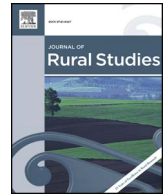


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More than just fields: Reframing deagrarianisation in landscapes and livelihoods

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the emergent properties of deagrarianisation processes in two villages in the central Eastern Cape, South Africa. The claim of is that much of the deagrarianisation literature and debate does not acknowledge the importance of landscapes and the interaction between their constituent elements, notably people, forests, grasslands, fields, grazing lands, open spaces, built environments and homesteads, all of which contribute to shaping and, in turn, are shaped by livelihoods. Conceptualising a landscape as a spatial entity and associated assemblage of practices, discourses and history, this paper dissects the landscape in terms of land uses for residential and cultural purposes, growing, grazing and gathering. These land use categories together represent the rural domain to which the villagers are attached as a place and a home. Their use of the land is not necessarily oriented to fully exploring its productive potential. The article explores the transformation from a productive landscape to one which largely hinges on consumption. The blurring of boundaries between the formally designated land use categories signifies the transformations occurring in many of the rural areas in the former homelands of South Africa.

1. Introduction: deagrarianisation and landscapes

The claim of this paper is that much of the deagrarianisation literature and debate do not explicitly acknowledge the importance of landscape and the interaction between its constituent elements, notably people, forests, grasslands, fields, grazing lands, open spaces, built up environments and homesteads, all of which contribute to shaping and, in turn are shaped by, livelihoods. The deagrarianisation literature only cursorily examines the decline in the share of agriculture in rural incomes without further consideration of how the broader landscapes and seemingly un- or under-used arable spaces are then used or interpreted. The literature pays little attention to the meaning of land and how the landscape has transformed in time from a 'productive' to a 'consumptive' or 'extractive' landscape. The paper draws on data collected in two villages, Guquka and Koloni, situated in the former Ciskei in the Eastern Cape, South Africa, to depict what happens with regard to the use of landscapes, land and its constituent elements.

The transformation of the landscape and the communities and their livelihoods that occur in areas like the former Ciskei is best conceptualised as an emergent property, with landscapes being continuously reassembled through a gradual reordering and use of the

varied and multiple elements of the landscape. This results in reshaping of landscape elements and boundaries such that the boundaries between landscape elements become blurred and the use of land has changed dramatically, although some interpretations persist. Such a conceptualisation acknowledges that on the one hand social actors (e.g. villagers, planners, researchers, policymakers) make and transform landscapes as much as landscapes form and shape livelihoods and ideas of planners and surveyors to (re)order the landscape. Such reassembling can only be examined as practical enactments by those staying and living in the villages and actions and views by governance institutions. Reassembling is thus varyingly underpinned, e.g. by the kind of livelihoods that evolve in the villages and also by physical planners, land administrators and policymakers in their attempts to re-order property rights to, and uses of, land and natural resources.

On the other hand, the processes of reassembling are neither linear nor homogenous and that we need to recognise heterogeneity as an emergent property of landscapes (see [Greenough and Tsing, 2003](#)). The reassembling does not occur in similar ways and practices, and may not always be agreed upon and shared. We will show that whilst the land use description applies at village level, not all households use landscapes or parts thereof in similar ways and they often diverge from the

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village level trajectory to construct their livelihoods. This in turn complicates narratives of unidirectional change, including deagrarianisation. Given space constraints, we limit our analysis to depicting the major trends in the two villages.

Much of the writing and research on rural development in southern Africa, and the two villages are no exception, conforms to the deagrarianisation thesis. The occupational movement away from relying on agriculture as a sole or primary source of livelihood and well-being is a reality and has been well documented in southern Africa and elsewhere (Bryceson, 1996; Twyman et al., 2004; Bank and Minkley, 2005; Hajdu, 2006; De Wet, 2011; Shackleton et al., 2013; Hebinck and Van Averbeke, 2013; Trefry et al., 2014). Such trends parallel increasing diversification of livelihood strategies at household level (Ellis, 2000; Twyman et al., 2004) and the multi-locational nature of many nominally rural peoples' livelihoods (Francis, 2000; Ramisch, 2014). Whilst this is not a recent phenomenon (Hebinck and Lent, 2007), the degree of deactivation from agriculture has increased with the growing effects of urbanisation, out-migration, a growing reliance on urban incomes, the 'granitisation' of rural incomes, modernisation and globalisation at household, community, village and also policy levels (Shackleton and Luckert, 2015; Masterson, 2016).

The objective of this article is not to deny the net and real trend in many regions of the declining contributions of cropping, livestock and gathered products to household or individual incomes. However, although agriculture may not be the principal source of livelihood for many rural households in South Africa, we show that this does not mean that the growing of crops and rearing of livestock do not make economic, lifestyle, or other contributions which are regarded as significant by rural people. We argue rather that the once actively and intensively lived lifestyle that hinged on ploughing and planting, gathering natural products and rearing livestock in combination with migrant labouring (Hebinck and Smith, 2007) has gradually been replaced by a different type of agrarianism in which the homestead and the need for its social-material reproduction remain central but in different ways. Such transforming agrarianism hinges predominantly on a consumptive use of the landscape and less on a productive exploration of the social and natural resources. People live in a rural setting that holds strong cultural values, history, memories and a home to stay in and return to. For the majority of villagers – but certainly not all – rural life no longer revolves around using and making the various elements of the landscape as a productive resource per se.

Building on and inspired by the work by Basso (1996), McAllister (2001), Masterson (2016) and Cocks et al. (2017) who have in common to conceptualise place - or home or the homestead - as lived experience¹, we (now) prefer to speak of a rural lifestyle rather than only an agrarian one and associated livelihoods that persistently are analysed as rural. The transformation from *agrarian* to *rural* produces a landscape that combines cultural, emotional, psychological and community values (Cocks et al., 2012, 2017; Trefry et al., 2014; Masterson, 2016; Connor and Mtwana, 2017) but simultaneously fragmented spaces of even increased biodiversity which continue to provide a range of goods and services to local livelihoods (Shackleton et al., 2002, 2013; Mtati, 2013) and at broader scales. The productive use of land for the provision of consumptive products for own use or sale, revives regularly and unexpectedly; perhaps not at the scale that would impress policy makers and agricultural economists, but at the local level it is significant for some household trajectories and identity (Shackleton et al., 2008). By elevating the level of analysis to the landscape, we will, however, show how the various elements of the landscape are used and interact, that particular pockets of agrarianism remain visible in the form of marginal

cropping, rearing of small and large stock, gathering of non-timber forest products (NFTPs) combined with home gardening and staying in the homestead. Only a nuanced and detailed exploration of the landscape will show this.

While debating deagrarianisation processes and outcomes we need to realise the complexity in that they are likely to affect various forms of land-based livelihoods in different ways. For example, a decline in livelihood opportunities associated with arable farming due to, say, declining soil fertility, which would then be interpreted as deagrarianisation, may be compensated by increased engagement with livestock or gathering of wild products, which would counter a deagrarianisation narrative. Indeed one cannot explain agriculture, or the demise of agriculture, with reference solely to arable fields. Loss of livestock due to disease or drought might prompt deeper engagement in gathering and selling of wild resources (Chagumaira et al., 2016), or an abandonment of arable cropping as manure and draught power are no longer available (Shackleton et al., 2013). Similarly, not working one's fields does not necessarily mean a total disengagement from agricultural fields and landscapes as a livelihood option, but also as a cultural and mental construct that provides a sense of place and individual and collective identity (Masterson, 2016).

1.1. Blurring boundaries

The significance of the blurring of categories lies, on the one hand, in the strategies that rural people use to make ends meet in circumstances for which the rural areas in South Africa are well known: poverty, inequality, aging populations, migrating youth, unemployment and the challenges of multi-locational livelihoods. As Twyman et al. (2004: 71) commented "Too often, in the quest to produce understandings of poverty and livelihoods, the complexity, incongruity and reality of day-to-day practices are overlooked". It is not just farming that keeps people afloat or in touch with local landscapes. On the other hand, the analysis of current land use practices underpins the need to theoretically refine and update our understanding of precisely what constitutes agriculture, and how agriculture is situated in both dynamic landscapes and in complex livelihoods. Livelihoods and landscapes change over time in response to local and external drivers as well as to the changing modalities of state interventions in the rural domain. This necessitates conceptually and empirically infusing a time dimension and a robust historical framing (Murray, 2002; Hebinck, 2007; Fay, 2009; Dahlberg, 2015). Rethinking what we mean by 'agriculture' entails broadening what is seen as 'the farm' to 'sites of production and consumption' to also include the encompassing physical and cultural landscape, utilised through harvesting or otherwise. This broadening frames farming and livelihoods as more robust and possibly more sustainable in the long run.

It is the continuous reassembling of the landscape that the deagrarianisation literature could be enriched with to fill the gap that historically rural livelihood diversification was largely between and within the land-based activities of arable agriculture and rearing cattle along with some off-farm cash generating strategies. It is the thrust of this paper to show that the reassembling varies in time and place and does not follow a linear pattern, although trends can be discerned. Unpacking this requires not only a necessary depth of understanding of local livelihoods and institutional processes, but also of local landscapes and natural capital as moulded by human interaction and interference, all within the broader contextual drivers and pressures. Thus, households vary the proportion of cash and non-cash household income generated by these landscape elements, as well as the nature and relative quantities of products from each element, for example the types and mix of crops grown or animals kept. This is not to ignore that some households may choose to specialise in specific, potentially more profitable sectors, which if successful for a period, provides them with sufficient income to accumulate capital reserves to weather most shocks and stresses (Sallu et al., 2010).

¹ The notion lived experience builds on the work by Lefebvre (2001). He distinguishes between conceived experiences (e.g. by planners), perceived (e.g. everyday life) and experienced (e.g. adapted). Together these result in the lived experience we empirically can investigate.

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