

THE DECLINE OF THE CAPE GENTRY, 1838–c. 1900

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THE final ending of slavery in 1838 marked a radical break in the agrarian history of the Cape Colony.¹ The liberated slaves could and did make use of the mobility that emancipation allowed them. This amounted to a real negotiation of the price of labour, for at various points in the nineteenth century the price of labour threatened the very profitability of farming. For the greater part of the century many landlords were led, in the words of one colonial official, ‘to look back... with something very like an envious eye, to the days in which slavery was tolerated by law, because then the slaveholder could command labour whenever it was needed.’²

For the former slaveowners, the outcome was agricultural innovation and routine insolvency, and merchants came to have an increasingly important role in the rural political economy. But post-emancipation agrarian structures were not merely shaped by the incursion of merchant capital and the mobility of labour. The former slaveholders displayed a remarkable tenacity. Most significantly, Cape landlords were heirs to a carefully constructed political economy in which the rules governing the circulation of land and wealth were clearly defined in community and familial terms and in which the ties of credit ran both vertically and horizontally. This was a ‘moral community’ in which all were cushioned against the sometimes detrimental effects of participation in a market economy.³ It is for this reason that the intervention of English-speaking merchants, by not paying due regard to these rules, was of a qualitatively different kind. Community, in short, provides the backdrop against which much of the colony’s agrarian history was played out.

This article seeks to provide a rather different interpretation of the post-emancipation Western Cape than is at present on offer. For all the attention given to the question of the ‘transformation to capitalism’ in South African agriculture, the Western Cape features but little.⁴ It is as if the trajectory of agrarian development in the initial heartland of colonial settlement requires the least explanation. In the existing orthodoxy, settler farming developed along a gradual, cataclysm-free road to capitalist agriculture. In a seminal article, Robert Ross has shown how, when viewed from the perspective of

¹ I am grateful to Andrew Bank, Helen Bradford, Harriet Deacon, John Iliffe, Timothy Keegan and the readers of the *Journal of African History* for their helpful comments. The research for this paper was kindly funded by the Emmanuel Bradlow Foundation.

² Published government papers, G24-1865, Colonial Botanist to J. A. Merrington, 28 Sept. 1864.

³ Wayne Dooling, *Law and Community in a Slave Society: Stellenbosch District, South Africa, c. 1760–1820* (Cape Town, 1992), esp. 6–28.

⁴ For an overview, see Helen Bradford, ‘Highways, byways and culs-de-sac: the transition to capitalism in revisionist South African history’, in Joshua Brown et al. (eds.), *History from South Africa: Alternative Visions and Practices* (Philadelphia, 1991).

both the individual farmer and the slave-based economy of the eighteenth-century as a whole, 'sufficient capital was clearly being generated at the Cape to allow continual investment in agriculture'.⁵ The latter half of the eighteenth century saw the emergence of a slaveowning elite – the Cape gentry – which jostled for power with the moribund VOC (Dutch East India Company). These patterns of class formation and capital accumulation, so the story goes, continued into the next century. The abolition of slavery, far from being the watershed it was elsewhere in the nineteenth-century world, was a 'non-event'.⁶ At the time of emancipation, 'the pre-eminence of the gentry within Cape society had been established.'⁷ The nineteenth century supposedly saw no serious clash of interests between the colony's farmers and its merchant elite.⁸ The gentry continued to farm their wheat and wine estates with a backward technology, at the expense of a bifurcated, dependent, impoverished and alcohol-addicted labour force. In short, the dominance of the gentry 'lasted, more or less, ever since'.⁹

But it is precisely here that this otherwise credible argument falters. In this formulation, there exists an assumption that the farmers of the twentieth century are the direct linear descendants of the slaveowners of the eighteenth. Put another way, the former slaveowners were 'Junkers':¹⁰ an ancient landed ruling class that had successfully transformed itself into a modern agrarian bourgeoisie. As Timothy Keegan has pointed out, such a definition implies that transformation was carried out 'by a sustained and self-generating process of accumulation'.¹¹

Historians across a number of continents have for decades been grappling with the issue of whether capitalist transformation was carried out by a class of 'new men'.¹² On balance, the Junker path to capitalist agriculture has

⁵ Robert Ross, 'The rise of the Cape gentry', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 9 (1983), 203.

⁶ Robert Ross, *Beyond the Pale: Essays on the History of Colonial South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1994), 48.

⁷ Ross, 'Rise of Cape Gentry', 194.

⁸ Ross, 'Rise of Cape Gentry', 215.

⁹ Robert Ross, '"Rather mental than physical": emancipations and the Cape economy', in Nigel Worden and Clifton Crais (eds.), *Breaking the Chains: Slavery and its Legacy in the Nineteenth-Century Cape Colony* (Johannesburg, 1994), esp. 161–6; Ross, 'Rise of Cape Gentry', 217.

¹⁰ In all fairness, this is not the terminology employed by historians of the colonial Cape.

¹¹ Timothy J. Keegan, *Rural Transformations in Industrializing South Africa: The Southern Highveld to 1914* (Braamfontein, 1986), 196. This definition may be somewhat distorted. The extent to which 'Junker' agriculture was transformed by a self-generating process is open to question. See Hanna Schissler, 'The Junkers: notes on the social significance of the agrarian elite in Prussia', in Robert G. Moëller (ed.), *Peasants and Lords in Modern Germany: Recent Studies in Agricultural History* (Boston, 1986), 28, where she notes that much of the innovation and expansion of late eighteenth-century East Elbian agriculture was carried out by non-nobles. For a Latin American example of a 'Junker path', see Simon Miller, 'Mexican junkers and capitalist haciendas, 1810–1910', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 22 (1990), 229–63.

¹² The intellectual origins of this debate can perhaps be traced to Adam Smith, who noted that eighteenth-century British merchants were 'commonly ambitious of becoming country gentlemen, and when they do, they are generally the best of all improvers': *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, cited in T. M. Devine, 'Glasgow colonial merchants and land, 1770–1815', in J. T. Ward and R. G. Wilson

historically been very rare. The retention of title to land by ancient landed classes is, in itself, not sufficient explanation of a Junker path to modernity: that is, that capitalist transformation was carried out under the aegis of a reactionary agrarian elite. Such classes were in general unable to join the modern world without fundamentally altering their world-view. The eighteenth-century English landed classes, for example, resolved their ambivalence to capitalism by transforming themselves into a class of gentlemanly capitalists, enjoying at once the fruits that capitalism had to offer whilst morally and physically removing themselves from the excesses of the City of London. As landed gentlemen witnessed their own decline in the course of the nineteenth century, they were forced to accommodate to other forms of wealth, and were by the late nineteenth century heavily dependent on money made in the service sector.¹³ On the other side of the Atlantic – in the post-emancipation United States – many Southern planters were able to hold on to their land in the wake of the destruction of the Civil War only by heavily mortgaging their property and so effectively giving control to their merchant-creditors.¹⁴ Those planters who survived and prospered became businessmen, to whom land was just one investment in a wide-ranging portfolio that included stores, railroads, banks and market speculation.¹⁵ Slave-ownership, in other words, no longer formed the basis of their economic and political power. But we do not need to leave the African continent to search for assaults upon traditional landed classes. In the wake of the mineral discoveries on the Witwatersrand late in the nineteenth century, Boers of the Highveld were ‘more likely to be victims of

(eds.), *Land and Industry: The Landed Estate and the Industrial Revolution* (Newton Abbot, 1971), 205. See also, Perry Anderson, ‘Origins of the present crisis’, restated in *English Questions* (London and New York, 1992); E. P. Thompson, ‘The peculiarities of the English’, in *The Poverty of Theory* (London, 1981). For a recent synthesis, see P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion, 1688–1914* (London and New York, 1993), esp. 1–46. The main poles in the American debate on the applicability of a ‘Junker path’ to capitalist agriculture are C. Van Woodward’s classic 1951 study, *Origins of the New South*, and Jonathan Wiener’s *Social Origins of the New South: Alabama, 1860–1885* (Baton Rouge and London, 1978). See also, Wiener, ‘Class structure and economic development in the American South, 1865–1955’, *American Historical Review*, 84 (1979), 970–92, and the reply by Harold D. Woodman, ‘Comment on Wiener’, *American Historical Review*, 84 (1979), 997–1001. For more recent additions, see Barbara Jeanne Fields, ‘The advent of capitalist agriculture: the new South in a bourgeois world’, in Thavolia Glymph and John J. Kushma (eds.), *Essays on the Postbellum Southern Economy* (Arlington, 1985); Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution 1863–1877* (New York, 1988), esp. 399–408; Steven Hahn, ‘Class and state in post-emancipation societies: Southern planters in comparative perspectives’, *American Historical Review*, 95 (1990), 75–98; *idem*, ‘Emancipation and the development of capitalist agriculture: The South in Comparative Perspective’, in Kees Gispén (ed.), *What Made the South Different?* (Jackson and London, 1990).

¹³ Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism*, 23–4.

¹⁴ Similarly, when emancipation came to East Africa late in the nineteenth century, it exacerbated the pre-existing indebtedness of Arab clove planters to Indian merchants: Frederick Cooper, *From Slaves to Squatters: Plantation Labor and Agriculture in Zanzibar and Coastal Kenya, 1890–1925* (New Haven and London, 1980), 138–9.

¹⁵ Harold D. Woodman, ‘The reconstruction of the cotton plantation in the New South’, in Thavolia Glymph and John J. Kushma (eds.), *Essays on the Postbellum Southern Economy*, 111.

South Africa's industrial revolution than amongst its beneficiaries'.¹⁶ The most successful and progressive farmers of the early twentieth century were most likely to be 'new men' – in the case of the Highveld, new settlers of Cape colonial or British origin.¹⁷

How does the Cape Colony fit into all of this? There has hitherto been no empirical investigation into the dynamics of nineteenth-century rural capital accumulation – not at the level of region, district or farm. There has, similarly, been no investigation into the precise mechanisms of the transmission of land and wealth in the nineteenth century. If it is true that there was no serious clash of interests between farmers and merchants, how do we explain the acquisition of thousands of acres of land in the 1880s by the merchant firm of the brothers Stephan in the veldcoronetcy of St Helena Bay, one of the most significant wheat-producing areas of the Malmesbury district? How do we account for the fierce debates waged between farmers and merchants in the 1860s over 'usury' and 'free trade in money'? There is even considerable uncertainty as to the level of technology in use on Western Cape farms, and its implications for the labour process.¹⁸

EMANCIPATION

In the long term, Robert Ross has argued in broad strokes, Cape slaveholders were not adversely affected by the economic consequences of emancipation: 'if anything, emancipation led to an increase in production' across all major sectors of the Cape rural economy – wine, wheat and pastoral production.¹⁹ Between 1838 and 1888, wheat production in the Western Cape increased threefold, without a corresponding increase in the amount of available labour.²⁰ As far as wine production was concerned, farmers could adapt to the immediate crisis of emancipation by producing more wine, albeit of a lower quality.²¹ Pastoral farming was rescued by a major swing to wool production. Indeed, this shift is the single most outstanding feature of the Cape economy in the mid-nineteenth century.²²

John Marinowitz, writing of the entire period between 1838 and 1888, concludes that wheat farming remained labour intensive: 'Most wheat

¹⁶ Keegan, *Rural Transformations*, 196.

¹⁷ Keegan, *Rural Transformations*, 197. In examining the 'reconstruction' of the post-war Transvaal by the imperial state, Jeremy Krikler, too, was 'struck by the fact that... a disproportionate number of foreigners established the relatively few large-scale commercial estates of the day. And their prominence throws into relief the agriculture of a different (far less commercial) orientation which was generally practised by the land-owners indigenous to the territory'. *Revolution from Above, Rebellion from Below: the Agrarian Transvaal at the turn of the Century* (Oxford, 1993), 90.

¹⁸ John Marinowitz has written off accounts of improved technology on farms as 'exaggerated reports to the contrary': 'Rural production and labour in the Western Cape, 1838–1888, with special reference to the wheat growing districts' (Ph.D thesis, University of London, 1985), 4. Robert Ross, on the other hand, is far more cautious and has stressed the need for more research on this particular subject: 'Rather mental than physical', 161.

¹⁹ Ross, 'Rather mental', 153.

²⁰ Marinowitz, 'Rural Production', 309.

²¹ Ross, 'Rather mental', 153–4.

²² This was most dramatic in the Eastern Cape, however. See Saul Dubow, *Land, Labour and Merchant Capital in the Pre-Industrial Rural Economy of the Cape: The Experience of the Graaff-Reinet District, 1852–72* (Cape Town, 1982).

producers retained traditional implements and practices such as the “old Cape plough”, the sickle, “trampling out the corn”, and “winnowing by means of the wind”.²³ For labour, the implications are clear: ‘it has to be assumed, therefore, that the labour supply remained sufficient to allow the farms of the Cape Colony, both in the (largely) agricultural west and in the (largely) pastoral east, to continue at much the same level.’²⁴ Both the presence of a number of mission stations scattered around the colony and the passage of restrictive Masters and Servants Laws gave farmers the access to labour that they needed. Central to this explanation is the fact that the slaves lacked the means to carry out independent peasant production.²⁵

Yet, as is well-known for parts of the Atlantic World, post-emancipation outcomes can hardly be determined by a mechanical reading of land-to-labour ratios.²⁶ If land-to-labour ratios were crucial, the Cape’s post-emancipation history is told – a scarcity of arable land would mean a system of domination akin to slavery and the survival of the slaveholding class; an abundance of such land would lead to the rise of an independent peasantry. However, historical explanation is seldom that simple. The point can be made by drawing on another post-emancipation outcome, the Southern United States, where emancipation followed upon the resounding military defeat of the world’s most powerful slaveholding class.

Despite attempts by planters everywhere to resurrect the plantation economy, by 1880 the system had effectively ceased to exist.²⁷ Cotton was never again grown as profitably for the planters as in the period before emancipation. Although cotton output nearly equalled that of antebellum times by the mid-1870s, this was a result of a major relocation of cotton production to upcountry areas dominated by yeomen.²⁸

After a number of experiments with various labour arrangements, the system that eventually came to dominate was sharecropping. Yet this had little to do with land-to-labour ratios. What is clear is that sharecropping emerged after a prolonged struggle between former slaves and former masters as each side attempted to impose its own definition of the ‘meaning of freedom’. To put it simply, sharecropping emerged as a result of ‘the freedman’s insistence upon it’.²⁹ To the former slaves, sharecropping meant

²³ Marincowitz, ‘Rural production’, 111–2. ²⁴ Ross, ‘Rather mental’, 161.

²⁵ For Nigel Worden as well, the former slaves’ lack of access to land was a crucial factor in the post-emancipation outcome: Worden, ‘Adjusting to emancipation’, in Mary Simons and Wilmut James (eds.), *The Angry Divide: Social and Economic History of the Western Cape* (Cape Town and Johannesburg, 1989), 38.

²⁶ See O. Nigel Bolland, ‘Systems of domination after slavery: the control of land and labor in the British West Indies after 1838’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 23 (1981), 591–619; William A. Green, ‘The perils of comparative history: Belize and the British Sugar Colonies after slavery’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 26 (1984), 112–9; O. Nigel Bolland, ‘Reply to William A. Green’s “The Perils of Comparative History”’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 26 (1984), 120–5.

²⁷ Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation* (Cambridge, 1977), 56–7.

²⁸ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 393. For a highly stimulating account of this shift, see Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850–1890* (New York and Oxford, 1983).

²⁹ Ronald Davis, *Good and Faithful Labor: From Slavery to Sharecropping in the Natchez District, 1860–1890* (Westport, 1982), 194.

a minimum of supervision and the scrapping of gang labour. Planters eventually acquiesced because they maintained control over crucial productive decisions: cotton is what they wanted, and cotton is what the sharecroppers grew. But far from being a victory for either planters or tenants, sharecropping 'stood not as a symbol of the freedmen's triumph but as a measure of their defeat. Instead of a landowning peasantry, they became the next thing to wage hands'.³⁰ On the other hand, sharecropping 'represented no shining victory of the planters. Its spread betrayed their weakness: their inability to carry through the transition to capitalism fully on their own terms'.³¹

To be sure, the scarcity of available arable land in the Western Cape ruled out any possibility of the genesis of a black peasantry, the existence of pockets of freed people squatting on government public land notwithstanding. The Western Cape was a very well-settled and conquered area at the time of emancipation. The slaves, the resident missionary at Pacaltsdorp astutely noted, 'went out from their bondage empty-handed'.³² The inhabitants of Zuurbraak mission station in the Swellendam district, John Philip noted in August 1839, gained 'the chief part of their livelihood by serving the farmers'.³³ But this did not mean that life in the countryside continued as before.

For the Cape's slaves, emancipation was above all about *mobility*. To start with, large numbers of slaves left their owners at emancipation. Freed women specifically withdrew from agricultural labour. 'It is known to every person who has had any experience in the colony, who is not naturally blind, deaf, or dumb, that the whole of the late apprentices, with but few exceptions, left their late employers immediately on their final emancipation', declared a group of 'Colonists' in a letter to the *Zuid Afrikaan*.³⁴ Reports of labour shortages were heard from far and wide.³⁵ The 30 labourers on the farm of A. J. Louw in Koeberg all left on the day of emancipation.³⁶ A group of Stellenbosch farmers declared:

solemnly [*sic*]...that since the 1st of December 1838...almost all of the apprentices have left their former Masters, unwilling to engage themselves for agricultural labor, by which the agriculturists with a few exceptions were left without the necessary number of hands, in consequence whereof they have, till this very moment been unable to perform their usual agricultural labor, which is at present in a most deplorable condition.³⁷

The labour shortage, they went on to claim, existed 'in every branch of agriculture, the cattle farmer not excepted'. Indeed, at the end of 1839, several families of the more remote cattle farming areas of Hantam and Bokkeveld, including the opulent Schalk Willem Burger and S. W. van der

³⁰ Barbara Jeanne Fields, 'The advent of capitalist agriculture', 84. ³¹ *Ibid.*

³² University of London, SOAS, CWM, Box 16, Folder 4, Jacket C, Report of Resident Missionary, Pacaltsdorp, 2 Dec. 1839; also cited in Worden, 'Adjusting to emancipation', 41.

³³ SOAS, CWM, Box 16, Folder 3, Jacket C, Philip to Napier, 14 Aug. 1839.

³⁴ *Zuid Afrikaan* (hereafter ZA), 20 March 1840. ³⁵ ZA, 27 March 1840.

³⁶ ZA, 31 Jan. 1840.

³⁷ Cape Archives (hereafter CA) CO 4007, Memorial of Wine and Cornfarmers and other farming and interested persons of the District of Stellenbosch convened as a Public Meeting at Stellenbosch, 28 Jan. 1840, no. 49, 176.

Merwe, chose to trek to Natal, listing as one of their reasons the difficulty of obtaining labourers.³⁸ In early 1840, 15 families of the vicinity of Riviersonderend were preparing to leave for Port Natal on account of what was perceived to be a severe labour shortage.³⁹

Some liberated slaves found their way to Cape Town, while others managed to gain access to tiny plots of land. But most of the slaves who left found their way to the mission stations scattered around the Western Cape: Marincowitz estimates that in the decade after emancipation, roughly 6,000 of the 25,000 former slaves in the Western Cape moved to the mission stations and that a further 1,000 settled on public land.⁴⁰ Although, as noted above, most of the mission station inhabitants were eventually to become dependent on labour to surrounding farmers, this sudden and dramatic withdrawal of labour could not have been easy for the farmers to come to terms with. For decades after emancipation, the farmers faced a never-ending struggle to acquire sufficient amounts of labour.

The former slaves enjoyed a level of mobility that continued long after emancipation. Consider, for example, an incident which occurred in 1852, involving one Jagers, a labourer in the service of farmer Hendrick Bester, but resident on Groenekloof mission station in the district of Malmesbury. Bester's labourers were customarily allowed to return to the mission station on Saturday afternoons and were expected to return to work the following Monday morning. On one occasion Jagers showed up for work only on the Tuesday morning, probably as a result of the hangover he suffered; after all, part of his remuneration was a wine allowance. After being 'reprimanded' Jagers returned to work, but left Bester's service the following day (Wednesday) and engaged himself in the service of another farmer.⁴¹

What bothered farmers most was the indiscriminate way in which labourers could leave their service. In 1855, Jacob Samuel van Reenen complained that Herman Esau had 'promised' to do some threshing for him. When Van Reenen went to Groenekloof mission station to collect Esau he received an answer that he would not come.⁴² Time after time, farmers complained that labourers left 'without any previous notice'.⁴³

Emancipation also allowed the slaves greater leverage in determining the conditions under which they laboured. In 1849, another Malmesbury labourer, Carolus Davids, told the local magistrates court that he left the service of his employer, Jacob van Reenen because

our victuals always came too late. The meals were generally served out $\frac{1}{2}$ hour too late and in the evenings we did not get our supper before 8 or 9 o'clock in the evenings... A week before I left, I told Def that I would leave, if things are not going on better. Before leaving I asked Defendant to settle with me.

³⁸ CA CO 2788, Civil Commissioner of Clanwilliam to Secretary to Government, 31 Dec. 1839.

³⁹ ZA, 27 March 1840.

⁴⁰ Marincowitz, 'Rural production', 33. For a richly detailed account of the space that the mission stations provided the freed slaves, see Elizabeth H. Ludlow, 'Missions and emancipation in the southwestern Cape: a case study of Groenekloof (Mamre), 1838–1852' (M.A. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1992).

⁴¹ CA 1/MBY 1/1/7, Bester vs Jagers, 20 Dec. 1852.

⁴² CA 1/MBY 1/1/8, Jacob Samuel van Reenen vs Herman Esau, 19 Feb. 1855.

⁴³ CA 1/MBY 1/1/6, Haupt vs Joseph Arends, 16 Aug. 1849; *ibid.* Haupt vs Ferdinand Pedro, 19 Jul. 1849.

When Van Reenen refused to pay the wages due, Carolus Davids took recourse to the courts in order to claim it.⁴⁴ Repeated court appearances in order to enforce dubious civil agreements could hardly have been convenient for the farmers. One was told by the Malmesbury magistrate that he was not to 'enter into any verbal agreement with any labourer, without the presence of a competent witness'.⁴⁵

Given this mobility, the former slaveowners were forced into compromise. Some farmers were forced to allow slaves to cultivate plots for themselves merely in order to gain labourers.⁴⁶ 'Some of those farmers who best understand their own interests,' declared a government official in 1841, 'have begun to locate their servants upon their estates, thus giving them an interest in the soil and also the habits of settled life'.⁴⁷ Some freed slaves, while maintaining tenuous links with the mission stations, were able to obtain plots of land on rent.⁴⁸ Moreover, farmers had to offer wages higher than their margins of profitability allowed. In 1841, wages in the Cape district averaged 22 shillings per month, apart from such bonuses as food and clothing.⁴⁹ A few farmers who went insolvent in the years immediately after emancipation claimed that the high price of labour was directly responsible. Melt van Schoor, a Koeberg wheat farmer, claimed in 1849 that he was forced into insolvency by 'high wages... the low price of corn, and the great sum which he is obliged annually to pay for Interest... and [had] during the past year not even had means of cultivating his farm in a proper manner'.⁵⁰ That same year, 'the scarcity and expensiveness of labour' was declared as the cause of the insolvency of Servaas van Niekerk, another Koeberg wheat farmer.⁵¹

In this context 'debt bondage' allows for a great deal of ambiguity. There can be no doubt that farmers advanced money to the former slaves in order to attract their labour. One commentator noted in 1840 that 'retail shops' were established on most farms, 'the servants of course are expected to purchase and frequently allowed to get in debt, pledging their services as security'.⁵² But the existence of such relations was as often a symptom of the weakness of a landowning class as of its strength.⁵³

⁴⁴ CA 1/MBY 1/1/6, Carolus Davids vs Jacob van Reenen, 3 Dec. 1849.

⁴⁵ CA 1/MBY 1/1/6, Haupt vs Ferdinand Pedro, 19 Jul. 1849.

⁴⁶ ZA, 27 March 1840.

⁴⁷ CA GH 28/17, Enclosure no. 2 of Despatch no. 85, 26 Aug. 1841, Report Called for by the Secretary for the Colonial Department.

⁴⁸ SOAS, CWM, Box 19, Folder 3, Jacket C, Report of Resident Missionary, Caledon, 1 Nov. 1843; CWM, Box 20, Folder 3, Jacket C, Report of Resident Missionary, Caledon, 1 Nov. 1844.

⁴⁹ CA GH 28/17, Enclosure no. 2 of Despatch no. 85, 26 Aug. 1841, Report Called for by the Secretary for the Colonial Department.

⁵⁰ CA MOIB 1/90, Records in Insolvent Estate of Melt Jacobus van Schoor, 12 Feb. 1849.

⁵¹ CA MOIB 1/90, Records in Insolvent Estate of Servaas van Niekerk, 27 Feb. 1849.

⁵² CA CO 2791, J. Miller to Secretary of Government, 30 April 1840.

⁵³ A. J. Bauer, 'Rural workers in Spanish America: problems of peonage and oppression', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 59 (1979), 34-63; D. A. Brading, *Haciendas and Ranchos in the Mexican Bajío: Leon 1700-1860* (Cambridge, 1978), 9.

SURVIVAL

The immediate post-emancipation decade was thus one of considerable difficulty for the farmers of the Western Cape. These years witnessed a reconfiguration of labour and productive structures. In addition to the loss of labour and the loss of wealth incurred by emancipation, the slaveowners faced a number of simultaneous calamities seemingly unrelated to emancipation – drought, horse-sickness and falling prices (apart from the immediate post-emancipation harvest when shortages resulted in an increase in wheat prices).

But the slaveowners of the British Empire had one advantage which their counterparts in the American South did not have, namely, slave compensation. The Abolition Act passed in the British parliament in 1833 also made allowance for a sum of £20 million to be paid to slaveowners throughout the Empire. A total of £1,247,000 made its way into the Cape Colony.⁵⁴ Predictably, the farmers complained that the compensation payments were not enough and hardly represented the true value of their human property.⁵⁵ Certainly there was a large discrepancy between the appraised value of slaves and the sums of money which slaveowners eventually received. Whereas the average field labourer was valued at £132.18.5½, slaveowners received on average only £54.0.6¾ for each such slave.⁵⁶ For large slaveowners this could involve significant losses. While Nicolaas van Wielligh's 35 slaves were valued at £3,307, only £1,243 was awarded as compensation.⁵⁷ Fredrik Scheundorff, also of Malmesbury district, had his 23 slaves valued at £2,051, but stood to receive only £698.⁵⁸ A number of farmers who were declared insolvent in the immediate post-emancipation years claimed such losses as contributory factors in their insolvency.⁵⁹ To Daniel Petrus Rossouw the difference of £475 between the amount paid for

⁵⁴ *South African Commercial Advertiser* (hereafter, *SACA*), 4 Aug. 1841.

⁵⁵ CA CO 4007, Memorial of Wine and Cornfarmers and other farming and interested persons of the District of Stellenbosch convened as a Public Meeting at Stellenbosch, 28 Jan. 1840, no. 49, 176.

⁵⁶ British Parliamentary Papers, 1837–1838, XLVIII, Statement of the Average Value of a Slave as Appraised and of the Compensation Awarded for such Slave. I am grateful to Robert Ross for making me aware of the existence of this important document.

⁵⁷ CA SO 20/13, Appraisal of Slaves for Stellenbosch, 1834–1835, Compensation no. 3765; British Parliamentary Papers, 1837–1838, XLVIII, Compensation no. 3765.

⁵⁸ CA SO 20/13, Appraisal of Slaves for Stellenbosch, 1834–1835, Compensation no. 3768; British Parliamentary Papers, 1837–1838, XLVIII, Compensation no. 3768.

⁵⁹ CA MOIB 1/53, Records in Insolvent Estate of *Charl Jacobus de Villiers*, 7 Feb. 1840; CA MOIB 1/56, Records in Insolvent Estate of *Abraham Barend du Toit*, 13 Aug. 1840; CA MOIB 1/59, Records in the Insolvent Estate of *Jacobus Johannes Luttig*, 4 Feb. 1841; CA MOIB 1/59, Records in Insolvent Estate of *Jacob Louis de Villiers*, 9 Feb. 1841; Records in Insolvent Estate of *Willem Adolph Krige*, 27 Feb. 1841; CA MOIB 1/62, Records in Insolvent Estate of *Willem Johannes Esterhuysen*, 12 July 1841; CA MOIB 1/64, Records in Insolvent Estate of *Jacob de Villiers*, 18 March 1842; CA MOIB 1/68, Records in Insolvent Estate of *Daniel Gerhardus Cilliers*, 16 Feb. 1843; Records in Insolvent Estate of *George Stephanus Hauptfleisch*, 9 March 1843; CA MOIB 1/71, Records in Insolvent Estate of *Joel Daniel Herholdt*, 5 Sep. 1843; CA MOIB 1/80, Records in Insolvent Estate of Daniel Petrus Rossouw, 12 Jan. 1846. (All dates refer to the date of the order of sequestration.)

his slaves and the compensation received was an 'immense loss'. Abraham Barend du Toit of Malmesbury spent more than £800 on the purchase of his slaves and received only £200 in compensation. Willem Adolph Krige of Paarl similarly lost in excess of £500.

Furthermore, as Robert Shell has pointed out, slaveowners had mortgaged their slaves heavily in the last decades of slavery.⁶⁰ It is not generally known, however, how much of this debt had been redeemed by the time of emancipation. A few examples will have to suffice. Of the £698 awarded to Fredrik Scheundorff, mentioned above, he received only £369, the remainder going to seven other individuals as payment in a 'litigated claim'.⁶¹ Scheundorff had mortgaged his slaves extensively in the decades leading to emancipation. In 1823, for example, he borrowed f7,000 from one Abraham de Smidt and mortgaged his slaves Mentor, December and Matfeld.⁶² In 1831, he borrowed £300 from Andries Brink and mortgaged ten of his slaves.⁶³ That same year he borrowed a further sum of £300 from Catharina le Roes and mortgaged his slaves Jacob, Africa, Phillis, Pedro, Jومات, Mentor and Matfeld.⁶⁴ In 1832, he borrowed £75 from Roelof Abraham Zeederberg, mortgaging his slave Abraham, and in 1833 he again borrowed from Andries Brink, this time the sum of £125 on mortgage of his slave Jacob.⁶⁵

Yet, there can be little doubt, as Nigel Worden has suggested, that compensation payments alleviated the strains of the immediate post-emancipation years.⁶⁶ This influx of money allowed for a rapid burst in the extension of credit and the clearing off of old debt. Thus in the years 1838 and 1839, the Registrar of Deeds noted, the number of deeds passed 'was unusually great owing to part of the arrears having been brought up... consequent upon the introduction of compensation money'.⁶⁷ Compensation money allowed the subdivision of land, the extension of agriculture and the granting of new mortgage bonds.⁶⁸

Unlike the British West Indies, however, where planters were largely indebted to outsiders, mortgage debt at the Cape was of a very local nature. Money was channelled into the countryside, not only via agents and merchants in Cape Town – resulting in the burgeoning of a 'local commercial bourgeoisie' – but also via large slaveholders.⁶⁹ Mortgage loans on slave property were also held by neighbouring farmers or relatives. When F. X. Jurgens purchased *Oliphantsfontein* in 1831, he obtained a loan on mortgage security of the farm and his ten slaves from his father, Johannes Josephus

⁶⁰ Robert Shell, *Children of Bondage: A Social History of Slave Society at the Cape of Good Hope, 1652–1838* (Hanover, NH, 1994), 109–10.

⁶¹ British Parliamentary Papers, 1837–1838, XLVIII, Claim no. 3768, 265, 329.

⁶² Deeds Office, Cape Town (hereafter, DO); Debt Registers (hereafter DR), S, 535.

⁶³ DO, DR, S, 675. The slaves were Samira, Frits, Clarinda, Jephtha, Camonie, Juliana, Francina, Grietjie, Machonie and Goliath.

⁶⁴ DO, DR, S, 675.

⁶⁵ DO, DR, S, 675.

⁶⁶ Worden, 'Adjusting to emancipation', 38.

⁶⁷ CA DOC 2/1/1/1, Registrar of Deeds to Secretary of Government, 6 April 1842, folio 105.

⁶⁸ *SACA*, 7 April 1838; CA DOC 2/1/1/1, Registrar of Deeds to Secretary of Government, 6 April 1842, folio 105.

⁶⁹ Lalou Meltzer, 'Growth of Cape Town commerce', in Worden and Crais, *Breaking the Chains*, 198.

Jurgens.⁷⁰ In addition to the fact that Nicolaas van Wielligh's claim to compensation money of £1,243 was uncontested, he received an additional sum of £137.7.11 from the claim of neighbouring farmer M. W. Theunissen, leaving Theunissen with just £39.9.10.⁷¹ When Theunissen bought *Leeuwekuil* for £625 in 1830, £325 was provided by Van Wielligh.⁷² Theunissen and Van Wielligh were not only neighbours, but also kin. Van Wielligh had at one time been married to Theunissen's namesake (most likely his sister), Elisabeth Johanna Theunissen.⁷³

The ready availability of money sowed the seeds of later distress. The influx of compensation money reduced the price of money and in the years immediately around emancipation, money could be obtained at the rate of 4 or 5 per cent as opposed to the normal rate of six per cent per annum. As is usual in such times, many overextended themselves. Thus landed property acquired an 'unprecedented although fictitious value'.⁷⁴ Wheat farms were in 1839 'very high in prize [*sic*]'.⁷⁵ But the gradual depletion in the availability of compensation money resulted in an increase in the rate of interest. Thus, in November 1838, Jonas van der Poel, one of the largest lenders of money on mortgage in the Colony, placed an advertisement in the *Government Gazette* informing his debtors who had borrowed money at four per cent per annum, that from 1 January 1840 they were to pay an increased rate of five per cent.⁷⁶ This general increase in interest rates had the effect of 'depreciating again ... the fictitious value of landed property'.⁷⁷ Just one such farm was *Oliphantsfontein* situated in the ward of Mosselbanks Rivier in the district of Malmesbury whose owner, Jacob Willem van Reenen, had passed bonds (one in 1839 and another in 1841) to the value of £1,875 on the farm. In 1842, the farm was sold for a mere £1,000.⁷⁸ A number of farms sold in the years immediately following emancipation displayed similar levels of mortgage indebtedness.

Wheat farmers were perhaps marginally better equipped to deal with the post-emancipation years than wine farmers. In some ways, the wine farmers never fully recovered from the spectacular crash of the wine industry in the late 1820s, when the British government lifted preferential tariffs on Cape

⁷⁰ DO, Transfer Deed no. 153, 22 March 1831; Mortgage Bond no. 154, 22 March 1831.

⁷¹ CA SO 20/13, Appraisement of Slaves for Stellenbosch; British Parliamentary Papers, 1837–1838, XLVIII, Returns of Sums Awarded by Commissioners of Slave Compensation, Claims no. 3765, no. 3764. Both Van Wielligh and Theunissen resided in the veldcornetcy of Mosselbanks Rivier.

⁷² DO, Transfer Deed no. 12, 9 Jul. 1830; Mortgage Bond no. 14, 9 Jul. 1830.

⁷³ CA MOIB 2/761, no. 134, Liquidation and Distribution Account in Insolvent Estate of Nicolaas van Wielligh, 15 Dec. 1851.

⁷⁴ CA MOIB 1/59, Records in Insolvent Estate of Andries Christoffel van der Byl, 15 Jan. 1841; CA MOIB 1/64, Records in Insolvent Estate of Christiaan Johannes Godlieb Ackermann, 7 March 1842; CA MOIB 1/77, Records in Insolvent Estate of Pieter Gerhard Wium, 26 March 1845.

⁷⁵ CA MOIB 1/52, Records in Insolvent Estate of August Joseph Reis, 10 Oct. 1839.

⁷⁶ *Cape of Good Hope Government Gazette* (hereafter, *GG*), 8 Nov. 1839.

⁷⁷ CA MOIB 1/77, Records in Insolvent Estate of Pieter Gerhard Wium, 26 March 1845.

⁷⁸ CA MOIB 2/551, no. 60, Liquidation and Distribution Account in Insolvent Estate of Jacob Willem van Reenen, 5 May 1842.

wines.⁷⁹ 'Instead of a benefactor, the man who introduced vine here, has been in fact the greatest enemy the Colony ever knew,' wrote the *South African Commercial Advertiser* in 1842. 'And next to him was the British minister who poured the poison of protection into the Cape vineyards.'⁸⁰ Whereas wheat farmers experienced a short-term rise in prices, wine farmers were faced with the 'almost unsaleable state of [their] staple produce'.⁸¹

The depreciation of landed property was therefore especially stark 'in the value of all farms whereon the vine [was] the principal object of culture'.⁸² 'The sudden fall in the price of fixed property and wine and the scarcity of money was undoubtedly the cause of the surrender of the estate,' declared the trustee in the insolvent estate of Abraham Bosman.⁸³ George Hauptfleisch's wine farm situated in the Stellenbosch district fell in value from £700 to £375, a depreciation of 46 per cent.⁸⁴ *Rustenburg*, situated in the district of Stellenbosch, declined in value from £2,500 to £2,000, while the moveable property on the farm, 'being nearly all the same', declined from £625 to £346, an overall depreciation of about 25 per cent.⁸⁵ This depression in the wine industry had a significant impact. Whereas the wine farmers were regarded as the most prosperous class at the end of the eighteenth century, they had now 'ceased to be as wine growers, the most prosperous and wealthy class of the community'.⁸⁶ But whatever the relative advantages of wheat farmers over wine farmers, distress was widespread. As the *Commercial Advertiser* reported in 1845:

numbers of the corn farmers towards the north and north-east of Cape Town, and at no great distance from it, are at this moment at the lowest point of penury; and to add to their misfortunes, during the great drought of last season, vast numbers of their stock, and most of their wagon oxen perished, so that for treading out and bringing to market the corn on the ground, they must depend on horses or oxen, hired or purchased on credit. In a word, there is much suffering and real misery among this class.⁸⁷

Yet, most farmers survived the post-emancipation decade. At least 788 individuals who resided in the Western Cape were declared insolvent between the beginning of 1838 and the end of 1849.⁸⁸ Interestingly though, persons whose occupations were given as farmers or 'agriculturists'

⁷⁹ The expansion and decline of the wine industry in the early decades of the century are described in Mary Rayner, 'Wine and slaves: the failure of an export economy and the ending of slavery in the Cape Colony, South Africa, 1806–1834' (Ph.D thesis, Duke University, 1986).
⁸⁰ *SACA*, 12 Oct. 1842.

⁸¹ CA MOIB 2/581, Liquidation and Distribution Account in Insolvent Estate of Andries Christoffel Cloete, 12 Sept. 1843.

⁸² CA MOIB 1/73, Records in Insolvent Estate of Dirk de Vos, 8 March 1844.

⁸³ CA MOIB 1/62, Records in Insolvent Estate of Abraham Daniel Bosman, 12 Aug. 1841.

⁸⁴ CA MOIB 1/68, Records in Insolvent Estate of George Stephanus Hauptfleisch, 9 March 1843.

⁸⁵ CA MOIB 1/64, Records in Insolvent Estate of Christiaan Johannes Godlieb Ackermann, 7 March 1842.

⁸⁶ *SACA*, 27 Apr. 1844; George Thompson, *Travels and Adventures in Southern Africa* (Cape Town, 1967 and 1968), 91.
⁸⁷ *SACA*, 18 Oct. 1845.

⁸⁸ These statistics were compiled from names of insolvents published weekly in the *Cape of Good Hope Government Gazette*. I say 'at least' because the place of residence of 139 individuals is uncertain. For the Eastern Cape, the figure was 299.

accounted for only 122 cases, representing a small minority of the total. The remainder occupied a range of occupations, such as artisans, shopkeepers and merchants. The peak was reached in 1841, when 26 farmers were declared insolvent. Shopkeepers, in these early years, appeared to be more vulnerable than farmers. One of the reasons for the insolvency in 1847 of Cape Town shopkeeper, Hendrik Schierhout, was his inability to obtain payment from farmers to whom he had sold goods on credit. The farmers were 'in the habit of buying at a year's credit'. It was 'well known that very few farmers are able at this time of the year [August] to meet their Debts, they having purchased under condition to pay in January out of their harvest'.⁸⁹

Farmers for the most part kept title to their land because of the peculiar structure of the Cape's mortgage market, their successful adaptation to a changed labour market and by seeking non-agricultural sources of income. The local nature of the mortgage market did much to keep the circulation of land within narrowly circumscribed boundaries. For example, with the insolvency in 1845 of Stellenbosch wine farmer Abraham de Villiers, the chief mortgage creditor was his namesake Jacob Isaac de Villiers.⁹⁰ In one instance a tenant was able to purchase the Malmesbury farm of his insolvent landlord, while being able to obtain mortgage loans of his own.⁹¹

A government official wondered in 1841 how the wine farmers could 'with the present prices of their wine...exist at all, even if labour were to be had for nothing'.⁹² The simple truth was that they could not. In the two years preceding 1843, one commentator noted, 'not one wine farmer had been enabled to make both ends meet unless they have had other resources than the mere production of their wine farms'.⁹³ The low price of wine forced Pieter de Villiers to 'look out for other means for the maintenance of himself and family'.⁹⁴ One very common activity was to go on *tocht*, or trading journeys into the interior of the colony, and for the remainder of the century trading remained a central prop of the farming economy.

MECHANIZATION

As noted above, mechanization, as a response to emancipation, is ruled out in the existing historiography of the nineteenth-century Western Cape. Both wheat and wine farming were labour intensive activities.⁹⁵ Marinowitz thus sees his study of post-emancipation wheat production as an investigation into

⁸⁹ CA MOIB 1/85, Records in Insolvent Estate of Hendrik Schierhout, 11 Aug. 1847.

⁹⁰ CA MOIB 2/628, no. 61, Liquidation and Distribution Account in Insolvent Estate of Abraham Pieter de Villiers, 28 Oct. 1845.

⁹¹ DO, Mortgage Bond no. 26, 5 Dec. 1844; *ibid*, Mortgage Bond no. 27, 5 Dec. 1844; CA MOIB 2/620, no. 10, Liquidation and Distribution Account in Insolvent Estate of Pieter Hendrik Woutersen Neethling, 28 Feb. 1845.

⁹² CA GH 3/13, no. 143, folio 358, Napier to Stanley, 21 Dec. 1841.

⁹³ CA MOIB 1/68, Records in Insolvent Estate of George Stephanus Hauptfleisch, 9 March 1843.

⁹⁴ CA MOIB 1/64, Records in Insolvent Estate of Pieter Johannes de Villiers, 10 Feb. 1842.

⁹⁵ For an outline of the annual work routine on eighteenth-century wheat and wine farms, see Nigel Worden, *Slavery in Dutch South Africa* (Cambridge, 1985), 20–22. A description of wheat farming printed in 1840 shows that this pattern had remained unchanged: *ZA*, 7 Feb. 1840.

'how a labour-intensive staple-food industry operated without slaves or mechanized harvesters'.⁹⁶ Put in these terms, wheat production at the Cape was not particularly unusual. In the first instance, it was rare to find wheat produced by slaves in monocultural productive systems.⁹⁷ Equally rare was the mechanized production of wheat in the nineteenth-century world. Certainly, labour-scarce countries such as Australia, Argentina and the United States mechanized heavily in the course of the nineteenth century. But in 1882 only about 7 per cent of cereal acreage in France and about 3.6 per cent of Germany's was cut by machine.⁹⁸ Mechanization of wheat production in Mexico came at the very end of the nineteenth century and in Chile only in the course of the twentieth.⁹⁹

There is no shortage of references to the backwardness of Cape agriculture. In 1849, an observer inquiring into the reasons for the insolvency of a Malmesbury wheat farmer, lamented the absence of 'late improvements in the art of production, which has hitherto remained unknown and unheeded as regards this colony'.¹⁰⁰ The Colonial Botanist saw in 1864 'no expectation of living to see machinery employed in agricultural operations in this country to the extent to which it is employed by agriculturists who engaged in what is called high-farming in Britain'.¹⁰¹ This is the crux of the issue: individuals who commented on Cape agriculture invariably had England as a frame of reference.

Yet the use of machinery in England was not much further advanced than the Cape at the time of emancipation. Even though there were some important innovations in agriculture, such as the development of threshing and winnowing machines in eighteenth-century England, the English agricultural engineering industry, as a source of supply of mechanized implements, was still in its infancy at the time of emancipation.¹⁰² Wheat harvesting involved two separate activities: reaping and the related task of threshing and winnowing. Progress in the development of a reaping machine was slow. In England, the reaping machine became a practical instrument only in 1851.¹⁰³ In early nineteenth-century England the scythe was the most common harvesting tool, but both sickles and scythes were not finally done away with until the beginning of the twentieth century.¹⁰⁴

Most importantly, the adoption of machines in England did not advance in a linear or uniform manner. Much as farmers may have wanted to

⁹⁶ Marincowitz, 'Rural production', 3.

⁹⁷ Worden, *Slavery*, 26.

⁹⁸ Arnold J. Bauer, *Chilean Rural Society: from the Spanish Conquest to 1930* (Cambridge, 1975), 105.

⁹⁹ Simon Miller, 'Wheat production in Europe and America: Mexican problems in comparative perspective, 1770-1910', *Agricultural History*, 68 (1994), 16-34; Bauer, *Chilean Rural Society*, 102-5; Donald Denoon, *Settler Capitalism: The Dynamics of Dependent Development in the Southern Hemisphere* (Oxford, 1983), 61.

¹⁰⁰ CA MOIB 1/90, Records in Insolvent Estate of Daniel Johannes Eelders, 31 Jan. 1849. ¹⁰¹ G24-65, Report of the Colonial Botanist for the Year 1864, 20 Jun. 1864.

¹⁰² E. J. T. Collins, 'The age of machinery', in G. E. Mingay (ed.), *The Victorian Countryside*, 2 vols., (London, 1981), 201.

¹⁰³ G. E. Fussell, *The Farmer's Tools: The History of British Farm Implements, Tools and Machinery, A.D. 1500-1900* (London, 1981), 200.

¹⁰⁴ W. Harwood Long, 'The development of mechanization in English farming', *Agricultural History Review*, 11 (1963), 21; Miller, 'Wheat production in Europe and America', 26.

mechanize, they were constrained by a moral economy that dictated that they provide employment. The Swing Riots of 1830 grew out of their first hesitant steps in the use of threshing machines. So violent was this ‘Luddite reaction’ that it retarded the general adoption of threshing machines by fully two decades, a ‘virtual moratorium’ having been declared on their use.¹⁰⁵ Only about two-thirds of all English wheat was cut by machine in the late 1870s.

At the Cape, the pressure to mechanize came from the press (both English and Dutch) and merchant-shopkeepers (resident both in Cape Town and the countryside) who imported agricultural machinery into the Colony. The stated aim of the Cape of Good Hope Agricultural Society, behind which merchants were the driving force, was to introduce agricultural machinery into the Colony.¹⁰⁶ In ‘a colony where hands are scarce, there is no point to which the efforts of the society can be turned with greater chance of positive and undeniable benefit than the introduction of agricultural machinery of every description – from the wool-shear and pruning-hook to the thrashing-machine and corn-mill,’ wrote one of its members in 1859.¹⁰⁷ In 1857 three quarters of the membership of the Society were resident in Cape Town.¹⁰⁸ Of the six persons who attended the 1863 annual meeting, ‘all, without exception, were merchants without one single bona fide agriculturist’.¹⁰⁹ But the Society had representatives throughout the countryside, amongst whom were included the leading farmers of the various districts, and in the course of the 1850s a number of branches were established in various rural districts.¹¹⁰ It was mainly due to the activities of such a branch in the Malmesbury district, according to its Civil Commissioner, that threshing machines were widely diffused throughout the district by 1860.¹¹¹

The press played its role in promoting the need for the mechanization of Cape agriculture and editors constantly exhorted farmers to mechanize.¹¹² The press could also be a source of information about the utility of machines. In 1852, a Bredasdorp farmer wrote to the *Zuid Afrikaan* expressing marvel at a ‘Hassey’ machine, and recommended that ‘every farmer...provided himself with one...as it will be a great saving to him by performing lighter work, and enable him to dispense with many labourers, from whom moreover, he has to endure much insolence only to get in his crop’.¹¹³ In 1857 readers of the *Cape Argus* could discover that one farmer had cleared £200 by using a threshing machine.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁵ E. J. T. Collins, ‘The “Machinery Question” in English agriculture in the nineteenth century’, in George Grantham and Carol S. Leonard (eds.), *Agrarian Organization in the Century of Industrialization: Europe, Russia and North America* (London, 1989), 208.

¹⁰⁶ *Cape Monthly Magazine*, 2 (Nov. 1857), Annual Report of the Committee of the Cape of Good Hope Agricultural Society.

¹⁰⁷ *Cape Monthly Magazine*, 6 (July 1859), ‘The Cape of Good Hope Agricultural Society’, by FWR.

¹⁰⁸ *Cape Monthly Magazine*, 2 (July 1857), ‘The Cape of Good Hope Agricultural Society’, by T. B. Bayley.

¹⁰⁹ *SACA*, 12 Aug. 1863.

¹¹⁰ *Cape Monthly Magazine*, 5 (March 1859), ‘Agricultural societies’, by R. W. Murray; Blue Book, 1857, Reports of Civil Commissioners.

¹¹¹ Cape of Good Hope Blue Books, Report of Civil Commissioner of Malmesbury, 1860. ¹¹² For example, *ZA*, 2 Feb. 1863; 27 July 1863. ¹¹³ *ZA*, 2 Dec. 1852.

¹¹⁴ *Cape Argus*, 28 March 1857.

Access to machinery was facilitated by the merchants and shopkeepers who were stationed in Cape Town and the countryside. As early as 1839, a Cape Town shopkeeper advertised for sale an imported 'Hand Thrashing Machine, Cider Mill and Press' and added that these items were 'well worthy the attention of Corn and Wine Farmers, particularly as labor is difficult to procure'.¹¹⁵ More sophisticated technology became available as the century progressed. In 1863, the Agricultural Engineers' Company Limited advertised the arrival of a variety of steam-, horse- and hand-powered threshing machines. The Company was prepared 'for the convenience of Colonists, to receive Colonial Produce, sell it to the best advantage, and transmit the proceeds in goods of any description, or in cash, as may be desired'.¹¹⁶ By the 1890s, the agricultural implements firm of Ryan, Roods and Co. could claim that it found 'a ready sale' for self-binders and other agricultural machinery.¹¹⁷

Given the difficulties experienced by farmers in the 1840s (and given the low level of technological development in England itself) it is not surprising to find little evidence of mechanization in this decade. But there is evidence of significant levels of mechanization on the part of farmers after the relatively more prosperous decade of the 1850s. As early as 1850, one Jacob Naude, 'an enterprising young farmer' of the Worcester district, succeeded in making his own reaping machine.¹¹⁸ By 1858, the Civil Commissioner of Paarl could claim that the 'introduction of foreign machinery, and the establishment of a branch agricultural and horticultural society have effected an encouraging improvement in agriculture'. In Malmesbury district the reaping-machine and cradle-scythe had been introduced and 60 threshing machines were to be found in the district in that year. As far afield as Namaqualand a threshing and reaping machine had been introduced 'with success'.¹¹⁹ By 1860, reaping, threshing, and other machines had been introduced in Paarl 'to an extent not known before'.¹²⁰

These reports are verified by inventories of individual farms. Investing in machinery could involve a considerable outlay of capital. Weybrand Thuynsma's threshing machine was in 1863 valued at £120, accounting for fully 16.2 per cent of all his moveable property.¹²¹ Thomas Tennant Heatlie, by 1865 clearly one of the more progressive farmers in the Worcester district, owned a threshing machine valued at £100.¹²² A threshing and reaping machine were amongst the goods which Johanna Pienaar mortgaged in 1885 in securing a loan of £700.¹²³ In 1891, a Tygerberg farmer, Johannes Uys, purchased four threshing machines and a straw binder for £600 from the firm of Marsh and Sons.¹²⁴

¹¹⁵ *GG*, 11 Oct. 1839.

¹¹⁶ *ZA*, 1 Jan. 1863.

¹¹⁷ G39-1893, Minutes of Labour Commission.

¹¹⁸ *ZA*, 12 Dec. 1850.

¹¹⁹ Blue Book, 1858, Reports by Civil Commissioners on Improvements in Agriculture and Manufactures.

¹²⁰ Blue Books, 1860, Observations by Civil Commissioners on Improvements in Agriculture and Manufactures.

¹²¹ CA MOIB 2/988, no. 201, Liquidation and Distribution Account in Insolvent Estate of Weybrand Elias Thuynsma, 12 Sept. 1863.

¹²² CA MOIB 2/1059, no. 77, Liquidation and Distribution Account in Insolvent Estate of Thomas Tennant Heatlie, 13 March 1865.

¹²³ CA DOC 4/1/163, Mortgage Bond no. 130, 14 Oct. 1885.

¹²⁴ CA DOC 4/1/291, Mortgage Bond no. 2696, 14 Nov. 1891.

The adoption of mechanized implements was, of course, not linear or uniform. The lack of markets for wheat in the remote district of Clanwilliam meant that by 1859 agriculture there ‘had not advanced a step’.¹²⁵ By 1864, there were still ‘no signs of progress...no efforts have been made for improvements in agriculture, or for the introduction of agricultural implements, to reduce the price of labour, so much complained of by the farmers’.¹²⁶ By 1861, Worcester district, ‘excepting two or three English gentlemen engaged in farming’, saw ‘very little improvement’ regarding the introduction of agricultural machinery.¹²⁷ There are clear indications that there was a slackening off of mechanization in the depression years of the mid-1860s. ‘No particular improvement’ had taken place in Malmesbury district in the year 1864.¹²⁸ The failure to mechanize in these years was ‘not to be ascribed to any apathy or indifference on the part of the farmers, but generally to the failure of their crops of grain’.¹²⁹ The *Zuid Afrikaan* recognized that:

to husband time and labour you must substitute machinery for manual operations and, in the first instance, import with machinery the skill to use it in a profitable manner. You must therefore start with a considerable expense, and that is what few farmers, in their present depressed circumstances, can afford without having recourse to loans.¹³⁰

But the diamond discoveries at Kimberley and the labour shortage which followed reversed the trend. In 1870, a few Malmesbury farmers put threshing machines to use and the ‘want of reaping machines has been seriously felt...owing to the unusual scarcity of labour at the season it was most required’.¹³¹ In 1871, ‘a few’ farmers in Stellenbosch district introduced the use of threshing machines ‘which seems to answer their object, and thus supply the deficiency of manual labour’.¹³² A steam-threshing machine was introduced in Malmesbury district in 1872.¹³³ Two decades later a Bredasdorp farmer claimed that in his district ‘everyone...uses the “steam thresher”’.¹³⁴

Of course, not every farm acquired mechanized implements. In 1845, for example, ploughs were the most advanced implements to be found on *Middelburg*, a farm in the Malmesbury district.¹³⁵ By 1878, the implements on the farm included merely ploughs and harrows valued at £30.¹³⁶ But even a few machines in a district could make a difference. Gideon Paulus, who

¹²⁵ Blue Books, 1859, Report of Civil Commissioner for the district of Clanwilliam.

¹²⁶ Blue Books, 1864, Report of Civil Commissioner for the district of Clanwilliam.

¹²⁷ Blue Books, 1861, Observations by Civil Commissioners on Improvements in Agriculture and Manufactures.

¹²⁸ Blue Books, 1864, Report of Civil Commissioner for Malmesbury.

¹²⁹ Blue Books, 1865, Report of the Civil Commissioner of Worcester.

¹³⁰ *ZA*, 2 Feb. 1863.

¹³¹ Blue Books, 1870, Report of the Civil Commissioner of Malmesbury.

¹³² Blue Books, 1871, Report of Civil Commissioner, Stellenbosch.

¹³³ Blue Books, 1872, Report of the Civil Commissioner of Malmesbury.

¹³⁴ G39-1893, Minutes of Labour Commission.

¹³⁵ CA MOIB 2/620, no. 10, Liquidation and Distribution Account in Insolvent Estate of Pieter Hendrik Woutersen Neethling, 28 Feb. 1845.

¹³⁶ CA MOIB 2/1473, no. 250, Liquidation and Distribution Account in Insolvent Estate of Gideon Paulus, 29 Aug. 1878.

took transfer of *Middelburg* in 1876, hired a threshing machine from A. M. Laubscher for £20.¹³⁷ A class of itinerants emerged who travelled through the countryside to thresh cereals by machine. One commentator noted in 1875 how the “tramp floor”, where the grain used to be trodden out by horses, is giving place to the steam-threshing machine, which itinerates about the districts, doing all the thrashing at the rate of 1s. a muid, the farmer supplying fuel and labour’.¹³⁸ Others pooled resources to buy mechanized implements. In 1887, for example, Johannes Lambrechts of Malmesbury owned shares in a threshing machine to the value of £6.¹³⁹ By 1886, one farmer owned three reaping machines.¹⁴⁰ By 1898, ‘the latest time saving reaping machines’ had come into ‘almost universal use’ in the district.¹⁴¹

Thus, by the end of the century, the primary wheat-growing district of Malmesbury showed a remarkable degree of mechanization. This outline of the historical development is confirmed by an examination of the records of individual farms. In 1838, the year of emancipation, no farming implements were listed amongst the assets of Nicolaas van Wielligh, owner of *Leeuwedans*, and one of the wealthiest farmers in the Malmesbury district as noted above.¹⁴² In 1851, his principal implements included only nine ploughs and three harrows. By 1885, the implements on the farm included a cutting machine valued at £15, 15 scythes, a winnowing machine, a reaping machine and a variety of different types of ploughs.¹⁴³

It is clear that agricultural machines allowed farmers to reduce their labour needs. One Malmesbury farmer estimated that a reaper saved the labour of five men per day and a self-binder about twenty. His father, he claimed, ‘had thirty [labourers], I have to do with eight, along with my machines’.¹⁴⁴

Nevertheless, this picture of mechanization was different for wine farmers. Indeed, one late nineteenth-century commentator who lamented the backwardness of Cape agriculture, emphasised that he was ‘speaking... of wine farmers, *not* the corn farmers’.¹⁴⁵ It was a ‘well-known fact’, noted another, ‘that farmers, and *particularly wine farmers*, adhere to their old habits and customs’.¹⁴⁶ But on a world scale there was in fact very little mechanization of wine production. In a recent world-wide study of wine farming it was

¹³⁷ CA MOIB 2/1473, no. 250, Liquidation and Distribution Account in Insolvent Estate of Gideon Paulus, 29 Aug. 1878.

¹³⁸ John Noble, *Descriptive Handbook of the Cape Colony: Its Conditions and Resources* (Cape Town and London, 1875), 277.

¹³⁹ CA MOIB 2/1955, no. 196, Liquidation and Distribution Account in Insolvent Estate of Johannes Jacobus Lambrechts, 14 March 1887.

¹⁴⁰ CA MOIB 2/1936, no. 863, Liquidation and Distribution Account in Insolvent Estate of Stephanus Sebastiaan Walters, 22 Dec. 1886.

¹⁴¹ Standard Bank Archives, Johannesburg (hereafter SB), Insp 1/1/108, Malmesbury, 19 Oct. 1898.

¹⁴² CA MOIB 2/761, no. 134, Liquidation and Distribution Account in Insolvent Estate of Nicolaas van Wielligh, 15 Dec. 1851.

¹⁴³ CA MOIB 2/1800, no. 270, Liquidation and Distribution Account in Insolvent Estate of Marthiam Johannes de Kock, 13 Apr. 1885.

¹⁴⁴ G39-1893, Minutes of Labour Commission, Evidence of Frans Schroeder.

¹⁴⁵ C2-1882, Select Committee Report on the Desirability of the appointment of a Minister of Agriculture, Evidence of Prof. Hahn, emphasis added.

¹⁴⁶ G39-1886, Carl von Babo, Report on the Viticulture of the Colony, emphasis added.

found that 'Methods of viticulture and vinification have until recently remained remarkably unchanged over the centuries, and indeed it is still possible in parts of Portugal, Greece and Italy to find wine made in much the same way as it must have been almost 2,000 years ago'.¹⁴⁷ Even in France, wine production remained labour-intensive; harvesting machines were only introduced there in the 1970s.¹⁴⁸

The picture of Cape agriculture as being universally backward throughout the nineteenth century is unacceptable. To be sure, this was the case for wine farming. Furthermore, little mechanization could have taken place in the immediate post-emancipation decade. But it is evident that in the primary wheat producing districts, mechanization commenced as early as the 1850s, slackened off in the 1860s and took off again in the 1870s. By the 1890s, such farms were mechanized to a degree which allowed farmers both to increase their acreages and to cut down on their labour costs. And the impetus to mechanize would have been unimaginable without the mobility that emancipation allowed the former slaves.

PROBLEMS OF ACCUMULATION

The ability to mechanize, though, was no indication of successful farming or capital accumulation. Indeed, much of the evidence for the mechanization of wheat farms was obtained from the inventories of *insolvent* estates. Insolvency was a routine occurrence in the histories of individual farms and landholding was fundamentally unstable. This can best be illuminated by reference to a case study of a specific veldcornetcy.¹⁴⁹ Mosselbanks Rivier, wedged between Koeberg and Paarl in the Malmesbury district, was by virtue of its proximity to Cape Town a highly commercialised wheat-growing area. The ward was one of the wealthiest in the colony, the average farm valued at £1,002 in 1845.¹⁵⁰ Most of the 14 farms in the ward fell within the range of 1,000–2,000 *morgen*.¹⁵¹

Table 1 is a compilation of property transfers (by sale, not inheritance) for 12 farms in the ward, covering the period from as early as 1818 to 1926.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁷ Tim Unwin, *Wine and Vine: An Historical Geography of Viticulture and the Wine Trade* (London and New York, 1991), 11.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 345.

¹⁴⁹ Robert Ross has recently suggested that the 'grid that has to be used to understand land ownership in the Cape Colony cannot be on the scale of the region or even of the district, but at the level of the individual veldcornetcy': *Beyond the pale: Essays on the History of Colonial South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1994), 63. Thus my focus here on a single fieldcornetcy is an endorsement of that view, but also represents a realistic approach to come to terms with the sheer weight of statistical material that a highly active and complex land market generated.

¹⁵⁰ CA CRB 129.

¹⁵¹ This ward is shown elsewhere to have consisted of 12 farming properties, but this is accounted for by the fact that four farms were in 1845 respectively counted as two properties by virtue of having had the same owners. I have counted these as single properties because the four farms subsequently assumed individual identities: Ross, *Beyond the Pale*, 62.

¹⁵² I have in each case collected deeds from the last deed passed before Emancipation (1 Dec. 1838) to the first deed of the twentieth century, apart from a few cases where I considered a last deed to be sufficiently close to the end of the nineteenth century. I have counted a transfer as one of hereditary settlement in those cases where the property was transferred to a person sharing the same surname, even in those cases where the property

Table 1. *Frequency of transfer of farms in the veldcornetcy of Mosselbanks Rivier. Source: DO.*

Farm	Period covered	No. of years	No. of times transferred by sale
Berg en Dal	1837-1911	74	7.00
Blaauwe Blomskloof	1830-1904	74	3.00
Drooge Vallei	1820-1898	78	4.00
Hoornbosch	1838-1906	68	10.00
Kalbaskraal	1821-1897	76	4.00
Leeuwedans	1818-1901	83	6.00
Leeuwekuil	1830-1896	66	3.00
Middelburg	1833-1909	76	12.00
Oliphantsfontein	1838-1897	59	3.00
Spenglaar's Drift	1831-1914	83	4.00
Uitkyk	1837-1903	66	4.00
Wolvedans	1838-1926	88	5.00
Averages		74	5.00

For an average period of about 74 years each farm changed hands as a result of sale an average of 5.42 times, or once every 13.70 years.¹⁵³ Most striking about transfers in this ward was the frequency with which they were a direct result of insolvency. Virtually every farm and its various subdivisions faced insolvency at some point, some having occurred even before emancipation,

was transferred before the death of the transferor. I have counted a transfer as one of sale in those cases where property was transferred to a person not obviously related to the transferor. I am aware that marriage alliances may have served to weld families together, but until considerable genealogical research is done this will remain obscure. For the central role that women played in preserving landed wealth in the eighteenth century, see Martin Hall, 'The secret lives of houses: women and gables in the eighteenth-century Cape', *Social Dynamics*, 20 (1994), 1-48. In this instance I am merely trying to point to the basic economic instability of landholding. I have, despite considerable effort, been unable to locate in the Cape Town Deeds Office the deeds for *Remhoogte* and *Klipheuwel*, the two farms not represented in the table. The farms shown here almost all reduced in size in the course of the century as small parcels were sold off, but in every case a chief core of the holding remained. The extreme subdivision of land was not primarily a Cape phenomenon: Ross, *Beyond the Pale*, 142. For the sake of brevity I shall list only the first deed of each farm: DO, Transfer Deed no. 19, 5 Sept. 1837; Transfer Deed no. 201, 10 Dec. 1830; Transfer Deed no. 34, 17 March 1820; Transfer Deed no. 68, 8 May 1838; Transfer Deed no. 187, 23 Nov. 1821; Transfer Deed no. 188, 24 Jul. 1818; Transfer Deed no. 11, 9 Jul. 1830; Transfer Deed no. 73, 7 May 1833; Transfer Deed no. 117, 13 March 1838; Transfer Deed no. 1, 4 Oct. 1831; Transfer Deed no. 141, 30 Jun. 1837; Transfer Deed no. 184, 29 Jun. 1838.

¹⁵³ For a comparative perspective, see Eric van Young, *Hacienda and Market in Eighteenth Century Mexico: The Rural Economy of the Guadalajara Region, 1675-1820* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1981), 114-38. Eighteenth-century Mexican *haciendas* showed far less stability of ownership than first thought: in the region of Guadalajara landed estates changed hands on average once every twenty-five years (115-7).

Table 2. *Insolvent farms, Mosselbanks Rivier, 1828–1909.*

Farm	Insolvency
Berg en Dal	—
Blaauwe Blomskloof	Aug. 1828; Nov. 1866
Drooge Vallei	May 1839
Hoornbosch	Jan. 1885; May 1894
Kalbaskraal	Oct. 1864; May 1868
Leeuwedans	Apr. 1851; Dec. 1887
Leeuwekuil	—
Middelburg	Dec. 1844; May 1870; Feb. 1877; Oct. 1884; May 1909
Oliphantsfontein	Sep. 1833; Mar. 1838; Feb. 1842
Spenglaar's Drift	Nov. 1866
Uitkyk	Aug. 1841; Aug. 1864
Wolwedans	Oct. 1835; Mar. 1870

as Table 2 demonstrated.¹⁵⁴ *Middelburg*, as the table shows, was sold by its insolvent owners in 1844, 1870, 1877, 1884 and 1909.¹⁵⁵ *Leeuwedans* faced insolvency in 1851 and 1887.¹⁵⁶ Only two of the farms in the sample show no insolvency, but these showed frequent transfers nevertheless.

And yet, despite the frequency with which land changed hands, there is also a discernible theme of relative stability. Daniel du Toit was able to retain possession of *Hoornbosch* from 1873 until his death in about 1897, despite being declared insolvent on two occasions in these years.¹⁵⁷ Hendrik du Plessis retained possession of *Middelburg* from 1851 to 1876 despite insolvency in 1864.¹⁵⁸ Albertus van Niekerk Piekard retained possession of his farm for fully 32 years. In 1854, he purchased *Wolwedans* jointly with one Johan van Aarde.¹⁵⁹ Three years later Piekard became the sole proprietor of the farm by purchasing Van Aarde's half-share.¹⁶⁰ Piekard was declared insolvent in 1868.¹⁶¹ Although the records of the liquidation of this insolvent estate show that *Wolwedans* was purchased by the well-known Jan Hendrik

¹⁵⁴ The dates refer to the transfer of the insolvent property, actual insolvency typically having occurred about a year earlier: CA MOIB 2/505, no. 21, Liquidation and Distribution Account in Insolvent Estate of William Proctor, 10 May 1839; DO, Transfer Deed no. 190, 21 Jan. 1885; Transfer Deed no. 2457, 15 May 1894; Transfer Deed no. 416, 28 Oct. 1864; Transfer Deed no. 54, 6 May 1868; Transfer Deed no. 138, 23 April 1851; Transfer Deed no. 326, 29 Dec. 1887; Transfer Deed no. 25, 5 Dec. 1844; Transfer Deed no. 148, 14 May 1870; Transfer Deed no. 156, 10 Feb. 1877; Transfer Deed no. 456, 29 Oct. 1884; Transfer Deed no. 832, 22 May 1909; Transfer Deed no. 164, 6 Sept. 1833; Transfer Deed no. 117, 13 March 1838; Transfer Deed no. 146, 18 Feb. 1842; Transfer Deed no. 40, 3 Nov. 1866; Transfer Deed no. 55, 12 Aug. 1828; Transfer Deed no. 89, 19 Aug. 1841; Transfer Deed no. 40, 3 Aug. 1864; Transfer Deed no. 72, 16 Oct. 1835; Transfer Deed no. 313, 19 March 1870.

¹⁵⁵ DO, Transfer Deed no. 25, 5 Dec. 1844; Transfer Deed no. 148, 14 May 1870; Transfer Deed no. 156, 10 Feb. 1877; Transfer Deed no. 456, 29 Oct. 1884.

¹⁵⁶ DO, Transfer Deed no. 138, 23 April 1851; Transfer Deed no. 326, 29 Dec. 1887.

¹⁵⁷ DO, Transfer Deed no. 90, 21 Jan. 1885; Transfer Deed no. 2457, 15 May 1894.

¹⁵⁸ GG, 1 April 1864; DO, Transfer Deed no. 148, 14 May 1870; Transfer Deed no. 76, 4 May 1876.

¹⁵⁹ DO, Transfer Deed no. 60, 4 Oct. 1854.

¹⁶⁰ DO, Transfer Deed no. 14, 1 Oct. 1857.

¹⁶¹ GG, 23 Feb. 1868.

Table 3. *Mortgage history of Middelburg, Mosselbanks Rivier, 1833–1909.*
Middelburg – Insolvent, 1844, 1870, 1877, 1884, 1909.

Date of Transfer	Date of Bond	Price in £	Mortgage in £	Percentage of mortgage relative to price
07/05/1833	07/05/1833	950	625	65.79
01/06/1841	01/06/1841	875	625	71.43
	01/06/1841	875	325	37.14
	<i>Total</i>		950	108.57
05/12/1844	05/12/1844	1075	250	23.26
	05/12/1844	1075	750	69.77
	<i>Total</i>		1000	93.02
25/10/1851	25/10/1851	950	750	78.95
	25/10/1851	950	200	21.05
	<i>Total</i>		950	100.00
14/05/1850	14/05/1870	750	750	100.00
04/05/1876	04/05/1876	1800	1928	107.11
10/02/1877		1500	0	0.00
07/07/1880	07/07/1880	1550	1400	90.32
	07/07/1880	1550	150	9.68
	<i>Total</i>			100.00
29/10/1884		1400	0	0.00
18/05/1889	18/05/1889	1900	1000	52.63
16/01/1891	16/01/1891	1400	1300	92.86
22/05/1909	22/05/1909	3400	2000	58.82

Hofmeyr, the chief mortgage creditor in the estate, the transfer records show that Piekard retained title of the property and only disposed of it in 1886.¹⁶² It is likely that Piekard stayed on as tenant until he was able to purchase the farm out of the insolvent estate.

Purchased from the insolvent estate of J. W. van Reenen in 1842, *Oliphantsfontein* remained in the hands of the Gird family into the twentieth century.¹⁶³ The Girds, though, are an interesting case. In the local press Henry Hobart Gird vigorously defended the interests of the wheat farmers under the name of ‘an English farmer’.¹⁶⁴ His success at farming may be attributed to the fact that he combined his farming activities with the practice of medicine. His successor, Henry William, had £918 deposited in the Standard Bank at the time of his death in 1893 and his net assets amounted to an astonishing figure of £6,149.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² CA MOIB 2/1237, Liquidation and Distribution Account in Insolvent Estate of A. B. van Niekerk, 3 Jun. 1869; DO, Transfer Deed no. 313, 19 March 1870; Transfer Deed no. 444, 31 March 1886.

¹⁶³ DO, Malmesbury Farm Registers, 12, folios 933/1–934/1; CA MOIB 1/59, Records in Insolvent Estate of J. W. van Reenen, 23 Feb. 1841.

¹⁶⁴ *ZA*, 8 April 1858; 26 April 1858; 20 Feb. 1860; 21 Jun. 1860; 28 Jun. 1860.

¹⁶⁵ CA MOOC 13/1/655, no. 13, Liquidation and Distribution Account in Deceased Estate of Henry William Gird, 2 Jun. 1893.

Table 4. *Mortgage history of Berg en Dal, Mosselbanks Rivier, 1837–1911. Berg en Dal – no insolvencies.*

Date of Transfer	Date of Bond	Price in £	Mortgage in £	Percentage of mortgage relative to price
05/09/1837	05/09/1837	750	500	66.67
	05/09/1837	750	250	33.33
	Total		750	100.00
06/06/1856	06/06/1856	1952	1325	67.88
	06/06/1856	1952	700	35.86
	Total		2025	103.74
21/01/1864	21/01/1864	1450	800	55.17
19/03/1867	19/03/1867	975	800	82.05
	19/03/1867	975	175	17.95
	Total		975	100.00
19/04/1871	19/03/1871	525	250	47.62
	19/03/1871	525	175	33.33
	Total		425	80.95
18/06/1873	18/06/1873	650	400	61.54
	18/06/1873	650	250	38.46
	Total		650	100.00
04/06/1896	04/06/1896	1325	900	67.92
	04/06/1896	1325	400	30.19
	Total		1300	98.11
18/05/1911	18/05/1911	1425	1425	100.00

The peculiar structure of the mortgage market helps to explain the apparent contradiction of stability and instability in landownership. In the first instance, most farms were heavily mortgaged. High levels of mortgage indebtedness would naturally lead to bankruptcy in times of crisis. But, as noted earlier, the mortgage market was hardly an impersonal one. Mortgage holders were kin and neighbours and this represented an obvious strategy for keeping landed property within families and clearly defined communities.

It was very common, throughout the century, for purchasers of farms, at the time of purchase, to mortgage their properties for 100 per cent (and more) of its value, as the mortgage histories of just two farms show (see Tables 3 and 4). A crisis in any one year would thus precipitate insolvency. The fragility of this system became clear in the depression of the mid-1860s. The *Zuid Afrikaan* warned in 1863:

When proprietors become borrowers for the full value of their property, they are no proprietors at all, and the first adverse contingency places them at the mercy of their creditors. Let the Colony as a whole, and every colonist individually, beware of wading beyond their depth into the quicksands of borrowed capital.¹⁶⁶

To a very large extent, however, such a mortgage market can be regarded as fictive. As noted earlier, farmers largely obtained credit, not from professional lending institutions, but from individuals known to them per-

¹⁶⁶ *ZA*, 23 Feb. 1863.

sonally. To be sure, a small group of professional money-lenders existed in the colony. One resident of Cape Town, Jonas van der Poel, was reputed to be the wealthiest man in the colony when he died in 1857.¹⁶⁷ But his wealth consisted for the most part of cash and outstanding mortgage bonds – in excess of 400 – not landed property.¹⁶⁸ It was the private nature of money-lending that made it difficult for outside institutions to penetrate the countryside. In 1864, after only one year in operation, lack of custom forced the Malmesbury branch of the Standard Bank to close its doors. Another branch was started only in 1878.¹⁶⁹ As late as 1891, the inspector of the Caledon branch of the bank lamented the fact that ‘there is a great deal of private money lending’.¹⁷⁰ By 1895, mortgage bonds of up to £100,000 were held locally in the district.¹⁷¹

It was common for sellers of properties to hold at least a part of the mortgage. *Middelburg* will again serve as an example. When Pieter Neethling acquired the farm for £875 in 1841, he obtained £325 on mortgage credit from the estate of his deceased father while the remainder was supplied by the widow Margaretha Meyer.¹⁷² The subsequent owner of the farm, Jan Michiel Louw, obtained £250 from one Michiel Joseph Louw, no doubt one of his close relations, and the remainder from one Gerhardus Nicolaas Mechau.¹⁷³ Mechau continued to mortgage the following owner, Hendrik du Plessis, while Jan Michiel Louw provided £200.¹⁷⁴ Thus Hendrik Du Plessis was able to acquire *Middelburg* without putting up any capital of his own. In 1857 a government commission explained how such a situation had come to be:

A sort of habit has arisen in the colony, of persons buying landed property who have no money to pay for it. If they were to go to the legitimate money-lenders to borrow money, wherewith to pay the price of their purchase, they would not obtain more, upon a special mortgage of the property than two thirds of its value; but, as they have no money of their own to pay the other one third, this course is evidently out of the question. What is done, therefore, is either to go to a money-lender, who will lend the whole of the price upon a special mortgage of the property...or to bargain with the seller that, instead of getting any money, he shall take a mortgage over the property sold for the whole price.¹⁷⁵

It was above all else the diffused, private and community-based nature of mortgage credit that allowed farmers to negotiate the terms of their insolvency and militated against the concentration of land in the hands of money-lenders. In this regard, another government report of 1857 clearly

¹⁶⁷ *Cape Argus*, 16 Dec. 1857.

¹⁶⁸ CA MOOC 13/1/177, Liquidation and Distribution Account in Deceased Estate of Jonas van der Poel, 31 Jan. 1858.

¹⁶⁹ Blue Books, Civil Commissioner's Annual Report, Malmesbury, 1864; Report of Directors of Standard Bank, 16 Aug. 1878, in A. Mabin and B. Conradie (eds.), *The Confidence of the Whole Country* (Johannesburg, 1987), 69–70.

¹⁷⁰ SB 1/1/23, Insp, Caledon, 4 Dec. 1891.

¹⁷¹ SB 1/1/23, Insp, Caledon, 31 Oct. 1895.

¹⁷² DO, Mortgage Bond no. 20, 1 Jun. 1841; Mortgage Bond no. 21, 1 Jun. 1841.

¹⁷³ DO, Mortgage Bond no. 27, 5 Dec. 1844; Mortgage Bond no. 26, 5 Dec. 1844.

¹⁷⁴ DO, Mortgage Bond no. 211, 25 Oct. 1851; Mortgage Bond no. 212, Oct. 1851.

¹⁷⁵ G20-57, Report of Commissioners Relative to the Expediency of Abolishing the Existing System of Preferent Credit by Means of General Bonds, April 1857.

acknowledged the extent to which considerations of community permeated social and economic relations of residents in the countryside:

There seems to us to be too great laxity on the subject of debtor and creditor – persons too easily become insolvent, and too easily escape from that position ... the chief vice in the administration of insolvent estates has arisen from the mode in which trustees, elected by the creditors, have discharged the duties of their office, and that this has arisen greatly from the influences which have been brought to bear upon persons in that capacity, who are dependent for their success in life on the opinions entertained of them by the members of so small a *community* as can be found within any given district of the Colony – with whom, therefore, they are necessarily constantly coming in contact in matters of business, not connected with the insolvent estates entrusted to them.¹⁷⁶

The eighteenth-century ‘moral community’, in which the extension of credit of this nature amounted to an extension of patronage, had survived.¹⁷⁷

It is in this context that the fierce debates which took place between farmers and merchants in the 1850s and 1860s on the question of ‘free trade in money’ should be understood. For, by clamouring for ‘free trade in money’, the colony’s merchants mounted a head-on assault on the moral rules of this community. As early as November 1839 the ‘usury question’ was raised in Cape Town’s newspapers, as merchants sought to lift the Dutch colonial custom of not charging more than six per cent annual interest on mortgage bonds.¹⁷⁸ Eventually, in 1860, the Cape Supreme Court ruled that interest rates could rise above six per cent.¹⁷⁹ This did not end the debate. In a petition to the House of Assembly, a number of Stellenbosch wine farmers claimed that ‘free trade in money’ was the tool of ‘unjust extortioners, usurers, and avaricious capitalists’ who sought to ‘increase in an ungodly way their capitals, by demanding an exorbitant interest to the ruin of hundreds of struggling and industrious families, and to the great detriment of agricultural interests’.¹⁸⁰ ‘Free trade in money’, the farmers argued, ‘was introduced with no other object than to blot out and destroy the so hated Dutch class, in order to make room for strangers’.¹⁸¹ In addition to threatening the economic well-being of the landowners, ‘free trade in money’ was also an affront to their moral sensibilities. Its proponents were seen as responsible for a breakdown of ‘custom ... sanctioned by a duration of nearly two centuries, of not taking more than six per cent on all mortgages and all monetary transactions’.¹⁸²

For the greater part of the century, farmers were able to resist and obtained money from other farmers. But, slowly, outsiders made an impact. The mortgage history of David J. du Plessis, who had acquired *Middelburg* in 1880, provides a variation on the previous history of the farm.¹⁸³ The farm

¹⁷⁶ G20-1857, Two Reports for Inquiring into the Present State of the Law Relative to the Collection, Administration and Distribution of Insolvent Estates, emphasis added.

¹⁷⁷ For the importance of this concept and its implications for social action, see Dooling, *Law and Community*, esp. 6–28.

¹⁷⁸ J. L. Meltzer, ‘The growth of Cape Town commerce and the role of John Fairbairn’s *Advertiser* (1835–1859)’ (M.A. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1989), 104.

¹⁷⁹ CA CSC, 2/1/1/95, John Dyason vs John Ruthven, 14 Feb. 1860, no. 16.

¹⁸⁰ A9-1862, Petition from Certain Landowners and Inhabitants of the District of Stellenbosch, 14 May 1862.

¹⁸¹ ZA, 16 July 1863.

¹⁸² A9-1862, Petition, 14 May 1862. ¹⁸³ DO, Transfer Deed no. 176, 7 Jul. 1880.

was again mortgaged for its full purchase value of £1,550. But £1,400 was now supplied by a private institution, the Paarl Bank, at an annual interest rate of seven per cent, higher than the more common one of six per cent.¹⁸⁴ At the same time, the remainder of the purchasing price of the farm, £150, was provided on mortgage, at 6 per cent annual interest, by the previous owner of the farm.¹⁸⁵ Three years after du Plessis took transfer of the farm, he passed a bond to the value of £857 at an annual rate of 7 per cent, in favour of grain millers and merchants, Daniel Mills and Sons, not to raise money for the purchase of property, but to secure 'money lent and advanced for goods sold and delivered'.¹⁸⁶ David du Plessis faced insolvency the following year. *Middelburg* passed into the hands of the merchant firm of Daniel Mills and Sons.¹⁸⁷ This was also the first time that the farm passed into the hands of a mortgage holder.

Others also succumbed to the merchant firm of Daniel Mills and Sons. In 1876, the year after which Marthiam De Kock took transfer of *Leeuwedans*, he passed a bond to the value of £864 in favour of the firm. The bond carried particularly onerous terms. Firstly, interest was charged at an annual rate of nine per cent. But, more importantly, De Kock was 'obliged to deliver to ... Daniel Mills ... in the wheat season such quantities of wheat as he may desire at the then market rates for the amount of the proceeds of which ... Daniel Mills shall give [De Kock] credit in diminution of [the] Bond'.¹⁸⁸

The bonds passed in favour of Daniel Mills were clearly of a different kind and are representative of a new era in the Colony's history of mortgage credit. They were similar to liens passed on cotton crops in the post-emancipation United States, which bound farmers inescapably to merchants. The merchant was also merchant-creditor, effectively giving the farmer only one outlet for the sale of his crop. This was a clearly antagonistic relationship. But Daniel Mills showed little desire to acquire landed property.¹⁸⁹ De Kock retained title to the farm until his death in about 1900.¹⁹⁰ Where merchants had an interest in gaining title to the farmers' land, though, they were able to do so. In the 1880s, virtually every farm in the ward of St Helena Bay fell into the hands of the merchant firm of the brothers Stephan by way of mortgage indebtedness.¹⁹¹

The farmers' cause against the lifting of interest rates above six per cent, as already mentioned, was articulated by H. H. Gird, owner of *Oliphantsfontein* in the veldcornetcy of Mosselbanks Rivier.¹⁹² Whatever H. H. Gird's opinion on 'usury', his heir, Henry William Gird, loaned money on mortgage to a neighbouring farmer on at least two occasions (one in 1882 and

¹⁸⁴ DO, Mortgage Bond no. 177, 7 Jul. 1880.

¹⁸⁵ DO, Mortgage Bond no. 178, 7 Jul. 1880.

¹⁸⁶ CA MOIB 2/1744, no. 808, Liquidation and Distribution Account in Insolvent Estate of David Johannes du Plessis. ¹⁸⁷ DO, Transfer Deed no. 456, 29 Oct. 1884.

¹⁸⁸ CA MOIB 2/1800, no. 270, Liquidation and Distribution Account in the Insolvent Estate of Marthiam Johannes de Kock, 13 April 1885.

¹⁸⁹ Mills, whose father had come to the Cape as one of the 1820 settlers, started business as a grain merchant in 1845. He soon turned his attention to milling and the firm went on to become one of the largest milling concerns in the Colony: *Dictionary of South African Biography* (Durban, 1981), IV, 364–5.

¹⁹⁰ DO, Transfer Deed no. 4117, 10 Jun. 1901.

¹⁹¹ Eric Rosenthal, *The Stephan Saga* (unpublished manuscript, n.d.).

¹⁹² ZA, 21 Jun. 1860; 28 Jun. 1860.

another in 1885) at the rate of seven per cent.¹⁹³ Clearly, the rules of commerce now triumphed over those of community.

Commercial farming in the nineteenth century was thus an inherently insecure occupation. David du Plessis, since 1880 owner of the particularly unfortunate *Middelburg*, which had seen four insolvencies between 1844 and 1884 and also landed in the hands of Daniel Mills, declared quite simply that ‘farming did not pay’.¹⁹⁴ Certainly, a core of wealthy slaveholding families survived to the end of the century, but they were only able to do so by combining farming with other entrepreneurial pursuits and by coming to terms with the dominant role that merchants had come to occupy in the political economy of the nineteenth century Cape. By 1882, the assets of Cornelis Grundlingh, a wheat farmer and owner of *Weltevreden* in the Malmesbury district, included five shares in the Western Province Bank (valued at £145) and 20 shares in the Paarl Fire Assurance Company (valued at £120).¹⁹⁵ As early as 1864, the Colonial Botanist could write that:

Instances... have been given to me of farmers and landholders having attained to estimated fortunes of colossal extent; but upon inquiry I have generally found that the fortune reached its ultimate extent, not by the rearing of flocks and herds, but by the successful speculations in the purchase of land, or in the purchase of farm produce from others.¹⁹⁶

CONCLUSION

Two years before the Nationalist government came to power in South Africa, 87-year-old Fredrik Christoffel Rust sat down to write his last will and testament. Apart from *Middelkraal*, his farm situated in the veldcornetcy of Zwartland, Malmesbury district, he could bequeath 100 shares of the *Suid Afrikaanse Nasionale Trust en Assuransie Maatskappy* (SANTAM).¹⁹⁷ *Volkskapitalisme* had indeed arrived.¹⁹⁸ But *Middelkraal*’s history shows just how tortuous that road had been. Just a decade after emancipation *Middelkraal* had passed into the hands of Johan Andries Heyse Wicht, parliamentarian, money-lender and slumlord of mid-nineteenth century Cape Town.¹⁹⁹ For fifteen years before Rust took possession of *Middelkraal*, it was farmed by Hendrik Gideon Greeff, not in his own right, but as the insolvent tenant of the merchant firm of the brothers Stephan.²⁰⁰ Capital accumulation, despite the concerted efforts of the former slaveowners to

¹⁹³ CA DOC 4/1/46, Mortgage Bond no. 286, 23 May 1882; DOC 4/1/137, Mortgage Bond no. 160, 21 Jan. 1885.

¹⁹⁴ MOIB 2/1744, no. 808, Liquidation and Distribution Account in the Insolvent Estate of David Johannes du Plessis.

¹⁹⁵ CA MOIB 2/1565, no. 21, Liquidation and Distribution Account in Insolvent Estate of Cornelis Ernestus Grundlingh, 1 Feb. 1882.

¹⁹⁶ G24-1865, Colonial Botanists to F. Tudhope, 16 Dec. 1864.

¹⁹⁷ DO, Transfer Deed no. 6423, 10 May 1950.

¹⁹⁸ For the connections between SANTAM and SANLAM and the crucial role that these institutions played in Cape agriculture in the early decades of the twentieth century, see Dan O’Meara, *Volkskapitalisme: Class, Capital and Ideology in the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1934–1948* (Cambridge, 1983), 98–101.

¹⁹⁹ DO, Transfer Deed no. 1583, 1 Nov. 1849; On Wicht see Ross, *Beyond the Pale*, 53.

²⁰⁰ DO, Transfer Deed no. 863, 18 April 1853; Transfer Deed no. 345, 21 Dec. 1883; Transfer Deed no. 2033, 18 March 1897.

modernize, unimaginable without emancipation, was neither linear, nor particularly lineal, nor self-generating.

Thus, the post-emancipation Western Cape did not go down the 'Prussian road', despite the tenacity of the class of former slaveowners. Agriculture was restructured as much from external forces – notably merchant capital – as from within.²⁰¹ What the Cape's merchants succeeded in doing, for the first time in the 1870s, was to apply new – rationally capitalist – rules to the circulation of land and wealth. Central to the agrarian question facing the post-emancipation Western Cape was the mobility of the freed slaves. In the history of settler agriculture of the Cape Colony, slave emancipation must surely stand as the fundamental watershed.

SUMMARY

This article examines the rural economy of the Western Cape in the wake of the emancipation of slaves. It argues, contrary to conventional wisdom, that the abolition of slavery in 1838 marked a radical break in the history of the Cape Colony. While the options of the freed slaves were severely circumscribed, emancipation bestowed upon them a level of mobility that slavery simply did not allow. Thus the freed slaves were able to negotiate the price of labour and conditions of work. Compensation money paid out by the British Crown provided relief to the former slaveowners, but this served merely to delay the worst effects of emancipation as far as the slaveowners were concerned. While most freed slaves probably continued to engage in agricultural labour for the former slaveowning class, they did so in a manner that severely strained their employers' margins of profitability.

These conditions prompted an almost immediate interest in mechanization. There is significant evidence to show that farmers mechanized wherever their means allowed. This was particularly true of wheat farmers. Wine farming, in line with wine farming elsewhere in the world, remained technologically backward.

Thus, for the greater part of the century, farming remained a highly unstable occupation and a great many former slaveowners came to experience routine insolvency. Yet, the former slaveowners displayed remarkable tenacity. This was because the farmers were heirs to a moral community in which the rules governing the circulation of land and wealth were defined in community and familial terms. Most important was the local nature of the mortgage market in which 'custom' prevented interest rates from floating above six per cent per annum. But the increasing importance of English-speaking merchants in the rural political economy – with their battle cry of 'free trade in money' – sealed the long-term decline of the Cape gentry.

²⁰¹ Helen Bradford has pointed to this basic fact for other regions of South Africa: Bradford, 'Highways, byways and culs-de-sac'.