



# Beyond technocracy: The role of the state in rural development in the Eastern Cape, South Africa

Paul Hebinck<sup>† a, b, c</sup>, Lothar Smith<sup>d, e, \*</sup>, Michael Aliber<sup>c, f</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Sociology of Development and Change, Wageningen University, The Netherlands

<sup>b</sup> Department of Environmental Science, Rhodes University, Makhanda, South Africa

<sup>c</sup> Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Extension, University of Fort Hare, South Africa

<sup>d</sup> African Centre for Migration & Society, The Witwatersrand University, South Africa

<sup>e</sup> Human Geography, Institute for Management Research, Radboud University, The Netherlands

<sup>f</sup> Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension, University of Fort Hare, South Africa

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## ABSTRACT

Drawing on longitudinal research engagement with villages and government projects in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, we argue the case for a strong revamp of government policies on rural development. Thereby we suggest that the legitimacy of ascribing to policy a notion of “post-apartheid” is largely redundant as current development policies in rural South Africa have not changed sufficiently. Notably the underlying rationale behind government interventions and associated governance mechanisms remains highly technocratic. This represents a strong continuity in the role of the state and its quest to restructure and modernise the rural economy. We question the efficacy of such a technocratic approach when it seems so disconnected from the socio-economically fluid and spatially heterogeneous spaces created by rural populations who, in the process of defining and pursuing their livelihood goals in relation to particular identities, and ideals around notions of modernity, produce livelihood constructions and identities that are seldom confined to the village or the agricultural sector alone.

## 1. Introduction

The discordance between everyday livelihood practises of a rural population and way the state perceives their situation and what it considers necessary for rural development is the focus of this paper. Thereby this paper addresses multiple issues and questions about the nature and orientation of rural development policies and programmes. While the focus is on South Africa, and more particularly the Eastern Cape, the significance of the article goes well beyond South Africa, as issues raised in this article also recur elsewhere.

Our premise for this paper stemmed from general discontent of villagers in 2 rural communities of the Eastern Cape with the South African government. Years of engagement with these 2 communities, often narrated during our longitudinal field research efforts (Hebinck and Lent, 2007; Hebinck et al., 2018; Hebinck and van Averbek, 2013; Shackleton and Hebinck, 2018; Van der Horst and Hebinck, 2017), as well as with other communities in the Eastern Cape (Aliber and Hall, 2010; NFA and ARDRI, 2015), helped us establish more clearly in what

ways government intentions and interventions tend to be at cross-purposes with the realities and wishes of rural dwellers.

While it may be argued that the mismatch between government policies and rural needs is common to rural contexts elsewhere in Africa and beyond, the South African situation is unique. This relates to the political framing of rural development in South Africa, given that rural development is very much part of a so-called ‘post-apartheid’ narrative according to which the government of the ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC), seeks to undo the injustices of the past by means of promoting new developmental opportunities. Yet the dissent of the villagers makes clear that this endeavour of the South African state is not necessarily recognized or embraced by rural populations, notably those residing in the former homelands.

Thus we discern a complex and often uneasy relationship between the state and rural communities, in which local expressions of frustration and anger are the result of a policy making process that is overly technocratic and authoritarian, in both design and implementation. In essence, we posit that the state’s technocratic approach fails to interface

\* Correspondence to: Heijdendaalseweg 141, P.O. Box 9108, 6500 HK Nijmegen, The Netherlands.

E-mail addresses: [Lothar.Smith@ru.nl](mailto:Lothar.Smith@ru.nl) (L. Smith), [MAliber@ufh.ac.za](mailto:MAliber@ufh.ac.za) (M. Aliber).

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with the interests of individuals and communities. This, we argue, constitutes the core of a crisis of rural development policy, according to which the effectiveness of rural livelihood strategies is overlooked rather than built upon, in favour of fantasies of formalisation, modernisation, and scaling up, which in turn rarely if ever materialize.

After decades of oppressive racist rule, societal expectations for improved life prospects were high for the period following the formal ending of apartheid in 1994. The central tenets of reform, redistribution and growth espoused in the Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP, 1994) only bolstered this expectation (Aliber and Hall, 2012; Aliber and Mokoena, 2003; Tapscott, 2016). The RDP was introduced as a roadmap for the new democratically elected government to help achieve political change and redistribute resources much more evenly across the nation. Indeed, significant upgrades of settlement and housing have been realized for the betterment of the poor, especially in urban areas. Furthermore, social grants and health care were insured, whilst access to water and electricity was much improved around the country. However, despite the success of each of these programmes, they fail to match the long-held expectations of rural people to improve their lives (Adams et al., 2015; Aliber, 2011; Aliber and Hall, 2012; Rogan, 2017). Certain rural policies have made a positive impact, but not always in the direction as expected (Beinart et al., 2017; Hebinck and Cousins, 2013).

This sense of new reality has led to various local responses, such as resentment with the government's performance, muted expressions of disappointment, and apathy (Paret, 2018), as the realization kicked in that, beyond access to basic state services, improvement to own livelihoods would have to be achieved with little or not assistance. During apartheid, the homelands were designed based on ethnicity to be independent territories from white South Africa, from which black people were largely excluded unless in possession of a labour pass that allowed one to work in towns, large farms, industry or the transport sector. The homelands served as labour reserves for an expanding capitalist economy and became a dumping ground for the majority of black people thereby relying on the limited natural resources of these areas (Wolpe, 1972). Nowadays, the *former* homelands seemingly emerge as spaces of opportunity constituted by residents' own initiatives, largely autonomous of the state (Aliber and Nikelo, 2020; Beinart, 2012; Hebinck, 2020; Jensen and Zenker, 2015). This also applies to certain urban spaces (Béni-Gbaffou, 2018; Malan, 2015). What is common to these spaces is that state policies, or elements thereof, are being *re-appropriated* and *reworked* to fit with everyday realities. We theorise here that technocracy emerges out of these two contrasting processes at the interface of policy and everyday rural life.

Given this problematization, the following questions emerge as key directives of this paper: (1) In what way, and to which extent, do state policies and interventions resonate with social life in rural communities? (2) What should the nature and objectives of state interventions be? And (3) Why and how might these state interventions be re-appropriated?

These 3 questions help to assess how state interventions can create opportunities for more rural people to engage with what Greenberg (2015, p. 975) calls '*economic activity for the benefit of themselves and others*'. This would generate the interfaces along which many interests – including those of communities and the state – would converge. Moreover, these questions address aspects of continuity, and thus whether the post-apartheid era is indeed structurally different from apartheid and colonial rule, in turn providing food for thought for the concept of post-apartheid authoritarianism. Our long-term engagement with rural development in the Eastern Cape helps to depict the problematic nature of current post-apartheid rural development policy making. This reflection thereby also extends to other interventions driven by notions of (under)development, such as forms of poverty (structural, systemic, chronic), what is considered as viable agricultural activities, and notions of livelihood security.

## 1.1. Data collection

We derive our data from our continuous research and policy engagements with agriculture and rural development in the Eastern Cape since 1995 (see Fig. 1).

The themes explored in this article originate both from village-based studies and research projects<sup>1</sup> as well as from engagement with the National and the Eastern Cape administration through policy-oriented seminars and collaborative research projects.<sup>2</sup> Our acquaintance with the Eastern Cape administration was further greatly facilitated by participation in seminars at the University of Fort Hare, Rhodes University, and the Eastern Cape Socio-Economic Consultative Council (ECSECC), East London. We also draw on the policy documents published before and after 1994. These also include policy-oriented academic publications (Aliber and Hall, 2010, 2012) and analysing policy briefs, presentations and documentation of Eastern Cape administrative units (DAFF, 2013, 2014; DRDAR, 2016; DRDLF, 2015; DWA, 2013; DWAF, 2007).

These interactions provided detailed insights into the conditions under which development agendas are being implemented in the Eastern Cape. Common to our investigating the effect and impact of technocratic policy processes is the methodological principle that these can only be properly understood and explained through conceptualising and situating the making of technocracy at the *interface* between social life in the village, its social economy and patterns of mobility, and the way policy making proceeds in the provinces and eventually reaches (or fails to reach) rural villages. It is here that we monitored and analysed how policy is put into action, reshaped, or radically transformed, and where the discrepancies in rationalities, values, interests, knowledge, and power manifest. We follow Long (2001, p. 65 ff) by defining interfaces "*as a critical point of intersection between different social systems, fields or levels of social order where structural discontinuities, based upon differences of normative value and social interest, are most likely to be found*". Interfaces need to be identified ethnographically, not presumed on the basis of predetermined categories, or as Long (2001) asserts: one must go to where people are already engaged in interactions, problem-solving activities or routine social practice and negotiate a role or combination of roles for oneself, as participant observer, active collaborator, adviser, etc. This focus gives insight into the dynamics of local institutional norms and practises versus external interventions.

## 1.2. Outline

This article is structured as follows: First, we review the literature on policy making to conceptualise and generically characterise the notion

<sup>1</sup> Hebinck and Smith focused on rural livelihoods in the central Eastern Cape as part of a collaborative project with the University of Fort Hare, by the Dutch Government funded SANPAD programme (1996–2015). See (Hebinck and Lent (2007); Hebinck and van Averbek (2013), Faku and Hebinck (2013), Shackleton and Hebinck (2018), Hebinck et al. (2018) and (Hebinck, 2020). Mixed methods were applied in these studies, including household surveys at different points in time (1996, 2010, 2013), aerial photography analysis of land use patterns, oral histories, focus-group discussions and informal interviews with local residents and local experts. All this was combined with detailed, direct observations and repeated visits for over two decades. Aliber's research applying similar modes of data collection focusses on land reform, agricultural development and rural development (Aliber and Cousins, 2013; Aliber et al., 2015; Aliber and Nikelo, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Aliber has worked in South Africa since 1994, also for the government (Department of Land Affairs, Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries). Hebinck has participated in CAPRI (Cape Rural Innovation Project) (2007 and 2012), a collaboration between the provincial departments of Agriculture of the Northern, Eastern and Western Cape provinces and Wageningen University, the Netherlands. The edited volume (Hebinck and Cousins, 2013) summarises the research output.

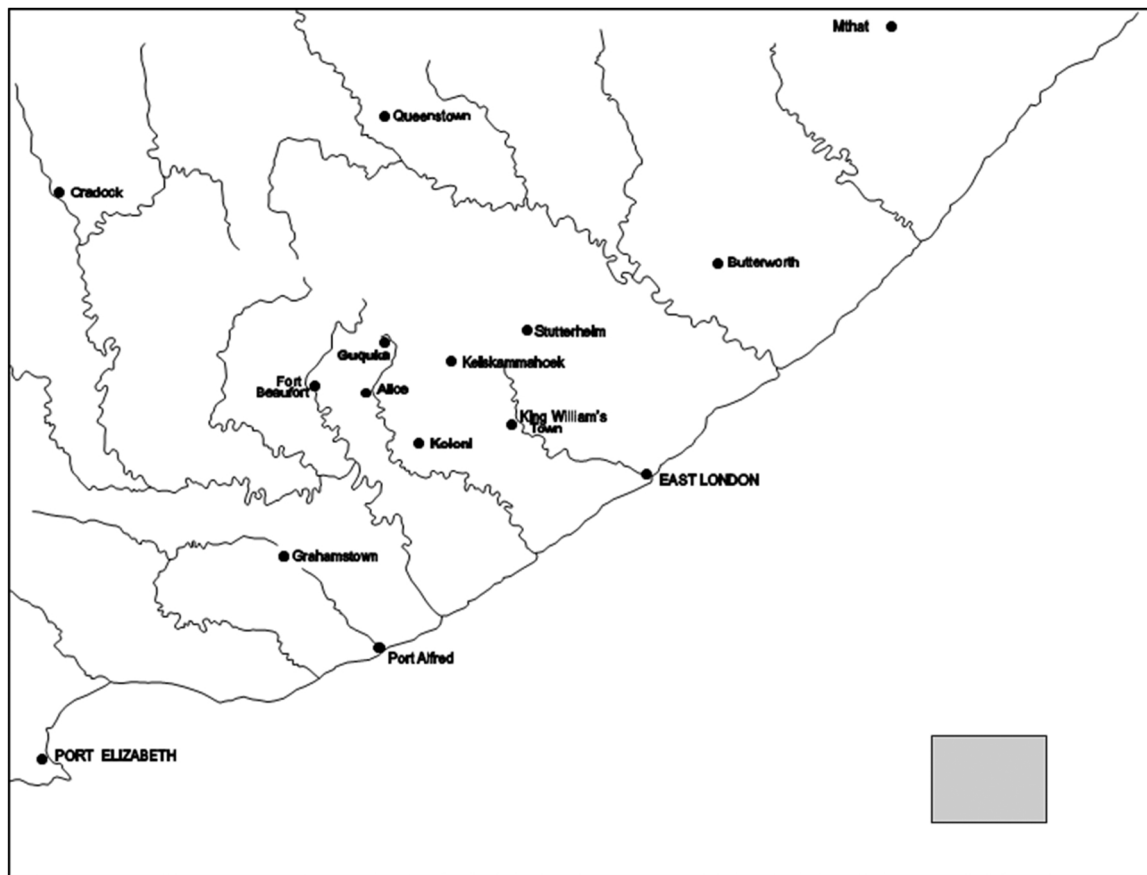


Fig. 1. Eastern Cape province and the location of Guquka and Koloni.

of technocracy. Specific attention is paid to the drafting of policies, their implementation, and subsequently re-appropriation by beneficiaries and other actors. In discussing the generic dimensions of policy formulation, we will also provide insight into political and administrative processes more specific to the Eastern Cape. Thereafter, we elaborate on the way policy and development intentions have become embedded or adapted to the realities of two central Eastern Cape villages, Guquka and Koloni.

## 2. The state, policymaking and technocracy

In our view it is crucial to make a distinction between the process of *policy formulation* and actual *development practices*, i.e. that which happens at the level of grassroots (McGee, 2004; Van der Ploeg et al., 2012). “Policy” denotes the coordinated efforts of the state bureaucracy to stimulate, direct, attempt to control, regulate, and govern development practices (Escobar, 2010; Ferguson, 1990; Long, 2008; Murray Li, 2007b; Scott, 1998). Policies, as Long (2004) has argued well, come into being as broadly stated narratives or ideas that aim to mobilise the state to act and allocate public resources to achieve societal objectives (Grindle and Thomas, 1991; Keeley and Scoones, 2003). Policy, essentially, is about assembling and re-assembling material and non-material resources (such as land, markets, capital, knowledge, agricultural inputs, socio-cultural repertoires, memories, etc.) and forming new connections and relationships that may not have previously existed (Murray Li, 2007a; Murray Li, 2014). The decision to deploy and connect resources to is simultaneously an exercise of power and a display of knowledge in defining what constitutes the essence of these resources, their origins (e.g. the market), how they might be deployed and how the wealth emanating from them might be redistributed (Murray Li, 2014; Ribot and Peluso, 2003).

The literature generally parts on the prowess of the state to act as an

able and efficient institute, in an almost Weberian fashion, to both manage the economy *and* administratively order nature and society towards desired social change. Or rather, whether it is more a prostrate institution that is very lacking in capacity to organise society without input from other stakeholders (Scott, 1998). For post-1994 South Africa, the situation is more complicated because of the gradual transition to democracy and a more egalitarian and non-racial society. Authors like von Holdt (2013) argue that various institutional ruptures exist and emerge in such transition processes, which may incapacitate the state to act coherently. The National Planning Committee of South Africa (NPC, 2013) also admits this, stating that ‘*our state lacks capacity in critical areas*’ but, nonetheless, should still take centre stage in pushing development forward. To that end, it identifies the need for ‘*a capable and developmental state [that is] able to intervene to correct our historical inequities, and [a] strong leadership throughout society [willingly] working together to solve our problems*’ (NPC, 2013, p. 1). All such ambitions aside, scholars like Cousins and Scoones (2010), Cousins (2016), Hall and Kepe (2017) and Lahiff (2011) argue that by and large state interventions are too often ineffective, through inherently flawed mechanisms, and in ways that lack coherence over time.

Bayart (1993) and Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan (2014) point out that a structural problem for the state in formulating policy is the heterogeneous composition of its own institutions, and how they relate to each other. This manifest in what Newell et al., (2019, p. 6) refers to as a *bureaucratic turf war* during which contrasting and contradictory development discourses are constructed and defended to argue their own legitimacy.

When *policy formulation* belongs to the political domain and serves to identify and set societal goals, *technocracy* applies to the realm of policy implementation; that is, the bureaucratic processes that translate politically negotiated goals into executable strategies, and their actual

implementation (Bowman, 2011; Chaumba et al., 2003; Teodoro and Pitcher, 2017). This process is not the exclusive domain of the state's bureaucrats; the views and perspectives of an array of consultants, advisors, and other kinds of experts play a significant role in the directing and drafting of (new) policies (Beinart et al., 2009; Grindle and Thomas, 1991; Hebinck, 2013b; Hodge, 2007; Keeley and Scoones, 2003).

What typifies a technocratic approach is that the various dimensions and realities of everyday life are largely disregarded (Fairhead and Leach, 2005; Feenberg, 1999; Scott, 1998). Instead, unfounded and empirically untested assumptions about the lived reality of (poor) rural households are usually expressed in aggregate terms, which strips them of their political-economic and historical contexts. These are the "received wisdoms", which Leach and Fairhead (2000) and Chambers (1977) have argued are fundamental in producing continued misconstrued understandings of rural change in Africa.

Policies, however, are seldom implemented in a unilinear manner. There are also limits to the reach of technocracy. Scott's (1998) notion 'prostrate institution', or Hobart's (1993) notion of 'ignorance', and Sillitoe's (2007, p. 5) comment that "*local people often get it right, sometimes when science gets it wrong*" add to the many explanations of why policies should not be perceived as blueprints (McGee, 2004; Roe, 1991) that follows out of coherent, linearly implementable script laid out by experts (Long, 2004; Scott, 1998). Policies are neither fixed nor static; they need to evolve and shift, and, above all be reworked by their actual beneficiaries (Long, 2001, 2008; Scott, 2009). Well-situated beneficiaries or elites, corporate interest groups, experts, organised labour and churches exercise their influence on the direction of policy and the choice of which resources to deploy (Long, 2004). They exercise a great deal of room for manoeuvre to deploy and use resources in ways they are used to and/or prefer. This process is understood as 'state capture' (Shai, 2017) to influence how, and to whom, resources are designated. These include also NGOs with a certain self-interest in gaining contracts (Bayart, 1993; Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan, 2014; Boone et al., 2019; Lund, 2008; Mosse, 2005). This is clearly shown by studies of land and agrarian reform in South Africa (Cousins, 2007, 2013a; Hall and Kepe, 2017; Hebinck and Cousins, 2013; James, 2007; Walker, 2008). Finally, villagers and local farmers often referred to as 'lay people' will seek to redesign and re-appropriate policies or elements there in an effort to make policies work for them (Long, 2008).

### 3. Agricultural and rural development in the Eastern Cape: an evolution of policies

Below we provide a condensed history of state-administered interventions and the associated gradual development of a network of experts that has come to play a key role in the design and implementation of these programmes. The growth of this network must be read against the background of the enactment of land and environmental laws, the implementation of segregationist policies since the turn of the twentieth century, and the administration of and attempt to control black rural communal farming areas. The plans and policies were often met with resistance by the communities on whom they were imposed (Beinart and Bundy, 1987). The resistance to segregation, the making of "Native Areas", the various land acts, Betterment planning and so on are comprehensively analysed and described in a series of well-written historiographies.<sup>3</sup> The ideas or wisdoms that fed – and still feed – these interventionist policies well represent the underlying misconceptions or perceived wisdoms so common to many past (but also contemporary) agrarian and rural development policies in the Eastern Cape. The history of the agricultural expert system cannot be viewed as disconnected or disassociated from attempts, in rhetoric and policy, to forge a unified and modern white nation from the early years of the 20th

century onwards (Beinart, 2003, p. 336 ff); see also (Beinart et al., 2009; Hebinck et al., 2011). Neither is its development isolated from global exchanges – on the contrary. Manifold interactions between Europe and the United States as well as with scientists from other British colonies made science the product of local and global interactions (Beinart, 2003; Beinart et al., 2009).

As was also the case in Europe and the United States, expert knowledge in South Africa drew largely on scientific traditions (Bowman, 2011; Brown, 2001). Over time, agricultural development, the leading role of the state and experts, Afrikaner nationalism, technocracy and modernisation became intertwined. The frame of reference for most agricultural experts became the white settler farm and the aspiration to extend and optimise "commercial" farming. Black or African farming was either virtually absent from or considered as marginally important for the furtherance of agricultural expert knowledge. One exception to this was the interest of some experts in certain African farming techniques (Bundy, 1977/1988; Hebinck and van Averbeke, 2007b) practised during the "*peasant moment*" (Giliomee and Mbenga (2007, p. 177), in the second half of the 19th and a first part of the 20th centuries.

Under apartheid policy makers' views of the situation in black rural areas changed rather little. With scientific backing,<sup>4</sup> they expressed concerns about the apparent lack of agrarian activity, in especially the so-called native reserves and particularly in relation to the use of arable land (e.g. erosion, overgrazing) and the need to produce food for the family as well as local markets. Even today, the lack of productivity and the continued decline in crop production in former homelands is seen as an issue and is explained as primarily being the result of a lack of capital, financial and physical, as well as a lack of knowledge and experience with farming as such. Past and present state interventions have focused particularly on providing access to capital and production inputs such as ploughing services, technical support for animal husbandry. State support to black smallholder farmers aimed at improving the fertility of arable land dates back to 1934, when the state supplied trucks to transport manure from the *kraals*<sup>5</sup> to the fields and subsidised the purchase of chemical fertilisers (Van Wyk, 1967). Subsequently, assistance to smallholder farming increased, peaking during the homeland era. However, despite all these efforts, the decline of crop production was never reversed. This was of little surprise to government officials and experts, as they saw the very nature of peasant agriculture at the time as something destined for eventual ecological collapse, particularly as there was little control on herd size. To reverse this, a series of interventions were set in motion to adjust the way farming was practised known as Betterment planning. What emerges is that over the last century agricultural reforms in South Africa have always been framed in terms of modernisation, productivity and economic returns, manifested

<sup>3</sup> See for instance Beinart et al. (1986); Beinart and Bundy (1987); Bundy (1977)/ (1988); Beinart (1982); Beinart and Delius (2014) and Mostert (1992).

<sup>4</sup> Many commissions were formed to advise the regime. They were always known by the names of their chairmen who, without exception, were renowned scientists. Some of these experts were also non-South African by birth and/or training (see Cross (1988) for more details). As regards their mission, the Beaumont Commission, for example, delivered its report about the actual delimitation of land for black people in 1916, while the Tomlinson Commission of 1955 rejected the one-man-one-plot principle and argued instead for a move towards to large(r) scale farming. The Swart Report of 1983 advocated moving all the black people in the Ciskei to urban areas, arguing that the rural areas were unable to sustain their present populations. This would also have opened the way for large scale farming. The knowledge and institutional culture of each generation of experts has laid the foundations for the next. In this way, expert practice and knowledge has been reproduced in its own image.

<sup>5</sup> A kraal is an enclosure where cattle is kept for the night and where cattle manure is deposited for use in the fields. Kraals are also important and secret socio-cultural sites where ceremonies are held to honour the ancestors (Ainslie, 2013; McAllister, 2001).



in policies targeting “minimum farm sizes”, appropriate “economic units”, and maximum “carrying capacities” (Cousins and Scoones, 2010).<sup>6</sup>

### 3.1. Post-1994 policies

Since 1994 a cascade of policies has been developed to support land and agrarian reform for smallholders. Initially, the focus was on land redistribution, and in the Eastern Cape, this was also implemented with some enthusiasm and hope for structural change (M. Kenyon, pers. communication, October 2017), albeit with varying degrees of success (Lahiff, 2007, 2011). The redistribution of land has given way to a programme that “*extended market participation (to acquire the land) to expectations of commercial production (to use the land) in ways that militate against secured land access for the poor*” (Hall and Kepe (2017, p. 129).

The post-1994 agrarian policies were formulated based on evaluations of pre-1994 policies (Tapscott, 2016), to address past injustices in access to markets and technology. They were intended to maintain the momentum of the transformation from “subsistence” to “commercial”, market-orientated farming established during previous periods. These programmes included *Siyakhula*, or the Massive Food Production Programme, and the more recent focus on Agri-Parks.

One new notion introduced to the post-1994 agricultural discourse is that of the “smallholder” or “small-scale and household farmers” (SSHFs). Importantly, this notion suggests that farming at a scale other than “large” is perceived as also relevant and possible, a departure from the overall perspective on farming in the homelands. However, in acknowledgement of the scope of SSHFs the simple assumption is made that resources needed, and developmental trajectories followed are merely a matter of downscaling those relevant to “large” or “commercial” farms. The smallholder sector can only develop by adopting new, capital-intensive technologies (purchased seeds, fertiliser, chemicals) and through integration in high-value chains or agribusiness configurations. The policy ingredients that try to speed up the transformation of the smallholder sector into a “commercial” sector receives strong political support. An example of this is the recent focal shift on Agri-Parks, intended to support smallholder agriculture. The Agri-Parks programme exemplifies one of the most influential pieces of received wisdom that today discursively shapes agricultural and rural development policies, namely that agricultural development in the former homelands can be realised *only* by following a “commercial” farming model. This is exemplified for example by the adoption by the provincial agriculture department in 2016 of the Eastern Cape Agricultural Economics Transformation Strategy which “...seeks to enable rural communities ... to derive optimal economic value out of their agricultural activity through customised government-supported partnerships with organised commercial partners” (DRDAR, 2016, p. 4).

This ties in with another major misconception of post-1994 policy making that lies at the heart of the discourse supporting smallholder agriculture: rural villages continue to be seen as being primarily agrarian in their outlook and practice. Villagers are often labelled as “farmers” who need to be uplifted to become small commercial entrepreneurs. Policies to achieve such “graduation” from subsistence to commercial agriculture set out to incorporate the newly graduated farmers into value chains managed by private agribusiness partners. The graduation to a commercial farming model revolves around strict notions of what constitutes agrarian, but – and this is extremely relevant

for the South African context – also rests on a received “wisdom” that is blind to the fact that the livelihoods of a majority of rural people are multi-locational and hinge on multiple sources of income, both in cash and kind; to which agriculture – particularly in the form of arable production – contributes only marginally. The stance of the National Planning Commission (NPC) that “*agriculture is the primary economic activity in rural areas*” (NPC, 2013, p. 219) is inconsistent with what happens in everyday life in rural villages. It misconstrues the reading of the ex-ante situation, resulting in policy initiatives that do not create productive interfaces allowing villagers to align their strategies with policy objectives.

### 3.2. *Siyakhula* (2003–2010) and *Fetsa Tlala* (2013 onwards)

*Siyakhula* (meaning “growth” in isiXhosa) was initiated in the Eastern Cape in 2003 in an attempt to create “*a one-step transformation of small-scale farms into agglomerated commercial farming units*” (Bolliger et al., 2005, p. 3) and to promote successful black commercial farmers in the former homelands (Aliber and Hall, 2012, p. 557; Fischer and Hajdu, 2015; Jacobson, 2013; Madyibi, 2013). *Siyakhula* provided state funds for grants and loans to participants who as a prerequisite had to organise themselves in groups to collectively provide 50 ha for cultivating hybrid and genetically modified maize seed, using fertiliser and mechanised ploughing. Subcontracting arrangements were made to help with land preparation, planting and spraying services. With the expected income generation from this scheme, *Siyakhula* would reduce rural poverty.

*Siyakhula* has since been evaluated as an overall failure. Based on monitoring and evaluation reports, Aliber and Hall (2012, p. 557) concluded that although there was initially widespread interest, there were strong delays in disbursing funds, which led to a low uptake. In subsequent years high debt levels led many farmers choosing to exit or be excluded. The programme was successful in bringing about significant improvements in yields for farmers involved – from an average of 1 ton to 3.75 tonnes per hectare – but the diminishing core of farmers coincided with rising levels of debt that proved unsustainable. Madyibi (2013) concluded that *Siyakhula* only strengthened the trend that was set in motion in the 1930 s (Beinart, 1992) that only a few elite villagers could manage to combine wage income with agricultural activities to cultivate more land and obtain higher yields. However, the rest of the rural population fell by the wayside. Jacobson (2013) argued that *Siyakhula* retained the one-sided focus that smallholders should become commercial farmers. Beyond issues around financial arrangements, Fischer and Hajdu (2015) also questioned the usefulness and relevance of the genetically hybrid maize seeds propagated by the programme. They stressed that farmers were more in tune with planting open-pollinated varieties, which are better adapted to local conditions and can also be exchanged more easily within communities.

*Siyakhula* and the formative ideas behind it continue to live on. In 2013 the *Fetsa Tlala* (meaning “eradicate hunger” in isiXhosa) initiative was established as the new flagship of the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) to help boost agricultural production of smallholders. *Fetsa Tlala* is, like *Siyakhula*, ostensibly designed to eradicate hunger: an “integrated government framework that seeks to promote food and nutrition security and to address structural causes of food insecurity, which continue to perpetuate inequality and social exclusion” (DAFF, 2013). The objective of *Fetsa Tlala* is:

“to increase the food production capacity of subsistence and smallholder producers, to increase the availability and access to locally produced fresh food products, to create opportunities for agricultural value chain development at local level, to create opportunities for Small Medium Micro Enterprise (SMME) development at local level, and lastly to create job opportunities within the agricultural sector” (DAFF, 2014).

A major goal is to provide an opportunity to smallholders to tap into

<sup>6</sup> For further insight in the mechanisms through which agricultural development in the so-called ‘Native Reserves’ or homelands was conducted we refer to the work of Hebinck and Lent (2007), Hebinck (2013), Lahiff (2005), Minkley and Westaway (2005), Bank and Minkley Hajdu (2005, 2006), Shackleton and Hebinck (2018), Hebinck et al. (2018), Hebinck (2020), Rogan (2017), Shackleton and Luckert (2015), Connor (2005), Connor and Mtswana (2018) and de la Hey and Beinart (2016).

national and international markets, such as national retail chains and the World Food Programme. When it was launched in 2013, *Fetsa Tlala* set itself a medium-term target of being applied to one million hectares to achieve these objectives. *Fetsa Tlala*'s key aim is to revitalise dormant land in the former homelands, such as in the former homelands Ciskei and Transkei of the Eastern Cape. Similar to *Siyakhula*, *Fetsa Tlala* hinges on achieving a certain scale of production to allow for mechanization. While DAFF and the (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2018) argue that *Fetsa Tlala* is on target for reaching its objectives, this is hard to confirm, as few independent evaluations have taken place. The Agricultural and Rural Development Research Institute (ARDRI) at the University of Fort Hare, together with the Nkonkobe Farmers Association (NFA), conducted a series of focus-group discussions with participants of four *Fetsa Tlala* projects out of the eight projects carried out in the municipality (NFA and ARDRI, 2015). From this evaluation report, it emerges that the programme would enable the participants to re-establish themselves as farmers, by earning a profit through their sales to the market, through increased employment opportunities. However, farmers pointed out that the cost of participation is quite high, certainly for those participants who are unemployed. Moreover, the ploughing services provided by the subcontractor were criticised for doing poor work, giving little regard to the indicated preferences or views of the farmers. Promised extension services were also hardly provided, and many participants struggled with repaying their loans. All farmers who were interviewed emphasised that there were far fewer benefits than anticipated. This certainly also related to uncontrollable factors such as poor rains. However it was emphasized that poor yields were also due to later planting, and when a tractor came by the job was rushed and not done properly, discouraging farmers from seeking government support in the future (NFA and ARDRI, 2015, p. 3).

Interestingly, the participants of one of the groups felt that the programme was rather alike to pre-1994 farming initiatives implemented by the Ciskei administration, albeit that those were better executed.

From a historical perspective the *Fetsa Tlala* programme, like its predecessor *Siyakhula*, fits well into a long tradition of policy making targeting an expansion and revitalization of smallholder agriculture in the province. The irony is that, notwithstanding the considerable expenditure of the *Fetsa Tlala* programme, it accounts for only a relatively small share of maize production in the former homelands. In the Eastern Cape, for instance, for the 2018/19 season, the Crop Estimates Committee established that of a total of 125.000 ha of maize planted as 'non-commercial maize' (generally meaning: in the former homelands) the *Fetsa Tlala* programme accounted for less than 50.000, this achieved at a total price of R139 million (or US \$ 8.8 mn), that is R 2780/ha (or US \$175 per ha).

### 3.3. Integration into value chains and Agri-Parks

A key element of the Eastern Cape post-1994 pro-smallholder discourse is a more integral relationship between smallholders and markets, where the term "market" is invariably taken to imply mean formal market networks. However, there already exists an array of markets in the Eastern Cape, including so-called 'informal' markets. We know that these exist from fieldwork in the two case study villages in former Ciskei, but also from work by others in the Transkei such as Fay (2009, 2013) and Connor and Mtwana (2018). However, what these signify in terms of quantities of produce sold, prices fetched, and changes in dynamics over time are matters still much unexplored. There is wide recognition that many households purchase rather than produce their food, doing so largely in supermarkets in nearby towns (D'Haese and Van Huylenbroeck, 2005), and that the scope for smallholders to become part of the food networks controlled by supermarkets is rather limited (van der Heijden and Vink, 2013).

Agri-Parks is the most recent programme set in motion under post-1994 agrarian policies in South Africa. The programme, launched by the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (DRDLR) in

2015, is intended to boost smallholder agricultural production in the country. The stated intention of the national Agri-Parks programme was to establish one Park in each district municipality, of which there are six in the Eastern Cape, excluding the two 'metropolitan' districts. The concept for Agri-Parks draws "from existing models locally and abroad, including educational/experimental farms, collective farming, farmer-incubator projects, agri-clusters, eco-villages, and urban-edge allotments and market gardens" (DRDLR, 2015). The clustering of services and assets in a locality will, it is claimed, create a critical mass of agricultural production, stimulating both upstream and downstream activity, which will lead to sustainable agricultural systems and rural job creation.

## 4. Village level dynamics: emerging relatively autonomous patterns of land use

This section moves the analysis from policy to the level of grassroots. On the basis of longitudinal studies in two central Eastern Cape villages, we depict the nature of the village by applying a livelihood lens to combine a categorization people's mobility and a sense of identity with the use of land and other key resources such as pensions, grants and knowledge. In contrast to the categories used in policy documents and plans, the composition of village-based lives is far more complex and diverse than generally assumed, and contests prevailing ideas that "peasant", "agrarian", or even "local" processes engaged with are disconnected from modernity and larger economies. Such sedentary thinking completely misses the point of how, and why, people continue to base themselves in rural Eastern Cape while pursuing livelihoods and lifestyles they deem appropriate, relevant and desirable. The current pattern of land-use practices includes practices that strongly hinge on the role of material elements, that have emerged from non-agrarian oriented developments, whereby their usage has shifted, however, as these materials have become re-appropriated or reworked. We reflect on the use of water for human consumption to clarify this argument.

### 4.1. The village as a heterogeneous assemblage of livelihoods and land use

Whilst tempting, any attempt to quantify the relative proportion of categories in a village will be unproductive and futile, as it fails to understand how dynamic livelihoods and associated strategies followed are. We saw this reflected in previous attempts at quantifying categories of livelihood and life styles in the village (Hebinck and van Averbek, 2013; Van Averbek and Hebinck, 2007). Based on survey data from 1994 and 2010, Table 1 specifies the kinds and nature of livelihoods we developed for villages like Guquka and Koloni. The pattern of multiple livelihoods displayed in the table is common throughout the Eastern Cape (Bank and Minkley, 2005; Hajdu, 2006).

Some ten years later the categories developed had not only morphed into other differentiations, but they also no longer captured the dynamics of processes of change (e.g. out-migration, the impact of ageing, lack of resources). For the villages of Guquka and Koloni we now distinguish between four key categories, the 'homesteaders', the 'reinvigorators', the 'drifters' and the less obvious category of 'visitors'.

The vignette 'homesteaders' brings together what is labelled in Table 1 as people's lives revolving on 'Pensions and Grants', 'Remittances' and 'Salaries and Wages' as their main monetary sources. We coined the notion *homesteaders* as they are most strongly connected to the village. Most farmed their land in the past, and now increasingly only cultivate their home gardens while also gather food stuffs from the formal arable fields, the rangelands and nearby forest or bush (Hebinck and Monde, 2007; Hebinck et al., 2018). They keep a few cattle, sheep and goats that usually roam freely around the village and the rangelands, and also hold some pigs and poultry at their homestead. In many homesteads, a *kraal* occupies a central place. Kraals are mainly maintained for the purpose of keeping animals. However they also play an important role in rituals such as the *rite of passage* towards manhood for the male youth. The homestead thereby emerges as a place for a rural

**Table 1**

Contribution of different sources of income to total income in cash and kind among rural homesteads in Guquka and Koloni: 1996–2010, in percentage and numbers of homesteads engaged.

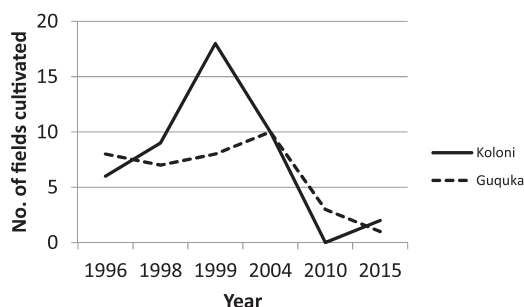
Livelihood sources	Guquka				Koloni			
	1996		2010		1996		2010	
	N = 76		N = 58		N = 54		N = 51	
	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n
Land based	6.7	43	6.1	42	12.1	40	8.2	42
Remittances	13.4	23	13.1	22	8.7	40	12.1	20
Pensions and Grants	41.8	32	41.9	46	26.5	40	29.5	36
Salaries and Wages	35.4	13	36.0	24	39.1	20	48.6	14
Other village based economic activities	2.7	17	3.0	5	13.5	20	1.7	5
Total	100.0		100.0		100.0		100.0	

Source: Unpublished 1996 and 2010 survey (Source Hebinck and van Averbeke, 2013: 194).

lifestyle that is no longer constituted by agrarian and associated livelihoods alone. Transformations over time have produced a landscape that reproduces cultural, emotional, psychological and community values (Cocks et al., 2017) while simultaneously seeing an emergence of more fragmented spaces of increased biodiversity, which continue to provide a range of goods and services to local livelihoods, without this necessarily taking the form of crop farming (Shackleton et al., 2013).

Most homesteaders actually purchase most of their food in the nearby towns of Alice and Middledrift, although they do add that “farming saves money” (Shackleton and Hebinck, 2018). Beyond certain land-based activities, they are also engaged in other local activities such as childcare (including care for the children of migrants), elderly care, local construction work and housekeeping for the more affluent of the village. For many cases, incomes obtained locally are augmented with income earned by absent homestead members in urban areas, but also by welfare grants. These provide a significant boost to otherwise precarious livelihoods, by giving them a regular source of income to help overcome tough periods, but also to help achieve minor investments in housing building and upgrading, mobile phones and taxi rides to nearby towns (Devereux, 2007; Ferguson, 2015; Hebinck and van Averbeke, 2007a, 2013; Lund, 2007).

The *reinvigorators* are investing heavily in agriculture. In Table 1 they were labelled as those whose livelihood hinge on land-based activities. Although they are not many in numbers, the *reinvigorators* are significant as they seek to re-activate farming specifically to achieve crop production at a scale beyond the level of the home garden (Hebinck, 2020; Hebinck et al., 2018; Shackleton et al., 2019; Shackleton and Hebinck, 2018), thus putting land that has been deactivated,<sup>7</sup> sometimes for decades, back into cultivation (Andrew and Fox, 2004). The extent and pattern of de-activation and the reinvigorating of crop farming is displayed in Fig. 2.



**Fig. 2.** Extent of deactivation of arable fields in Guquka and Koloni. Source: Hebinck and Monde : 183) (2007), 2010 survey, 2015 field visits.

Interestingly most of these *reinvigorators* re-activated arable land without support from any of the DAFF programmes. Some of them have a background in teaching and see it as an element of education too to share their interest with other villagers. Others are former migrants who have saved money that they have now invested in tractors, pick up vehicles (known locally as *bakkies*), but also in cattle. Since 2014, for example, one retired police officer staying in Koloni has invested in a tractor of his own, in fencing (to keep animals out of his fields), but also invested in new practises, learning about new ideas and technologies through social linkages (through his children) to various regional agricultural research institutes. Another villager runs a taxi company, whereby he has steadily expanded his herd of cattle in the village over the last 20 years. In this way, he is maximizing his entitlement, particularly in the absence of competition from others to graze his herd on the village commonage. The *reinvigorators* thus represent a pattern of land use that is beyond the size of home gardens, aiming for “production at scale”.

The label *reinvigorator* also applies to a former PAC<sup>8</sup> activist who initiated the *Phelindlala* (“ending poverty”) community project, which seeks to give the poor in the village (notably the most precariously dispositioned members of the ‘homesteader’ category), both male and female, a chance to increase their financial independence by collectively growing vegetables on a piece of land allocated to them in the middle of the village Koloni. Hereby they not only gain access to fresh produce to augment their diets but can also generate a bit of income.

The *visitors* are those who maintain strong kin-based links with their family in the village from which they migrated in their youth to work in Johannesburg, Port Elizabeth or East London. We did not identify the category “visitors when compiling Table 1 in our earlier work. “Visitors” are usually not incorporated as a separate category in village-based studies. They typically come back to the village for marriages, funerals or *rite de passage* ceremonies. Although these rites now also take place in the peri-urban zones of South Africa’s major cities, most families still prefer to conduct them in their home village, partially out of respect for their fathers, uncles and grandfathers, whom they ask to supervise the process. They travel from Port Elizabeth and further afield and stay for a week or longer in the village with their next of kin. While in the village, they have time to catch up with recent developments in community life. The significance of visitors is not simply that they maintain the social links with their home village. They provide key resources by serving as an entry point for those who are set to migrate to the city for work or studies. Whenever present in the village their participation in rituals often entails the use of local natural resources, such as firewood

<sup>8</sup> The PAC stands for the Pan African Congress and was the main rival liberation movement for the ANC during the Apartheid era. PAC had thereby broken away from the ANC. The PAC had a Pan Africanist orientation seeking justice and demanded human rights and equality of economic opportunity. Like the ANC, PAC also converted into a political party, although it gained a far smaller following.

<sup>7</sup> The *Fetsa Tlala* policy documents refers to this as ‘dormant land’.

collected in the woods, or a goat or cow being slaughtered and cooked (Mtati, 2014). This makes such visitors *de facto* users of natural resources, although they sometimes also bring their meat and firewood with them.

The *drifters*, in contrast to visitors and homesteaders, are those located in the in-between, as a perpetually mobile population who, in livelihood and identity terms, drift in a physical and a mental sense between the rural and urban domains. Previously we tried to capture this category by identifying houses that were occupied only once per year or less. Noij (2012) and Evers (2012) traced these to townships in Cape Town and Port Elizabeth and found city dwellers hailing from Guquka and Koloni who articulated an urban identity that very much sought to exhibit the link to the rural, to the village, to what they consider to be the only place they will ever be able to really call “home”. The link to the village extends beyond ancestral links and ties to family lands (and homes), as the Christmas and Easter break also provide occasions to reaffirm relations with rural family and friends through reunion events such as cricket and rugby competitions. Funerals, weddings and coming of age rites (mentioned earlier) are other occasions that help them engage physically with their community, beyond more continual exchanges by phone, through text messages and Facebook interchanges.

The vignettes above illustrate that villages are constituted by multiple livelihoods and identities, showcasing a heterogeneity both in terms of their agency, the basis of their resources, and how they use these. The exact nature of each vignette, but also their respective role in the villages, is subject to continual change, as linked to dynamic changes in the larger socio-cultural-economic and political environment, as well as local opportunities. The homestead remains the central place in the village and in village life. It is often composed of multiple generations maintaining multiple links with the urban domain. The desire to maintain or reproduce the homestead as a physical and social unit is common to all the livelihood vignettes. The use of land and the immediate environment, receiving visitors, maintaining relations with the urban domain and the state depend, to varying degrees, on defending the homestead and making it a paramount and significant resource and place to maintain, so that it does not fall apart. For some making productive use of land means actively aiming to ‘produce at scale’ (Shackleton and Hebinck, 2018) while relying on their resources (e.g. capital, knowledge, connections). For others, it means ‘farming to save cash’ – a process which we have labelled ‘homesteading’ and revolves partly around the varying use of home gardens as a site of production (Hebinck, 2020; Hebinck et al., 2018).

In contrast to production at scale, home gardening is more popular and carries fewer risks and warrants allocating labour and investment of limited financial resources. Home gardens are fenced to reduce the risk of damage to crops by livestock that freely roam the village, water is more widely available and can be attended more regularly and provide

quick access to fresh produce. This may explain why cropping has shifted from distant arable fields to home gardens as is the case in many other villages in the former Ciskei and Transkei (Andrew and Fox, 2004; Connor and Mtwana, 2018; De Klerk, 2007; de la Hey and Beinart, 2016; de Wet, 2011; Herd-Hoare and Shackleton, 2020; Shackleton et al., 2013). While the vast majority of households rely on purchased food for most of their sustenance, and increasingly so over time (D’Haese and Van Huylenbroeck, 2005; Hebinck and Monde, 2007), home gardening has been and remains important as a supplemental source of household food supply in villages like Guquka and Koloni and elsewhere in the Eastern Cape and beyond (Van Averbek and Khosa, 2007; Zimpita et al., 2015; Ngcaba and Maroyi, 2021).<sup>9</sup> Some households have commercialised their home garden production (Van der Horst and Hebinck, 2017). Local informants used to say when discussing gardening, ‘gardening saves money’.

Despite being important for the supply of food for some households, not all households keep gardens, and among those that do, some do not always fully cultivate their gardens, nor do they do so continuously over time. The variation between the years of observation may be due to the differences in surveying, or differences in seasonal weather conditions and money available for buying seeds, or because the coming and going of alternative opportunities affects either the need or the capacity to keep a garden. Interventions by the Eastern Cape government play a role as well. Whereas *Siakhula* was aimed at field production, *Siyazondla* targeted home garden production. These generated some initial enthusiasm and impact on production, but these impacts were rarely enduring (De Klerk, 2013; Fay, 2013). Another example is a Water Harvesting Project that was implemented in Guquka between 2004 and 2009. It initially generated much enthusiasm in home gardening, but when the funding cycle ended the water harvesting activities faltered. In 2014 we found only one gardener who was part of the initial project still using the water-harvesting techniques (Van der Horst and Hebinck, 2017). The provision of water is an important resource for home gardening and human consumption and will be shortly discussed in the following section in more detail.

#### 4.2. “Irrigation by night”: the re-appropriation of water

One of the most significant inequalities experienced in the rural areas of the former homelands under apartheid legislation was access to water, for human consumption and domestic use. In the aftermath of apartheid, new water services were provided to rural villages. From 1994 and onwards communal water taps were constructed, and taps were installed in the yards of some homesteads.

The right to treated (i.e. chlorinated) water for domestic purposes is guaranteed by the Water Services Act of 1997 and is an important policy item in the RDP. The water supply is heavily subsidised. The water for Guquka, for instance, is pumped from a dam some 6 kilometres away.

<sup>9</sup> Based on their survey of 131 rural households in Limpopo province, Van Averbek and Khosa concluded that, “the food households obtained from various types of dry-land agriculture contained large enough quantities of nutrients to contribute significantly to satisfying the requirements of households” (Van Averbek and Khosa, 2007, p.417). Zimpita et al. (2015) found that, 10 years after the conclusion of an intervention in KwaZulu-Natal aiming to encourage rural households in KwaZulu-Natal to grow more  $\beta$ -carotene-rich vegetables and fruits in their home gardens, almost all of those households who initially adopted the cultivation of such species had continued doing so, and as such consumed far more  $\beta$ -carotene than other households. Ngcaba and Maroyi (2021) surveyed 129 households with home gardens from six villages in the Eastern Cape, and found that collectively the households produced 32 different edible plants. Although few of the households relied mainly on their garden production for their sustenance, the authors did conclude that, “The value of home gardens for food production and household livelihoods needs was ubiquitously perceived, with all respondents reporting their positive contribution towards household food provision” (Ngcaba and Maroyi, 2021, p.4050).



After treatment, it is provided to people free of charge. To ensure that water is used solely for human consumption, the local Water Services Authority (WSA) restricted that domestic water may not be used for the watering of home gardens, irrespective of whether a household has used less than its full entitlement. Village level committees have been established to enforce this regulation, but despite this, the practice of what has come to be known as “irrigation by night” is widespread (Van der Horst and Hebinck, 2017). “Irrigation by night” is derived from the work of Chambers (1986) and stands for the practice whereby people tap water meant for human consumption at times when enforcement systems are either not operating or largely dysfunctional.

The accounts of home gardeners demonstrate that some irrigation by night is a crucial aspect of *homesteading*. Thereby the water from the communal and private taps seems to be a major source of water for crops in the home gardens. Water is certainly used for human consumption, but also to wash clothes and sometimes also to water livestock. To the home gardener, water is so much more than a technical message defined in usage by quantity (cubic litres) and where to use it. Although limited in scale, ‘irrigation by night’ is a manifestation of villagers re-appropriating the RDP-inspired construction of a communal water system to fit their own needs falling beyond the legal and technical specifications. Similar kinds of re-appropriations occur in other rural development projects such as the Nguni project implemented in the Eastern Cape (Faku and Hebinck, 2013).

## 5. Debating policy: continuities and technocracy

Our analysis of a selection of rural programmes enacted over the years in the Eastern Cape shows that there is simply too little empirical ground to speak of a rupture in policy design and implementation since 1994, even when we accept the limiting conditions of a somewhat incapacitated and/or inefficient state. In effect, what we argue here is that the use of the moniker ‘post-apartheid’ to refer to all post-1994 rural development-oriented policies is misguided. Thereby we differ in view from other scholars such as Ansari (2017), Kingwill et al. (2017), Findlay and Twine (2018) and Habib and Padayachee (2000) who coined the term ‘post-authoritarianism’ in their analysis of South Africa post-1994. We find this distinction quite problematic as it presupposes a rupture in governance style automatically associated with the transition to democracy. We’d rather argue that the authoritarianism which characterised policy design processes in South Africa’s past still prevails in some programmes today. However, the policies of today, in contrast to those of the previous dispensations, are embedded in a negotiated and democratically designed constitution. This provides these policies certain legitimacy and above all an embeddedness in a range of laws that become real as rules, regulations, acts, and decrees, all presenting a democratic approach. Indeed, since 1994, an array of new policies and laws have imbued rural communities with rights to land but also to government services such as water, health care, and education (Claassens, 2013, 2014; Stein, 2005). The emphasis on human rights, together with the pervasive belief to which it gave rise, that the new political dispensation would bring about comprehensive change, is of key importance for understanding the workings of state policy in South Africa today. The designation “historically disadvantaged” has engendered a strong feeling of entitlement amongst those denied access to resources and state services during colonial and apartheid eras. Interviews with policy makers in the immediate aftermath of the 1994 transition to democracy (M. Kenyon pers. communication, July 2017) render a picture of a bureaucracy that was essentially functioning as a “hope generating machine”.<sup>10</sup> This approach to policy might politically legitimise the implementation but, as Robins (2003) well argued, it may also

raise the risk that people’s rights might not be protected and that resources and services may not actually be delivered. Despite the promise of greater state support and improved livelihoods, a consistent feature of the current dispensation is that most policy objectives have seldom been met or have fallen significantly short of the targets set (Aliber, 2011; Cousins, 2013b; 2015; 2016; Jacobs and Hart, 2015; Tapscott, 2016).

Despite undeniably significant advances in social welfare, infrastructure, and housing programmes in the last two decades, an underlying tenet of state policy formulation has remained the conviction that essentially social and economic change is best directed and controlled through rational planning approaches (Long, 2001; Olivier de Sardan, 2006; Scott, 1998). In the context of South Africa, the belief in rational planning too shaped a series of time-bound programmes and projects (e.g. the social grants and welfare schemes, RDP, and land and agrarian reforms). These programmes were delivered to rural communities in the form of services and projects that prescribed how state resources were to be used. This attempt to direct proper use of state resources has been questioned, and particularly whether a capable Weberian bureaucracy has any material substance (Bierschen and Olivier de Sardan, 2007, 2014; Hebinck and Cousins, 2013; James, 2007).

Nevertheless, there are continuities in the discourse and paradigmatic dimensions of development, which take expression in policy documents, but also manifest themselves in the way in which key resources are allocated. A bureaucracy plays a key role in this processes of resource allocation (Claassens, 2014; McGee, 2004). One such continuity evident in the field of agriculture and rural development in South Africa, and elsewhere on the African continent, is the attempt to rationalise and modernise the economy. Modernisation or, as Sender (2016) puts it, development of the forces of production, is seen as a necessary and almost Rostovian in a quest to go through various stages of development by seeking optimal conditions for the deployment of land, capital and labour. The reproduction of certain continuities and the firm belief in a planned development is thereby anchored in a state of “technocracy” (Bowman, 2011; Chamunogwa, 2019; Chaumba et al., 2003; Thurston, 2018). The tractor mirrors the almost ultimate example of techno-continuity. Praised in the early 1940s by the then experts to revive ‘native agriculture’ during apartheid; the tractor remains the device to solve the problem of agricultural development in promoting expansion and a further commercialisation of agriculture in the former homelands. In front of the Dohne Agricultural Development Institute one can find a series of tractors waiting for the beneficiaries of *Fetsa Tlala*. This not only signifies the continuous belief in mechanical technology but also the historical role of the state (see also Amanor and Iddrisu, 2021; (Cabral and Amanor, 2021; Hajdu et al., 2012)).

Technocracy creates a particular kind of interface when it enters the lifeworld of rural communities. It not only attempts to appropriate control by the state and associated bureaucracy but also to produce and immerse new knowledge. Aliber and Mokoena (2003), Cousins and Scoones (2010) and Hebinck et al. (2011) have shown that in the South African context the new knowledge implies the *imposition* of the norms and standards of one group (e.g. large-scale commercial farmers) on other social categories (e.g. the so-called smallholder farmers, or homeland farmers). Technocracy is certainly manifested in policy documents such as the RDP, which maintains a discursive framing of development as a linear process, ideally transitioning from “traditional” to “modern”. The dualist notion of a “first” and “second” economy became the predominant prism for South Africa’s post-1994 agricultural and rural development policies (Pauw, 2007). “First”, or modern, identifies both the future and how to get there (Cousins and Scoones, 2010; Jacobs and Hart, 2015). The “second” economy, being “traditional”, exists alongside the wealthy “first” economy and, in its subjection to an enduring apartheid legacy, is now seen as hampering the transition to a democratic and more developed society. RDP created the political space that the state bureaucracy required to allocate resources for a reconstruction of development pathway that would remove the barriers to development imposed by apartheid policies and laws while

<sup>10</sup> The notion “hope generating machine” stems from the work of Nuijten (2004, pp. 52, 53) in her analysis of the role of the state and bureaucracy in agrarian reforms in Mexico.

slowly morphing from “subsistence”, to “emergent” and ultimately to “commercial”. This framing reveals that modernising key resources and relationships became the paradigmatic anchor for agricultural and rural development programmes and reforms, which built on past development policy orientations and showcase an important continuity in ideology and thought (Aliber and Mokoena, 2003; Cousins and Scoones, 2010; Hebinck et al., 2011). Feenberg (1999, p. 75) associates this with a Weberian conceptualisation of modernity and “*the increasing role of calculation and control in social life ... [S]ocial life is more and more structured by technically mediated organisation*”. Scott (1998) attributes this to highly modernist views on planning, often backed by authoritarian powers. Escobar (2010) and Chambers (1977) rather point at the positivist tendencies with which the hegemony of constructed state knowledge is imposed on development subjects. Thus, according to Feenberg (1999, p. 75) technocracy, “*assumes the existence of technological imperatives that only need be recognized to guide management of society as a system*”. Development is thus thereby conceived as something that takes place within the restricted parameters of what is considered proper use of resources, for instance land, tractors, hybrid seed and irrigation facilities. An essential feature of technocracy is that selected experts, through political negotiations and consultations, play an important role in the problematization of development situations, the formulation of solutions, and the design and implementation of interventions to help achieve afore identified policy objectives. Typically these experts are consultants, policy advisors, but also NGO practitioners and academics that operate in the field of “development”. Experts problematise development situations by combining what is claimed to be scientific knowledge with a standardised set of practices which include *ex-ante* evaluations and feasibility studies to identify problems and forge solutions (Wilson, 2006). They operate and gather facts, expertise and insights not just locally or on a global scale, but more significantly, as Callon (1981) describes them, in networks of “translation”.

As scientific knowledge and scientists have come to perform a supporting, problematizing and legitimizing role, the authority of the state for the kinds of interventions it seeks, has strengthened, as this not only rests on its own authoritative powers to enforce rules and regulations, but is therein also supported by a host of policy advisory documents from development, agrarian and technology sciences, augmented by an associated expert system (Beinart, 2003; Beinart et al., 2009; Scott, 1998; Wilson, 2006). Experts’ ideas on development, relating for example to water, infrastructure, new market arrangements, are influenced by the resource practices they are most familiar with. In this way, the realities of rural life are framed in simplified, one-dimensional models that suggest it is sufficient for any scientific-administrative vision to limit itself to those aspects amenable to technical interventions (Callon, 1981; Hebinck et al., 2011; Murray Li, 2007a; Scott, 1998; van der Ploeg, 2003). Framing development issues in ways that confines their outer parameters, and premises on a knowledge and control of resources, then also implies that the perceived problems of development are all solvable, and for successful implementation (by the state) only subject to sufficient capacity and a close adherence to the sound advice of monitoring experts (Herbert-Cheshire and Higgins, 2004; Scott, 1998). Callon (1981, p. 211) adds that problems may not be solved but are rather displaced by newer forms of problematizing through a different approach by a series of associated experts engaging with each other, yet seldom or only superficially with local contexts. This adds to the problematization of insufficiently grounded policy analysis in local contexts of the Eastern Cape and extends the state of technocracy.

Technocratizing development is also very much a process of “rendering technical” (Murray Li, 2007a; Murray Li, 2007b). The solutions that are predetermined to solve the problem are thereby also believed to be non-contestable and thus non-political (Chambers, 1977; Ferguson, 1990; Mosse, 2005). To that end, a target village or community is also conceptualised as homogenous, with a singular collective set

of goals. The tractor once again provides a good example of this. “Rendering technical” thereby ignores other, potentially competing, forms of knowledge, or other forms of problematizing. Thereby everyday issues (gender, age, mobility, power) are isolated as external to the more foundational technical questions. Technocracy, in short, rearranges and misinterprets local realities and obscures and ignores what is happening in rural communities. More importantly, the narrative transmitted by the government (and at times also by NGO managers) stresses the need for a transfer of knowledge and training or capacity building, which happen to align well with skills they have mastered, which can then be utilised to steer development along a particular path. The result is an almost exclusive focus on management, efficiency, and the application of technology to modernise the agricultural sector, increase production and promote efficient resource-use practices. This specific aspect of policy-making processes may explain why most development policies, including those in South Africa and the Eastern Cape more specifically, fail to bridge the gap between the perceptions of the experts and the day-to-day experiences of people at grassroots (Keeley and Scoones, 2003; McGee, 2004). Put differently, policies that fail or are unsuccessful often lack a suitable interface for aligning individual strategies to more common goals and interests (Milone et al., 2018; Milone and Ventura, 2015).

Earlier we also pointed out that where “lay” people or rural villagers are beneficiaries, this may come about from a relatively independent use of resources, which may include selectively (re-)appropriate government instruments. Policies are not only transmitted but also “*contested, reassembled, and negotiated at the points where policy decisions and implementations impinge upon the life circumstances and everyday life-worlds of so-called ‘lay’ or ‘non-expert’ actors*” (Long, 2004, p. 26 ff). Villages, or farms for that matter, thus act as the locus of intervention, unfolding as arenas where different pieces of knowledge and values interface. Jara (2017, p. 229) refers to these situations as “cross-linking” and argues that the more policies become cross-linked with practices of local actors, the more effective they become. At the interface between policy and (land-use) practices at the grassroots level in the villages we studied in the Eastern Cape, new values and knowledge are commonly constructed. Thereby it needs to be accepted that these may not be completely in line with state policies and intentions. Development interventions inevitably encounter, and simultaneously give rise to, emerging and robust practices that attempt to redesign or oppose and sometimes blatantly resist them. These are practices that unfold relatively autonomously from state policies. The re-activation of field production in Guquka and Koloni by a limited number of re-invigorators underscores this relative autonomy and the ways in which policies are re-appropriated at village, field or farm level.

The implication of the remoulding and re-appropriation of policy proves that, alongside an assumed rationally operating Weberian institution, i.e. the state, there are all kinds of other coordinating mechanisms and practices shaping the dynamics and outcomes of development policies. All help to explain why policies generate unexpected and perhaps politically unwanted outcomes. Indeed, the title Scott (2009) gave to his book, ‘The Art of NOT being governed’, is telling in this respect. Friedman (2005, 2011) points out for Namibia that while the state takes root in the local (or everyday life) the converse process of local participation in political processes of the state is far less common. Bayart (1993) documented skilfully how the orientation of state policy too often ignores the position of bureaucrats at grassroots levels, and their role in accessing, controlling and (re)directing state funds for development. This “counter-work”, as Arce and Long (2000a) (2000b) call it, is performed by local groups, and their engagement shows that policy ideas and inherent practices of modernity can be appropriated and re-embedded in local life-worlds. This signifies how beneficiaries of policy interventions respond selectively to these interventions, doing so through their own understandings, interpretations and needs (Hebinck et al., 2019; Robins, 2003). Counter work thus manifests the limitations of technocracy and the ability of the state to ‘discipline’ (rural) people as

beneficiaries of a policy.

## 6. Conclusions

The notion of technocracy has helped typify how policies in South Africa were, and still are, designed and implemented with the intention to transform the rural economy and achieve sustainable rural livelihoods. We argued that most of these interventions were rather unsuccessful because they were premised on misconceived interpretations of rural realities, and in this wholly unable to generate practitioner to policy interfaces whereby individual strategies could be aligned to more common national goals and interests. Tractor schemes subsidised by the apartheid government, as well as the post-1994 *Siyakhula* and the *Fetsa Tlala* programmes, to help boost agricultural production and regional food security, have been unsuccessful, not because such traction is not desired, but the formula, the conditionalities through which it is provided, ill fitted local needs and practises. Where the *Fetsa Tlala* programme might seem to be targeting local agriculture, it foremost seeks to incite a change in agricultural practise that helps align it with other national programmes aiming to increase agricultural production, such as the purchase of land and the creation of Agri-Parks. This quietly abandons an earlier focus on spatial injustice through land reform and restitution and what this could entail for rural livelihoods. Thereby policy making processes fail to take cognisance of current conditions of agricultural production as well as motivational factors underlying livelihood and lifestyle decision making processes within rural communities.

The qualification technocracy certainly applies to the approach taken by the first ANC-led government (1994–1999) with its RDP. Providing housing and access to land for the poor, and access to better quality education and health was, and is, above all, informed by a strong belief that development problems can be solved through planning, a transfer of technology, and by rigorous application of proven development models, premised on notions of modernisation and formalisation, and therein also steeped in neo-liberal notions. Macro-economically, the economic strategy GEAR (Growth, Employment and Redistribution Strategy) and much later the New Growth Plan of the Zuma led government (2007–2018) were structurally neo-liberal in its orientation. One irony of this commitment to neo-liberal policies has been an almost puritanical antipathy to the agricultural subsidies that were a hallmark of the apartheid state's public policy, to the general despair of residents of the former homelands, for whom these government programmes had been instrumental in keeping some of their agricultural activities going.

The 'technological fixing' projected and implemented (or even imposed) in and on rural settings of the former homelands in South Africa is misconstrued. The essential mismatch lies with the inability or unwillingness for policy makers to see that what happens at the grassroots level in rural villages is of valuable input to their policies; present-day rural areas are not seen as already relevant spaces of opportunity. Instead the rural is predominantly imagined as "agrarian" and villagers are referred to as marginalised "farmers" or "smallholder producers", who are assumed to strongly long for proper incorporation into the market economy. This ignores the actual rural social fabric, which has transformed dramatically in recent decades, through continued urban-rural mobility, multi-sited livelihoods, and dynamic identities. The resulting socially and spatially heterogeneous communities have a premise in rural regions but are also spatially connected to economic spaces elsewhere. Such developments, it appears, are either less well understood and/or appreciated in policy-making circles. What then emerges is a process whereby local actors can relate to their surrounding technocratic and authoritarian policy environment in very different ways. Some have been able to adapt to the new circumstances to take advantage of the opportunities which present themselves. Others have not been able to do so. Resultant re-appropriations of resources, local and those provided through policy interventions, reflect new power

relations, more active forms of asserted agency, but also highlight emerging frictions in new modes of collective versus individual agency. Overall, new social configurations have arisen in the villages that have further eroded the scope for concerted action out of a homogeneous sense of community. Indeed, village members who are less well able to deal with the constraints of a largely stagnant national economy, despite their readiness to move between the rural and urban domains to optimize their life chances, are hereby seeing their livelihoods jeopardized.

Capturing the dynamics of the state vis-à-vis the rural domain interface can help disassemble policy processes and re-examine how their implementation results in particular re-appropriations along the way. This also pushes forward the debate on policy-making processes as an engaging learning process, that embraces a likely need for regular adjustment of goals, and that is not limited to the question what kinds of resources are available or aggregate goals that fail to recognise heterogeneous local contexts and associated livelihood patterns. To that end, notions of development embedded in ideas of post-apartheid represent a conceptual stumbling block in South Africa's vision of a viable rural economy, as they are premised on an appraisal of the resources and capital available to a local population, and how any lack might be uplifted with external interventions, be these financial, economic, technical, human or otherwise in nature. Instead, we plea for policy processes that take account of the agency displayed by the local populations, thereby also welcoming insights into how villagers navigate and re-appropriate the world around them, including prevailing state policies and programmes. Some of these experiences build on historical patterns of resource use, such as migrants returning home after a full working life in the urban domain, who thereupon begin to re-activate their farming practises. This should result in more inclusive policy-making processes that are also of immediate relevance to local populations.

In many countries that have undergone the transition from colonial to post-colonial policies and practices has been remarkably continuous, reflected also in the enduring careers of policy makers across this colonial to post-colonial divide (Hodge, 2010; Moore, 2005; Van Beusekom and Hodgson, 2000). We related this experience to South Africa by questioning the notion of post-1994 policy making as fundamental shifting away from prior policy approaches. Indeed, we argue that the evidence we presented suggests that we should rather speak of a certain continuity in the underlying principles used in the design and implementation of rural development policies. Thus, beyond a democratization of legislation to ensure equal rights for all residents of South Africa and the disbanding of homeland administrations and associated immobilizing apartheid laws, the focus of rural development policies has remained essentially technocratic and therein too oriented on commercial forms of agriculture.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Data Availability

Data will be made available on request.

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