

Chapter 3

Livestock, Identity and the Social Imagination in South Africa

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Regina Nelani cradles the soft, woolly body of a lamb in her fake-fur-sheathed arms (Figure 1). A tenant farmer who depends on her small flock of sheep for her



Figure 1. Regina Nelani.

Barkly East, Eastern Cape, 27 July 2010. C-print ©Daniel Naudé. Courtesy of Stevenson, Cape Town and Johannesburg.

livelihood, Regina gets up every few hours during the night to nurse this orphaned lamb – its mother killed by jackals – from a Black Label beer bottle fitted with a plastic teat.¹ An unknown light source pierces the dark interior of the hut like a Baroque painting, illuminating the plump body stretched across Regina's lap between her strong, anchoring hands. The pyramidal composition of the figures reads as a classical *pietà*, registering a complex set of emotions and associations that go beyond the animal as agricultural commodity.

Meanwhile, in the portrait *David Tieties with his three-day-old donkey*. Verneuk Pan, Northern Cape, 6 April 2009 (Figure 2), the shadows cast by the relentless Karoo



Figure 2. David Tieties with his three-day-old donkey.

Verneukpan, Northern Cape, 6 April 2009. C-print ©Daniel Naudé. Courtesy of Stevenson, Cape Town and Johannesburg.

1. Information supplied during an interview with the artist conducted on 27 July 2011.

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sun stretch diagonally across the picture plane, hinting at the desolate expanse of the flat salt pans of Verneukpan on either side.

From the feet of David Tieties, the melded shadow of man and animal seems to beckon their forms beyond the edges of the frame; urging them on, or marking where they have been. The sense of thick time and considerable distance cast by the shadows' visual push-and-pull invokes something of the character of David's life: David is one of the Great Karoo's so-called – and self-attributed – 'Karretjiemense' (donkey-cart people), itinerant sheep-shearers who travel between farms, sometimes setting up temporary shelters on verges (from materials carried on their carts), but often sleeping in their carts and wholly dependent for transport on their donkeys.

The Karoo – the semi-arid and arid heartland of South Africa – overlaps parts of today's Eastern, Western and Northern Cape provinces, as well as the Free State. It is prime land for extensive sheep, cattle, goat and game farms, but its seemingly immutable surfaces belie a deep history of conflict between settlers and indigenous peoples, as well as between settler groups (the Karoo featured prominently in the Anglo-Boer war). The Karretjiemense trace their ancestry to the Khoisan, who were largely dispossessed of land and livestock and coercively integrated into the agricultural labour force by the Boers – the descendants of early Dutch (as well as French Huguenot and German) settlers – in the eighteenth century. The peripatetic lifestyle of the Karretjiemense emerged as a self-determined response to commercial agricultural expansion from the mid-nineteenth century: carts provided mobility, a prop for roadside shelter and a locus for domestic life, with donkeys thus key to multiple social and economic purposes. The acquisition of a donkey by a young man would enable his independence, and the ability to set up a new family unit.² Sheep-shearing was generally a migrant, seasonal job, for which the Karretjiemense gained a small proportion of contracts alongside Africans from the Transkei and Ciskei, as well as semi-migrant whites in the Northern Cape (until the early twentieth century). However, due to increasingly concentrated land ownership from the mid-twentieth century, and the economic stagnation of many of the small Karoo towns and villages which once provided other forms of unskilled employment, there are now vastly more Karretjie people than sheep-shearing contracts.

The continued structural violence of colonialism and apartheid plays out on the *platteland* (the 'flat lands'), where large sheep farms are still white-owned and farm labourers have no share in the agricultural economy.³ Despite being

2. Sarah Adriana Steyn, 'Childhood: An Anthropological Study of Itinerancy and Domestic Fluidity amongst the Karretjie People of the South African Karoo' (unpublished dissertation, 2009), p. 87. Available: http://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/4065/MA.dissertation._steyn_a.pdf?sequence=1
3. This is particularly true of the Northern Cape, where most Karretjiemense live, as one third of the country's privately owned commercial farmland is situated in this province, which boasts only 2% of the population. See Cheryl Walker, 'Looking Forward, Looking Back: Beyond the Narrative of

'opportunistically "discovered" as citizens of the country by the main political parties in the run-up to the 1994 election', and occasionally drawn into projects of Khoisan identity politics and land claims, the Karretjiemense continue to be amongst the poorest, most disenfranchised communities in South Africa.⁴ They lack access to infrastructure, resources and secure employment, and are dispersed across immense swathes of land, making them largely invisible in terms of official poverty assessments and interventions (as is often the case with rural poverty). The portrait of David Tieties captures something of the vulnerability of his position: David's slight frame seems almost dwarfed by the gangly donkey foal he clasps; furry knees falling against trouser-clad, delicate hoofs dangling above cheap trainers. This knock-kneed donkey will, in about two months' time, be strong enough to pull David's cart and David's marginal identity will continue to be defined as that of a *karretjieman*.

Despite most South Africans now living in cities, an entanglement with animals is still the everyday experience of many, particularly in rural areas: from established (mostly white) commercial farmers to newly-settled claimants of land redistribution programmes, from subsistence hunters to rangeland herders.⁵ Many black city dwellers also retain links with homesteads and communal tenure arrangements in former 'homelands', some maintaining variations of traditional cultural practices such as *lobola* (the payment of cattle to a bride's family), or the ritual slaughter of livestock as intermediaries with the ancestors at significant moments of celebration, change or crisis.⁶ However, images documenting the diverse iterations of the agricultural economy in South African history – and its ongoing role in shaping social relations today – are scarce in a visual market dominated by the familiar trope of safari imaging, which constantly reasserts the country as quintessentially 'wild'. And yet 'taming' the wild – the progressive improvement and cultivation of natural resources – was central to the ideological project of settler colonialism.⁷

Young South African photographer Daniel Naudé, who captured these compelling portraits of Regina Nelani and David Tieties, has responded to this gap

Loss and Restoration in the History of Land', in M. Godby (ed.) *The Lie of the Land: Representations of the South African Landscape* (Cape Town: exhibition catalogue, 2010) pp. 12–27. p. 21.

4. Michael de Jongh, 'No Fixed Abode: The Poorest of the Poor and Elusive Identities in Rural South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 28/2 (2002): 441–460.
5. Based on statistics published on the Unicef website: http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/southafrica_statistics.html
6. See the discussion of the multiple and ongoing social and economic utility of cattle in Lovemore Musemva and Abyssinia Mushunje, 'Marketing challenges and opportunities faced by the Nguni cattle project beneficiaries in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa', in Ajuruchukwu Obi, *Institutional Constraints to Small Farmer Development in Southern Africa* (Wageningen: Wageningen Academic Publishers, 2011) pp. 121–135.
7. Kay Anderson, 'A Walk on the Wild Side: A Critical Geography of Domestication', *Progress in Human Geography* 21 (1997): 463–485.

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in the international image economy through two extended photographic essays. The first series, *African Animals and Scenery*, is a homage to the natural history folio of the same name by early nineteenth century artist and explorer Samuel Daniell who set out from the Cape into the unmapped interior of South Africa during the first British occupation.⁸ The second, *Animal Farm*, is an extension of Naudé's interest in questions of breeding, land ownership and what constitutes 'indigeneity', and includes a number of rare double portraits of human and animal subjects. Naudé is predominantly known for his lavish portraits of cows, goats, horses, donkeys and indigenous dogs, set within the variegated landscapes of the Karoo, Transkei and old Transvaal regions of South Africa; areas with deeply embedded environmental and political histories of domestication, exploitation and conflict.⁹

Taking his photographs with a medium-format camera with a top viewfinder, the photographer seldom uses a tripod, but spends hours silently stalking skittish Africanis dogs or languorous bovine subjects, often kneeling or lying on the ground in wait for the perfect shot, an alignment of land and livestock that resonates with him. One journalist has referred to him as a 'hunter with a Hasselblad'.¹⁰ And certainly the hunting metaphor is apposite, for trophy hunting – initially with guns and, more recently, with cameras – has long been a framing device for perceiving the South African landscape and its animals.¹¹ For Naudé, livestock emerge as curiously

8. For more on Samuel Daniell, see Thomas Sutton, *The Daniells: Artists and Travellers* (London: Bodley Head, 1954).
9. The Transkei refers to the area of the Eastern Cape established, along with the Ciskei, as an 'independent' homeland for the Xhosa during apartheid, during which black South Africans were divided according to ethnicity and granted shares of the land vastly demographically disproportionate to that granted to whites. The main area of the Transkei stretches from the Umtamvuna River in the north to the Great Kei River in the south, and is bounded by the Indian Ocean, Drakensburg mountains and Lesotho to east and west. It remains an important centre of the rural agricultural economy. The Transvaal is an area associated with the land north of the Vaal River. After a series of interrelated wars and forced migrations (known as the Mfecane) between indigenous people in the regions led to the ascent of the Ndebele in the area in the first half of the nineteenth century, the Boers founded the South African Republic (called the Transvaal) as an independent republic in 1856. It was annexed by the English in 1877 and again after the Anglo-Boer war in 1902 before becoming the Transvaal Province of the Union of South Africa in 1910. Within what was once the Transvaal province is the 'Bushveld' region of grassland (sub-tropical woodland) that covers much of today's Limpopo Province and some of the North West Province. It is prime cattle and game farming territory. The significance of the Veld in the construction of Afrikaner identity is explored in Jeremy Foster, *Washed with Sun: Landscape and the Making of White South Africa* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008).
10. Janine Stephen, 'Hunter with a Hasselblad', *Business Day* 20 March 2009: 14. For an in-depth discussion of the historical interweaving of discourses of hunting and photography invoked by this newspaper article, see Karen Jones, "'Hunting with the Camera": Photography, Animals and the Technology of the Chase in the Rocky Mountains' in the present volume.
11. John MacKenzie traces the seventeenth-century hunting trophies of the Dutch at the Cape Town Castle as an antecedent of museum specimen exhibition and ways of viewing the natural environment, increasingly reinforced by colonial hunting practices. 'The South African Museum, Cape

liminal bodies, poised between nature and culture: the embodiment of wildness tamed, but so often overlooked in the country's visual traditions. Michael Godby unpacks this tension in a discussion of the ambiguous position of agriculture and animal husbandry in South African landscape art: are farmlands and livestock part of a natural order or a foreign intervention into it? Godby suggests, by looking at the seamless inclusion of livestock (and the absence of fences, gates and roads) in various landscapes by white artists in the twentieth century, that 'ownership is made to appear more natural the more fully the property is integrated into the landscape'.¹² As a result, livestock bodies help to naturalise (white) claims to land and its 'improvement'. By making recourse to individual socio-economic relationships between humans and livestock, laying bare the link between livestock, land and ownership and interrogating the anxieties around breeds and breeding, Naudé's images start to unpick these visual traditions, effectively 'denaturing' livestock.

Naudé's intervention into dominant modes of imaging the natural world in South Africa – from colonial natural history to today's tourist-attracting photographic safaris – is timely, for South African historiography has witnessed a recent turn to environmental concerns. However, a lacuna still remains in the rigorous interrogation of the country's past and present: the central role of livestock accumulation and the forms of knowledge that accrued around it, ranging from veterinary developments to vernacular or indigenous knowledge, from breed standards to environmental regulation and state intervention. Accounts of early capitalism in South Africa, for example, retain a largely 'Randcentric' focus on the mineral revolution and the social and political relations of labour, despite evidence of a simultaneous (and related) 'intensification in pastoral production, which exceeded that of diamonds nationally'.¹³ William Beinart is one of the few scholars who has addressed this issue, most notably in *The Rise of Conservation in South Africa: Settlers, Livestock, and the Environment 1770–1950* (2008). Naudé, I argue, eloquently uses photography to reveal how livestock, land and knowledge form a neglected nexus of power and identity. By drawing attention to correspondences and slippages between issues of human and animal breeding, indigeneity and ethnicity, Naudé poses durable questions about how environmental histories continue to shape social relations in South Africa.

Town' in *Museums and Empire: Natural History, Human Cultures and Colonial Identities* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2009) p. 78.

12. Michael Godby, 'Introduction: Interface, Contestations, Interventions, Inventions, Interrogations', in M. Godby (ed.) *The Lie of the Land: Representations of the South African Landscape* (Cape Town: exhibition catalogue, 2010) pp. 60–135. p.94.
13. William Beinart, *The Rise of Conservation in South Africa: Settlers, Livestock, and the Environment 1770–1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) p.16.

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Livestock Portraiture and the Image of Good Breeding in England and South Africa

Naudé's photographs (Figures 3–5) – with their large scale, saturated colour, insistence on profile views and compressed depth of field (which heightens an anatomical awareness of each animal's sculptural presence and conformation) – draw on pictorial conventions from eighteenth century natural history illustration and animal portraiture. It is difficult to look at Naudé's honorific images of livestock, pictured from a slightly low angle so as to increase their stature – and hung on the walls of homes and galleries – without calling to mind the painting of George Stubbs. Stubbs, whose naturalistic animal portraits were simultaneously works of fine art



Figure 3. Merino sheep.

Graaff-Reinet, Eastern Cape, 15 May 2010. C-print ©Daniel Naudé. Courtesy of Stevenson, Cape Town and Johannesburg.



Figure 4. Black Nguni bull.

Stella, North West Province, 2 March 2010. C-print ©Daniel Naudé. Courtesy of Stevenson, Cape Town and Johannesburg.

and empirically rendered representations with strong links to natural history, is perhaps the most famous exponent of the tradition of animal portraiture.¹⁴ Animal portraiture as a genre, beyond an extension of (or inclusion in) landscape painting or human portraiture, emerged in England in the mid to late eighteenth century.¹⁵

14. For more on Stubbs's union of the anatomical and aesthetic elements of animal portraiture, see Judy Egerton, *George Stubbs, Painter* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007) pp.16–35.

15. It should be noted, however, that the Dutch Golden Age produced honorific images of cattle, imbued with nationalistic sentiment (for example, Paulus Potter's much-admired *Young Bull* of 1647), but these did not constitute an independent genre. Alex Potts, 'Natural Order and the Call of the Wild: The Politics of Animal Picturing', *Oxford Art Journal* 13/1 (1990): 12–33. 13.

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Figure 5. Appaloosa horse in foal.

Curry's Post, KwaZulu-Natal, 23 October 2009. C-print ©Daniel Naudé. Courtesy of Stevenson, Cape Town and Johannesburg.

Stubbs's subjects range from wild animals – often exotic captives of empire that he observed in the royal zoological gardens – to prize livestock, from the grandeur of horses and hounds in hunting scenes to the domestic scale of faithful pet dogs.¹⁶ His commissioners included scientists, who championed him for his empirical eye, and aristocratic landowners, many of whom were 'breeders and owners of "fine animals" as well as owners of "fine art"'.¹⁷ As a result, the images spoke volumes

16. This theme would subsequently be elaborated in allegorical terms by Edward Landseer. See Diane Donald, 'Landseer's Dogs', in *Picturing Animals in Britain: 1750–1850* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007) pp.126–158.

17. Ports, 'Natural Order': 13.

about human pedigree and connoisseurship through the refined characteristics and stature of specific animals and through the art collections which acted as a form both of commemoration and of conspicuous consumption.

As Harriet Ritvo traces in the *Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (1987), images of elite cattle in England were metonymically associated with agricultural improvement and patriotism, as increased yields in meat and dairy were needed to cater to a rapidly expanding population and were thus in the national interest. Moreover, livestock portraiture:

embodied the values of the wealthy, often aristocratic landowners who produced exemplary livestock ... The rhetoric of connoisseurship that accompanied their production and display emphasised these distinctive characteristics, not only within the community of elite stock breeders, but also to the multitudes who paid to admire either individual animals on tour or prize stock assembled at shows.¹⁸

By the close of the eighteenth and throughout the nineteenth century in Britain, exhibitions of 'exceptional livestock' were annual fixtures on the social calendar. Dominated by the aristocracy, these livestock shows celebrated animals – and, by extension, breeders – of exceptional pedigree, such that spectacle, status and the science of husbandry overlapped.¹⁹ Moreover, agricultural societies were formed to 'popularise and instruct the common husbandmen in the latest agricultural principles and practices'. From the mid-nineteenth century, breeding associations with defined studbooks would further entrench the overlap of animal pedigree with anxieties around human status, class and 'purity'.²⁰

The Victorian polymath Francis Galton took this overlap one step further. In the context of urban overcrowding, a rise in criminality, and the widespread perception of social degeneration, Galton became convinced that the lessons of animal domestication and selective breeding could and should be applied to humans in order to improve the national 'stock' of human capital. In his research, Galton was constantly frustrated by the lack of sufficient human data over successive generations to construct an overarching theory of heredity. But, in visiting livestock exhibitions and perusing studbooks, he realised that these sources offered untapped opportunities for rigorously testing his ideas.²¹ Most notably, by the late nineteenth century, livestock shows usually involved photographic portraits of prize stock. And thus, in 1898, Galton wrote a letter to the journal *Nature*, entitled 'Photographic Measurement of Horses and Other Animals'. In it, Galton stated:

18. Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1987) p.46.

19. Cynthia Huff, 'Victorian Exhibitionism and Eugenics: The Case of Francis Galton and the 1899 Crystal Palace Dog Show', *Victorian Review* 28/2 (2002): 1–20. 4.

20. Ritvo, *Animal Estate*, pp. 46–58.

21. Huff, *Victorian Exhibitionism*.

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Valuable horses are habitually photographed by professionals and amateurs, and beautiful portraits of them appear in newspapers ... [and] in shows of pedigree stock it is frequently required that the prize-winners should be photographed, it being of obvious importance that the appearance of the progenitors of the animals should be known before selections are made for pairing ... If photographs of horses and other pedigree stock could be rendered available for strict scientific studies in heredity, the material is copious, and as it would in time extend through many generations, should far exceed in value anything that is now procurable for those purposes.²²

Like their antecedents in oil on canvas, both the public and professional value and utility of pedigree photography was already established. Thus Galton proposed a further dimension be considered, by which 'an ordinary photograph would be transformed from a mere picture into a record of real scientific value'.²³ Galton outlined several basic instructions to be carried out regarding the positioning of the animal and the marking out of the space so as to correctly measure the animal's physical dimensions from the resulting photograph, accommodating the distance and angle between the subject and the camera. Informed by his work in human anthropometry, used to measure and assess various human groups by connecting physical measurements with various internal capacities, Galton's instructions for livestock photography ensured the uniformity and accuracy of the images and the validity of subsequent measurements taken from them with callipers.²⁴ In the statistical and photographic data he obtained from livestock and dog shows, Galton would, over time, develop his theory of Eugenics.

In South Africa, a 'Society for the encouragement of the agricultural arts and sciences' had been established in the late eighteenth century by Cape Governor George Yonge during the first British occupation (on the advice of visiting agriculturalist William Duckitt, who arrived in the Cape with some pedigree cattle and the newest in farming implements from England).²⁵ It was later revived by Lord Charles Somerset, governor from 1814 to 1826. Lord Somerset set an example by importing European horses, sheep, cattle and hunting dogs (and setting up a hunt) and encouraging the latest methods in the cultivation of land and livestock. English settlers – who were soon distributed over extensive areas of land (in the Cape, on the eastern frontier and later in Natal) – established various local agricultural societies and shows. English agricultural societies were strengthened in the Cape subsequent

22. Francis Galton, 'Photographic Measurement of Horses and Other Animals', *Nature* 57 (1898): 230–2. 230–1.

23. *Ibid.*: 231.

24. *Ibid.*: 232.

25. Although the Dutch governor Simon van der Stel promoted fairs and markets, these did not actively promote animal husbandry or include an agricultural show element. For a brief history of agricultural societies in South Africa, see Thelma Gutsche, *A Very Smart Medal: The Story of the Witwatersrand Agricultural Society* (Cape Town: Howard Timmins, 1970) pp.13–14.

to the Great Trek, in which great numbers of Boers left the British-controlled colony to found independent republics inland: English farmers were able to buy land in key districts, fostering a large export economy based on wool, angora and ostrich plumage (catering to Europe's millinery fashions).

The Afrikanerbond, largely based on the farmers' associations of the Boers, acted as the mouthpiece of Afrikaners (particularly in the Cape colony) from the late nineteenth century up to the Union in 1910. However, across the vast distances of the Boer republics of the South African Republic (often informally referred to as the Transvaal) and Orange Free State, it was difficult for agricultural societies to flourish in the small *dorps* scattered among the wider farming population. The mineral revolution proved a great stimulus to agricultural production in the interior. Oxen were needed for expanded draught power in arable production and transport and markets expanded for meat and other consumer goods. A mutually-inflecting increase in population size and agricultural yield catalysed livestock improvement experiments in South African in a similar fashion to those in England.²⁶ The expansion of the veterinary service would likewise contribute to this development. Afrikaner interest in agricultural societies and shows, previously the preserve largely of English settlers and a minority of 'progressive' Afrikaners, became more widespread and, by the early twentieth century, the great Rand Show in Johannesburg (founded by the Witwaterand Agricultural Society) had become 'a genuine marketplace for ideas and products' for Boer and Englishman alike.²⁷

Agricultural shows were not only popular with the public, they were also reported in both general and specialist publications. In England, the *Illustrated London News*, for example, would regularly publish multiple engravings of prize-winning animals, such that these images were widely circulated in town and country. Livestock painters travelled all over the land to these shows, drawing animals in their pens and undertaking commissions for stock-owners and breeders. As Elspeth Moncrief has examined in her study *Farm Animal Portraits*, in the Victorian era, 'the culture of the show ring was probably the single biggest impetus to livestock portraiture', a visual tradition which may have spread to the colonies along with the British pedigree livestock that was coveted by, and exported to, Australia and South Africa particularly.²⁸ Moncrief traces the rise of livestock portraiture to the selective breeding experiments of Robert Bakewell (1725–1795), which constitute

26. See also Andrew Ainslie's discussion of the impact of the discovery of diamonds on agricultural production in the Eastern Cape, *Cattle Ownership and Production in the Communal Areas of the Eastern Cape, South Africa* (Cape Town: University of the Western Cape. PLAAS Research Report no. 10, 2002) p. 21.

27. Gutsche discusses the educational role of the Witwatersrand Agricultural Society in the Rand Agricultural Show in 1970: *A Very Smart Medal*, p. 115.

28. Elizabeth Moncrief, *Farm Animal Portraits* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Antique Collectors' Club Ltd, 1996) pp. 104–6.

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'one of the earliest forms of genetic engineering. He awakened the country to the concept that certain characteristics could be selected in individual livestock and perpetuated and fixed in their progeny.'²⁹ For Moncrief, Bakewell's principles were the foundation of the development of pedigree livestock and, in turn, the rise of farm animal portraiture, initially in painting and engraving, but later in photography.³⁰ In South Africa, the country's oldest magazine, *Farmer's Weekly*, established in 1911 by Englishman John Rodrick – who would become the country's most famous pedigree livestock auctioneer – was significant for its pioneering role in agricultural journalism and in the fostering of a national (settler) agricultural identity. Most editions included photographs of prize-winning and pedigree livestock, as well as the latest in agricultural technology, and the magazine was circulated widely, distributed by road and rail throughout the country. In the 1970s, the magazine would claim to be the first to harness the potential of full colour printing for publishing photographs of champion animals at important shows, a feature that remains amongst the most popular in the magazine today.³¹

A Breed Apart: The Socio-Political Construction of Afrikaner and Nguni Cattle

Naudé's contemporary images of livestock – each image focused on the physical conformation of individual animals and anchored in the ascription of breed in the title – are deeply embedded in these visual and historical discourses of pedigree and purity, which acquired specific valences within the South African context. These issues are most palpable in Naudé's double portraits of human and animal subjects. Two images of (human) Afrikaners open up a particularly productive dialogue at the intersection of livestock breeding and portraiture: that of Dirk, an attendant and technician at the anatomy school of the famous veterinary college at Onderstepoort, Pretoria (Figure 6) and that of Ben Fyfer, a cattle farmer from Louwna in the North West Province (Figure 7). In the former, Dirk's thin limbs, ensconced in the long socks and khaki shorts that stand as stereotypical Afrikaner garb, are enclosed by the articulated skeleton of an Afrikaner bull, a visual doubling of the specimen's armature. In the latter, a bull-necked farmer sits sturdily at his desk. His own hirsute face is suspended in visual parenthesis between two others: the mounted trophy head of one of his prize stud Nguni cattle and a fondly painted portrait of the same bull by his daughter.³²

29. Ibid. p. 15.

30. Ibid. p. 167.

31. George Nicholas, 'And the Decades Roll By ...', Centenary edition of the *Farmer's Weekly*, 2011.

32. Background information provided by the artist in an informal interview conducted Wednesday 29 August 2011.



Figure 6. Dirk next to an Afrikaner bull skeleton.

Onderstepoort, Pretoria, 27 October 2010. C-print ©Daniel Naudé. Courtesy of Stevenson, Cape Town and Johannesburg.

The multiple framing and media of photography, taxidermy, painting and anatomical reconstruction are brought to bear on one another, suggesting an integral connection between animal and human portrait subjects. Each human subject is engaged in a livelihood which involves constant recourse to animal bodies: veterinary science and farming. The lived relationship of human–animal interaction is materially reinscribed in the images through the human subjects' compositional framing by these animal bodies. Moreover, the animal bodies are, in the captions, expressly identified as 'Afrikaner' or 'Nguni', terms more familiarly used to refer to

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Figure 7. Ben Fyfer, an Nguni cattle farmer, at his desk.

Louwena, North West Province, 2 March 2010. C-print ©Daniel Naudé. Courtesy of Stevenson, Cape Town and Johannesburg.

cultural or linguistic human identities in South Africa: The term 'Afrikaner' refers to white South Africans descended from early settlers, while 'Nguni' was the general anthropological term used for the African people of the East Coast (both terms also denote relationships to language). Through an act of semantic metonymy, the hybrid breed of cattle selectively bred (and 'improved') by many Afrikaner livestock farmers came to be known as such, while 'Nguni' became a category for old African breeds of cattle. But what is at stake in the taxonomy of breeds?

A 1917 cartoon from the Johannesburg newspaper, *The Star*, may offer some insights (Figure 8). As Saul Dubow has examined in his book *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa* (1995), Francis Galton's eugenic theories had a diverse and contradictory uptake in South Africa (playing only an inferential role in the elaboration of segregationist theory) and racial difference tended to be understood more in Social Darwinist terms until the 1930s.³³ Nevertheless, Union rhetoric echoed Galton's language of hereditary distance and proximity: on the one hand, the coming together of close kin, such as the European-descended English and Afrikaners, promoted a hybrid vigour, strengthening the national stock. On the other hand, intermixing between supposedly distinct 'races' was commonly believed to result in decreased fertility, as well as moral and physical degeneration. In Galton's England, eugenics expressed a deep-seated belief in Anglo-Saxon supremacy, even as it spoke to widespread anxieties in the Victorian middle class around social 'degeneration' (particularly the rise of criminality, indolence and 'feeble-mindedness') in a context of rapid industrialisation and urbanisation. Similarly, in South Africa:

The transforming power of the late nineteenth-century mineral revolution and the experience of industrialisation raised the issue of the political relationship between white and black in an acute form. The problems associated with the creation of a modern industrial society compounded classic eugenic and Malthusian anxieties about the differential birth-rate of the 'residuum' with new fears about race degeneration. Thus, the perception of an increasing urban black population gave a sharp twist to white fears of the corruptive potential presented by racial mixing.³⁴

An attempt at the consolidation of white settler identity, subsequent to the South African (Anglo-Boer) war, was one of the most definitive responses to these anxieties. This consolidation, though never fully realised, operated on a popular level through eugenic discourse around the 'horror of "race fusion" or "miscegenation"'.³⁵ Simultaneously, the rise of breed standards and increasing state intervention in the agricultural and veterinary industries in South Africa meant that the bodies of livestock became a site of inscription surrounding race 'purity', environmental fitness, and degenerative interbreeding.

The cartoon responds to the annual Rand Show – an agricultural spectacle founded by the Witwatersrand Agricultural Society in the late nineteenth century. The Rand Show was a primary arena for the popular dissemination of the latest ideas and technologies in agriculture and animal husbandry, with a large section devoted to livestock shows. Saul Dubow, in *A Commonwealth of Knowledge: Science, Sensibility, and White South Africa 1820–2000* (2006), contends that knowledge-centred

33. See the chapter 'The Equivocal Message of Eugenics' in Saul Dubow, *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) pp.166–196.

34. Ibid. p.168.

35. Ibid. p.180.

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Figure 8. *Aristocracy at the Show – and Only Man is Vilé*.

This cartoon by Edward Arnold Packer appeared in *The Star* newspaper shortly after the 1917 Rand Agricultural Show. Image courtesy of Museum Africa.

institutions and endeavours (from scientific associations to literary magazines) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries helped to bridge the ethnic divide between Dutch/Afrikaans and English settlers (despite ongoing political rifts and rivalries), aiding in the construction of a more unified colonial identity, particularly amongst the rising mercantile and agrarian middle classes. The pursuit of science – and the development of local institutions and publications no longer wholly dependent on England – also helped to cement an emerging racial order. White colonists became producers and consumers of knowledge about the land and its people – a set of expertise and practices ‘closely bound up with claims to be rights-bearing citizens of a country that they were consciously making their own’.³⁶ And, as Kay Anderson has investigated in her study of the Royal Agricultural Show in Sydney, the agricultural show in the colonies was a major site for the visualisation

36. Saul Dubow, *A Commonwealth of Knowledge: Science, Sensibility, and White South Africa, 1820–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) p. 4.

and stabilisation of the ontology of settler colonialism, centred on the triumph of 'improvement'.³⁷

In the cartoon, the animal gaze has been turned on the human spectators, suggesting just how 'human' the concerns of animal bloodlines had become. This is particularly salient in a moment of South African history in which, despite ongoing rifts between English and Afrikaner, white power was being consolidated in the face of the so-called 'native question'. A monocled horse, clearly an Anglophone member of the progressive middle to upper agrarian class, appraises the spectator, whose cross-hatched cheeks suggest an ambiguous skin tone. The horse remarks to the adjacent thoroughbred ox: 'Great Scot! I'll bet there are a few missing links in his pedigree, what?' The ox retorts, 'It's just one of those "scrub" humans. Ignore it, my dear, ignore it'. The punchline revolves around one of the agricultural sector's most pervasive concerns at the time: that of the danger posed to pure, imported stock bloodlines, and to the quality of grazing land, by the 'overwhelming' numbers of apparently inferior indigenous cattle.³⁸ The cartoon reveals how human class and racial anxieties became interwoven with the agricultural project of abolishing 'scrub' animals and promoting 'pure' (European) breeds. It also evokes the discourses of natural history, glossed by Social Darwinism, in which so-called Bantu and Hottentot groups were associated with the lower evolutionary rungs of humanity, potentially as 'missing links' between man and animal.³⁹

Nguni cattle, the most numerous subjects of Naudé's portraits, were particularly targeted as 'economically valueless "scrub" cattle'.⁴⁰ The heterogeneous coat patterns of the cattle – which are given lyrical names and form an integral part of Zulu oral culture – along with variable horn-shapes and conformation, were popularly read as evidence of indiscriminate bloodlines and dubious genetics, for you could never be sure what the next generation of cattle would look like.⁴¹ Moreover, the size and lack of enclosure of the communal tenure herds led to concern about the spread of disease and overgrazing. Instead, imported stock was highly prized by white commercial farmers and official schemes advised Africans to switch to these 'improved' breeds, restrict the size of their herds and 'subscribe to strict state

37. Kay Anderson, 'White Natures: Sydney's Royal Agricultural Show in PostHumanist Perspective', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 28/4 (2003): 422–441.

38. See Ainslie, *Cattle Ownership*, pp. 6–8, 28–29.

39. See Saul Dubow, 'Physical Anthropology and the Quest for the "Missing Link"', in his *Scientific Racism*, pp. 20–65.

40. Jane Carruthers, 'The Knowledge that is in Names', *Environmental History* 12/2 (2007): 299–301. 300.

41. Wolfgang Bayer, Rauri Alcock and Peter Gilles, 'Going Backwards? – Moving Forward? – Nguni Cattle in Communal KwaZulu-Natal', *Rural Poverty Reduction through Research for Development and Transformation*. A Scientific Paper Presented at a Conference Held at the Agricultural and Horticultural Faculty, Humboldt-Universität, Berlin. October 5–7, 2004. pp. 1–7. Available: <http://www.tropentag.de/2004/abstracts/full/326.pdf>

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veterinary interventions'.⁴² This 'advice' was largely resisted, however, reflecting the strong cultural salience and invisible capital of Nguni cattle in communities in which they embody wealth and status, provide various utilities and are the object of ritual sacrifice. Nevertheless, by the 1930s and 1940s in African farming areas (later 'homelands') like the Transkei, state policies encouraging 'stock improvement' and 'land rehabilitation' included the introduction of European breeds, as well as the culling (usually through enforced sale) and castration of nondescript 'scrub' bulls (though these measures were often sporadically implemented and largely ineffective, given the reproduction rate of cattle).⁴³ While part of these official schemes represents the strength of conservationist attitudes of the time, they also contributed to the ongoing undermining of the socio-cultural base and economic independence of black South Africans.

Despite mandated preference for imported breeds, there was one notable indigenous cattle breed that escaped classification as 'scrub' livestock, and this was the Afrikaner or Afrikaner: the animal with which Dirk is pictured in Naudé's portrait. This specimen – the articulated skeleton of an Afrikaner bull – was constructed many decades ago as a teaching model for the students of the Onderstepoort Veterinary Institute in Pretoria, South Africa. The original bull was donated by a local farmer. Unlike the majority of the anatomical collection, the specimen does not display a developmental anomaly or specific pathology, but represents what from the perspective of veterinary practitioners might be considered a 'standard' model. The lab technician would have spent hours slowly simmering the tissue from the bones, degreasing them, painstakingly reassembling them and finally setting the entire articulated specimen in a steel armature.

But the preserved and mounted skeleton is more than just a didactic tool. It is also a cultural monument commemorating the draught animal that pulled the ox-wagons of the Afrikaners who set out on the Great Trek. Taking place in South Africa from the 1830s to 1850s, the Great Trek was the mass emigration of Afrikaners from the British Cape Colony, in which the Afrikaners journeyed inland to establish independent republics.⁴⁴ From the late nineteenth century, as the ideology of Afrikaner nationalism began to foment, the interweaving of Afrikaner history and strong Calvinist traditions recast the Great Trek as the South African equivalent of a biblical exodus from British dominion to the Promised Land of the Boer republics.⁴⁵ As the Great Trek assumed a central position in the construction of Afrikaner identity, so the narrative and genealogical pedigrees of the Afrikaner

42. Carruthers, 'Knowledge': 300.

43. Ainslie, *Cattle Ownership*, pp. 28–30.

44. See the discussion 'The Afrikaner Great Trek, 1836–1854' in Leonard Thomson, *A History of South Africa* (3rd ed.) [2000] (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001) p. 87–96.

45. As Saul Dubow explores in 'Afrikaner Nationalism, Apartheid and the Conceptualisation of Race', this was not necessarily the 'self-perception of the Boers at the time of the Trek', but rather part

Bull become intertwined: its genetic characteristics associated with the ability to endure hardship and emerge with its character unaltered.

Afrikaner nationalism – as well as broadly eugenic concerns around miscegenation, race purity and human ‘breeding’ in South Africa – reached a formative point in the interwar period.⁴⁶ And it was in this context that a telling article emerged in the *Journal of Heredity* (1933). Writing about the origin and development of the breed, Helmut Epstein declared that the Afrikaner breed of cattle was:

not a mixed but a pure breed, evolved from indigenous cattle by severe and careful selection. A mixed breed would never have been capable of such a marvellous preservation of its pure and uniform character in every part of this country as the red Afrikaner cattle were after the profound economic changes following the Great Trek, the Rinderpest of the nineties and the destructive consequences of the Anglo-Boer War.⁴⁷

Here, the ‘purity’ of the breed is used to account for its survival over generations of environmental and political adversity, its unique conformation emerging as the result of these travails. Because it was ‘evolved’ from indigenous cattle, the breed was simultaneously produced as autochthonous and ‘improved’; the article thereby associated Afrikaners with a lineage of both indigeneity (something that white South Africans – and particularly Afrikaners – were shaping for themselves in the socio-political sphere of the 1930s) and progressive cultivation of the land and its resources (a central tenet legitimating land seizure, set in contrast to the practices of African pastoralists and communal farmers).⁴⁸ The historical and genetic pedigree of Afrikaner cattle and the pedigree of the Afrikaner nation emerge in the article as thoroughly entangled. Moreover, an association for the protection and systematic breeding of the Afrikaner was set up in 1912, one of the first professional bodies to produce a standardised studbook. Today, the Afrikaner Breeding Society continues to extol the narrative of the Afrikaner as a ‘hardy, no-nonsense breed’ that survived despite near ‘extermination ... [by] Rinderpest or ... during the South African War’ due to the efforts of ‘some breeders [who], to their credit, succeeded in keeping their Afrikaner stock pure’.⁴⁹

Just prior to Epstein’s article extolling the virtues of the Afrikaner, a small herd of Nguni cattle (though it should be noted that after the Rinderpest and

of the romantic – though no less powerful – mythology of the Boer experience, as developed by modern nationalist intellectuals. *The Journal of African History* 33/2 (1992): 209–237. 224.

46. Dubow, *Scientific Racism*.

47. Helmut Epstein, ‘Descent and Origin of the Afrikaner Cattle’, *The Journal of Heredity* 24/12 (1933): 449–462. 450.

48. Andrew Ainslie discusses the ideological discourse of an ‘irrational and inefficient’ African sector, set in contrast to English and Afrikaner agricultural practices, in ‘Introduction: Setting the Scene’ in Ainslie, *Cattle Ownership*, pp.1–17.

49. [no author], ‘The Society: History’. Available: <http://www.afrikanerbees.com/Society-History.htm>

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East Coast Fever of the early twentieth century, there were very few 'pure' Nguni remaining on the East coast) was purchased from the interior of Maputaland in 1931 and transferred to the Onderstepoort Veterinary Research Institute. In 1950, the herd, with additional purchases from local Zulu communities in Nongoma, Ingwavuma, Ubombo and Hlabisa, was sent to Bartlow Combine Research Station (seven adjacent farms in the Hluhluwe district of the old Natal province), where outside genetic influence was eliminated from 1957 to 1981 and assortive mating used to select for type, conformation and weight. Already from the 1930s, milestone research by Onderstepoort Professor H.H. Curson and R.W. Thornton (1936) and by J.H.R. Bisschop (1937) revealed the positive potential of the breed, with attempted dissemination in a series of publications and talks at livestock shows and farmers' days.⁵⁰ Moreover, an important study by the Department of Agriculture in 1950 acknowledged:

With the exception of the Afrikaner breed, little or no attention has been paid to the improvement or study of the potentialities of the indigenous breed of cattle in South Africa ... The failure of the exotic breeds has brought about an appreciation of the importance of a harmonious relationship between the hereditary complex of a breed and the prevailing environmental conditions of a specific region. It is generally accepted today, that the most important aspect of any livestock improvement policy is to secure a type which, by virtue of its hereditary constitution, will thrive, and successfully reproduce and produce in a given area.⁵¹

And yet, so strong was the prevailing belief in the inferiority of 'scrub' Nguni cattle to both European breeds and the Afrikaner that it was only in 1983 that the Nguni was finally recognised as an official breed.⁵² By this point, however, preferences in African farming areas had turned to higher-yielding breeds such as Brahmans, which have some of the same characteristics as Nguni cattle but are bigger, as well as Bonsmara (an Afrikaner-European cross).

Marguerite Poland, whose lavishly illustrated text *The Abundant Herds* (2003) is evidence of the upsurge in interest in Nguni cattle in post-1994 South Africa, laments the manner in which agriculture and animal husbandry in much of the twentieth century was framed by and filtered through the social imagination, constructing the Nguni as 'a breed apart':

It is a sad indictment of South African society that the deeply rooted racial prejudices that have been the dominant theme in the history of this country should have

50. W.D. Gertenbach and A.A. Kars, 'Towards the conservation of the indigenous cattle of KwaZulu-Natal', *South African Journal of Animal Science* 29/2 (1999): 55–63. 56.

51. F.N. Bonsma, J.H.R. Bisschop, W.G. Barnard, J.A. Van Rensburg, J.J. Duvenhage, H.P.D. Van Wyk and F. Watermeyer, *Nguni-Cattle: Report on Indigenous Cattle in South Africa*, Department of Agriculture Pamphlet 311 (Pretoria, The Government Printer, 1950) p. 1.

52. Marguerite Poland, David Hammond-Tooke and Lee Voigt, *The Abundant Herds: A Celebration of the Nguni Cattle of the Zulu People* (Cape Town: Fernwood Press, 2003) p. 106.

carried over into attitudes towards the livestock of the indigenous population. The very qualities of hardiness, fertility and adaptability that government and stockmen have tried so hard to introduce through imported breeds, existed – largely unrecognised – in the indigenous herds for hundreds of years, acquired through centuries of adaptation and natural selection.⁵³

Since the 1980s, numerous longitudinal studies using data from the Bartlow Combine herd have reinforced the benefits of farming with indigenous Nguni cattle: they display a natural immunity to endemic disease and tick infestation, have an ability to reproduce quickly, even under harsh environmental conditions, and are more productive without manufactured supplementary feeds than other breeds, resulting in less carbon emissions and catering to a more ecologically-conscious international context (including the current ‘vogue’ for organic foods).⁵⁴ Moreover, since 1994, Nguni cattle have been mobilised as icons of indigenous knowledge and ethnic pride, duly feted – and farmed – by South Africans of all ethnic groups. They have also been integrated into a cultural heritage economy that seeks to revalue the country’s rare ‘indigenous’ breeds and celebrate the precolonial stewardship of the land.⁵⁵

However, the majority of the country’s commercial and stud Nguni farms are today owned by white, predominantly Afrikaner, farmers such as Ben Fyfer, pictured in Naudé’s image. While the reevaluation of the breed has reinvigorated the commercial sector, there appears to be less interest in Nguni cattle in small-scale and communal farming areas. Recent studies suggest that African stock-owners articulate preferences for bigger-framed imported and cross-bred stock and sometimes perceive Nguni cattle as ‘something for the white farmers’.⁵⁶ In response both to the scientific evidence of the suitability of the breed to small-scale communal farming (as a low maintenance breed which adapts well to low-input farm systems) and to the change in eco-political context, post-apartheid land redistribution programmes have increasingly been paired with livestock loans of Nguni bulls (often along with in-calf heifers) to create new nucleus herds. Though these programmes have been largely unsuccessful, they nonetheless present a telling inversion of the livestock ‘improvement’ policies of the early twentieth century. As Andrew Ainslie points out in his analysis of the history and current state of cattle ownership and production in the Eastern Cape, it is:

the stuff of legends that, whilst the state spent a great deal of time and resources

53. Ibid. p. 108.

54. L. Musemwa, A. Mushunje, M. Chimonyo and C. Mapiye, ‘Low Cattle Market Off-Take Rates in Communal Production Systems of South Africa: Causes and Mitigation Strategies’, *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa* 12/5 (2010): 209–226. 210.

55. Carruthers, ‘Knowledge’: 300.

56. Bayer *et al.* ‘Going Backwards?’ p. 6.

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castrating and culling 'scrub' Nguni/Nkone bulls in rural areas, those Nguni bulls which survived this regime are now in the hands of commercial 'white' stud breeders and fetch up to R40 000 per head. Indeed the Eastern Cape Department of Agriculture and Land Affairs announced recently that it had 'facilitated the ordering of 20 breed bulls which were sold to [African] stock farmers at a low price in order to improve the breed of cattle in the province' (*Daily Dispatch*, 16 February, 1999).⁵⁷

Taking Stock

Returning then, to Naudé's images of Ben Fyfer and Dirk, Regina Nelani and David Tieties, it is clear that these images offer more than just human portraits: they provide snapshots of a country in flux, where socio-political identity is deeply invested in livestock and land, and historical conflict, change and continuity encoded in breeds and breeding. The two (human) Afrikaners, Dirk and Ben, set alongside the bovine relics of the articulated Afrikaner skeleton and the Nguni trophy, offer a dialectic, perhaps, of Afrikaner identity and status in contemporary South Africa. If the prosperous Ben Fyfer, ensconced in his office, represents the ongoing structural legacies of settler colonialism and apartheid policy (with its land and agricultural subsidies) in which much material prosperity – including the harnessing of new indigenous icons – remains in the same hands, Dirk's ageing image paints the shadow side of the new dispensation; the dislocation of an Afrikaner minority that must articulate a new sense of self against a compromised history.⁵⁸ The portraits of Regina Nelani, her dignified bearing engaging the viewer straight on, and David Tieties, who looks slightly askance, offer additional tableaux of the South African rural landscape. Enfolding their animal charges, Regina and David reveal how livestock in South Africa adumbrate lived experience, contributing to individual human livelihoods and often (particularly in the case of dogs, horses and cattle) partaking in complex relationships of affection and reciprocity.

Naudé's project thus seeks to redress the paucity of attention paid to South Africa's domestic animals and rural life in both national historiography and international image economies. While much of the reimagining of nature currently registering in environmental history and contemporary art revolves around ideas of wild(er)ness, Naudé opens up the complexities of the 'natural' world to include livestock and the contested scrub and grasslands in which they range, recognising that the amount of land devoted to livestock far outstrips that apportioned to wildlife in South Africa. Moreover, as changes in the socio-economic environment lead to an increase in integrated game and livestock farming, the borders of wild

57. Ainslie, *Cattle Breeding*, p. 29.

58. Mads Vestergaard, 'Who's Got the Map? The Negotiation of Afrikaner Identities in Post-Apartheid South Africa', *Daedalus* 130/1 (2001): 19–41.

and tame, nature and culture – the fault-lines upon which South African history and its landscapes have been shaped – become ever more fraught.

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