

ENVIRONMENTAL VIOLENCE

I. Introduction

(Note: At about the same time that we were preparing our 2002 New Ways seminar, on the theme of violence, Nancy Jacobs published her article on “The Great Bophuthatswana Donkey Massacre” in the *American Historical Review*. (April 2001) In the seminar we were hoping to do two things: we wanted to explore new scholarship on familiar events (memory and memorials in connection with the Holocaust and Stalinist Russia); and we wanted to see how scholars were treating violence in less familiar but perhaps more easily stereotyped areas outside the West (civil war and ethnic violence in Sri Lanka). Jacobs’ article suggested ways to address the second goal by extending the notion of violence to include attacks on animals and plants as well, and to focus on southern Africa. For our summary presentation of the seminar’s work, we have decided to divide out study of violence into two parts, treating the exciting new perspectives of environmental history, along with materials on memory and memorials, as two separate subjects. Here we present our material on Environmental Violence.)

As an isolated event, the deliberate slaughter of 10,000 donkeys by police forces acting in the name of the state appears as a particularly gruesome act of violence against the innocent. Even if the animals had been wild, and menacing human settlements, the proportions would have been outrageous – many innocent animals killed in order to eliminate a few vicious ones. When this event is set into an historical context that includes many similar events, and when many of those events are legitimized as scientifically sound policy, we enter the muddy waters of historical complexity. What kind of violence are we talking about? If official policy over a century consistently requires the slaughter of surplus animals and the eradication of pest weeds, on what grounds can we characterize such policy as violent?

Of course we are talking about perspective here: who stands to benefit when these policies are implemented, and who are the losers? If you were the owner of a massacred donkey, a culled head of cattle, a dog poisoned in an effort to conserve forest land, or a subsistence farmer making due in time of drought on a cactus plant that was eradicated in order to clear the land for intensive agriculture, you might have considered yourself a victim of state violence. That would require, though, that you had not been consulted, and did not give your consent to the action. When those caveats are introduced, we have to consider such issues as coercion, active and passive resistance, acquiescence, and collaboration, all options for those at the lower end of the power ratio,

and all to be found in the cases we study. Very quickly we have complicated the category of victim.

If you were not one of the losers, who else might you be? Who did these policies benefit, and how did they benefit them? If the people most directly affected by the actions were not consulted, who was? How were such policies formulated? What conditions made it possible for the policies, once formulated, to be actually carried out? These are some of the questions the new approaches to environmental history encourage you to ask, especially in the colonial setting. In a book length study, in which the donkey massacre figures as a final capping event, environmental historian Nancy Jacobs remarks that “Although structural inequalities are the major theme of South African history, environmental oppression has been too often absent from the master narrative.” (Jacobs, 2003, p 17) What purpose is served by the focus on environmental oppression? What sorts of complexity does it enable us to see?

The particular cases that we study here come from scholarly studies of areas and time periods in southern Africa and neighboring Madagascar: specifically, the Cape and Transkei regions of South Africa (17th, 18th, 19th c); southwest Madagascar (1920s and 1930s); Southern Rhodesia (1930s); and the South African homeland of Bophuthatswana (1983). The historical context is the conquest and expansion of Dutch, British, and French colonialism, and the peculiar version of postcolonialism that the South African state introduced into the homelands. Bophuthatswana became an independent homeland in 1977. It was governed by a policy of indirect rule through which a chief or headman, appointed by the white South African government and subject to its authority, had, in turn, authority over the natives in the homeland. In the scenarios that are narrated, the descendants of the pre-colonial inhabitants of these regions progressively lose water rights, access to land, food resources, the right to hunt in forests, and a multi-purpose resource (the donkey), who plowed, hauled, and provided fuel (dung), food, and milk. If read together, these narratives can appear like one endless and ultimately hopeless lament. Are there ways of reading them other than as fragments of one long tale of woe in which the powerless are consistently done in by the powerful?

If we cannot satisfactorily answer the question of why the colonial powers always seem to win, at least these stories help us to bracket the question of why while we pay attention to the historical specificity of what we are hearing about. We can look especially for revelations about human behavior and the analysis of how power works in a colonial setting. The scholars whose work is summarized here employ insights, theories and methodologies from social history and cultural studies to bring us close into the historical situations they reconstruct. In doing so, they draw on a vast archive that reveals the intimacy and detail of the colonial reach. Very little was left untouched in the lives of Africans by the succession and variety of colonial rulers, and it looks as though equally little must have been left unrecorded. Policies were invented, promoted, and implemented through paper transactions, and very little of what we read about cattle culling, the massacre of donkeys, the poisoning of dogs, or the eradication of cactus was uncontested. Certainly not all in the settler communities supported the more oppressive policies of the colonial state; and certainly not all Africans and Malagasy opposed policy initiatives that oppressed parts of their own populations. There are no monoliths pitted against each other here.

Nor is there anything in these pieces that offers insights into a supposed African traditional culture, immune to influences from the outside, and shaped by transcendent spiritual values. Rather, the way Jacobs sums up her own subjects in the Kuruman section of Bophuthatswana seems to apply to all those who are studied here: “Africans in the precolonial period,” Jacobs says, “neither lived in harmony with nor had control over their environment. What they did was work it with particular methods that were affected by colonial annexation.” (Jacobs, 2003, p. 18) In a similar vein with regard to colonial knowledge systems, Shutt maintains that the people who endowed African cattle with spiritual values were the Europeans who read the work of anthropologist Melville Herskovitz, not the Africans who owned the cattle, and sold when the price was good.

The knowledge systems that seem most relevant in the environmental history approach, if these sources are representative, are not so much ethnographic studies of African tribal culture and the like, but the common sense about the world that European settlers brought to southern Africa and Madagascar, and the various scientific discourses of conservation and agriculture that came to be influential in the late 19th century and throughout the 20th. The European settler belief in private property and settled, intensive agriculture coincided with the early missionary belief that Africans were lost souls, and the land itself needed redemption. Belief in redemption of the land through irrigation fed easily into the more secular view that civilization and surplus production for the market were one and the same. What is most interesting, and most provocative in the readings is the suggestion that these earlier ethnocentric European views accorded well with the aims of conservation and agricultural science, as these discourses became influential toward the end of the 19th century. How did it happen that science backed up policies that benefited the European settlers and confirmed them in their stereotypes of Africans? Why does there appear to be so much agreement between Dutch, British, and French views about Africans and Malagasy, sometimes across considerable time spans?

European views about Africans, which Jacobs calls “biased outsider depictions,” often tell us more about the observer than the observed. What can the environmental history approach tell us about the people who suffered oppression? Do we get any closer to how southern Africans and Malagasy made sense out of the European incursion? Jacobs’ book, in particular, offers some helpful guidelines to consider as we confront the imbalance in sources that the colonial enterprise produced. Against the colonial tendency to view the Africans they actually encountered as somehow less knowledgeable about their environment than their own African forebears, and certainly than Europeans like themselves, Jacobs comments that the people she studies are not living “a degraded version of what went before.” (Jacobs, 2003, p. 19) Her subjects, and the other groups studied by Shutt, Middleton and Tropp, as well as the earlier people alluded to in the study by Guelke and Shell, are pursuing a life style in difficult environmental conditions which colonial annexation made all but impossible. Does that leave room open for the view that through colonial annexation superior methods of scientific land use were introduced?

Certainly the question of whether European environmental policy had any beneficial effects in Africa and Madagascar is open for debate. Addressing the question would require, as suggested through the work here, a careful study of how supposedly scientific views were formulated and tested, and whether in the process, the people who actually worked the land were consulted on land use and animal husbandry. In cases

mentioned here, the conviction that natives were lazy and ignorant, as demonstrated in their pastoralism, extensive farming, and foraging practices, precluded the need for any consultation. In the absence of the kind of knowledge that people who used the land could have provided, settlers often practiced very shoddy science and were quickly proven wrong.

These up close studies provide opportunities to see colonialism for the trial and error negotiation practice that it often was. In so doing, they make it difficult to easily and quickly assign responsibility for the oppression that clearly was at the center of European colonialism in southern Africa and Madagascar. Does lack of a clear villain make colonial policies seem less oppressive, or less violent? Does recognition of historical complexity make us less willing to characterize oppressive policies as unjust?

II. The Vignettes

ENVIRONMENTAL VIOLENCE #1

WATER

Attention to water is a good place to start. It seems non-controversial to say that everywhere in the world people would have recognized the need for and use of water in their own daily lives and in connection with farming and raising livestock. Water – the need for it and the uses to which it is put – must be universal. How, then, is water significant in colonial situations?

In the case of the Khoikhoi and Khoisan peoples of what, under Dutch and British colonialism became South Africa, water is itself not the issue. What became the issue in the mid-17th century, and remained, for over a hundred years, the central issue in the relationship between Dutch settlers and the pastoral and hunter-gather peoples who lived on the land the Dutch moved into, was legality: who had the right to claim the land that had water resources on it, and who could defend their claim against opposition.

The argument put forward by Guelke and Shell has to do with an understanding of the nature of the land that became contested; of the ways of surviving on that land practiced by two different groups of Africans, the pastoralist Khoikhoi and the hunter-gatherer Khoisan; of landholding practices introduced by the Dutch; of the legal technologies the Dutch also brought with them; and of the historiography of the area in which a few hundred Dutch were able to grab land from an estimated 50,000 native peoples.

In 1647, when a Dutch ship was wrecked off the coast of the Cape of Good Hope in southern Africa, the Dutch had already been rounding the Cape to trade in the Indian Ocean for half a century. Provisioning the ships for the long sail from the Netherlands to India and beyond had always been a problem. The shipwreck victims were not rescued for a year, plenty of time to discover the potential of the area for building a provisioning station. In 1652 the first Dutch settlers arrived, and the area remained a Dutch settlement until a brief British occupation during the Napoleonic wars in 1795-1802. After another short period of Dutch rule, the colony once again became British in 1806. When the British took over, the population of the Cape Colony was about 35,000, half of who were white settlers and half African slaves. The slave population was not, however, primarily made up of Khoikhoi and Khoisan peoples, but of West Africans who had been purchased by the Dutch. From the first days of settlement, the Dutch had traded with the Khoikhoi. As they extended their territorial claims, they continued to recognize the Khoikhoi as an independent people, and when they needed a bigger labor supply than the one they had from Europe, they imported slaves from West Africa. This is not a simple story of conquest and enslavement, or even, at least much of the time, of overt hostility, but rather of gradual encroachments over a hundred and thirty year period which Khoikhoi and Khoisan were unable to deflect.

Was the problem in the nature of the land itself? The land, Guelke and Shell tell us, is “rugged, immense, and largely arid,...of imposing mountains and vast plains.” (804) Rainfall is irregular and unreliable, and thus there are frequent draughts; but there is an adequate supply of ground water to support livestock as long as the herds are moved around. The Khoikhoi pastoralists, with their large estimated population of 50,000 on the eve of the Dutch arrival, divided themselves into autonomous groups and followed a sufficiently complex migratory pattern that the Dutch could never figure out, nor could the Dutch predict when who would arrive where. What apparently was clear to the Dutch was that Khoikhoi did not guard water sources that they weren’t currently using, and Guelke and Shell tell us that although Khoikhoi individually owned their livestock, rights to water and land were held in common.

To this arid and vast land the Dutch brought habits developed in a temperate climate with adequate rainfall, and the concept of private property fortified by a legal structure that favored owners of land. What did they think about the Khoikhoi and their livestock-raising practices? Guelke and Shell encourage us not to speculate, but to focus on what the documentary record can tell us. The initial intention of the first Dutch settlers was to set up and fortify a provisioning station through intensive agriculture and trade with Khoikhoi for cattle and sheep, and to establish boundaries between the Dutch camp and the native land. When labor was needed the settlers petitioned the officers of the Dutch trading company, the VOC, to provide them with slaves from elsewhere. When Khoikhoi did attack the Dutch settlement, the Dutch fought back, and because of superior firepower, they generally won the day. It wasn’t until the second generation of Dutch settlers, however, that these Europeans began to transgress their own boundaries and venture into Khoikhoi land. How did they know where to go once they entered a vast, unknown, and to them featureless expanse? Guelke and Shell tell us that Dutch trekkers would follow migrating Khoikhoi and see where they settled their herds, knowing that the

place would have water, and then returned to the settlement to enter an official claim to that land. Was the system corrupt through and through? Did everyone in the Dutch community know what was happening? This kind of close scholarship, attentive to the record, is restrained; and Guelke and Shell do not ascribe corrupt motives to the Dutch across the board. Was the legal system of granting deeds to people who had surveyed and laid claim to land outside the settlement based on awareness that Khoikhoi used that land in their yearly migrations and would be displaced? Was it ever the Dutch intention to drive Khoikhoi off the land? While we cannot answer these questions, we can look at the effects of Dutch practice.

According to the archival record, which constitutes the main source for Guelke and Shell, only one Khoikhoi ever used the legal system to make a land claim, and he lost the land after a few years. The Khoikhoi did not, or could not, use the legal system. Individuals had to make decisions, once they realized they could not get rid of the Dutch, and between 1652, when the first Dutch settlers arrived, and 1780, when the expanding Dutch reached the lands of the Xhosa agriculturalists, various Khoikhoi had chosen to continue on the move, further and further away from their traditional water sources, until they ran into other African groups who prevented their continued movement; to attempt to continue their way of life by working part of the time for the Dutch and the other part on their own; or to give up their livestock altogether and become dependent on Dutch employment. While they, at least, had these choices, the Khoisan, who knew nothing of either clientage or livestock raising, had only the choice to resist. They did, and the Dutch, Guelke and Shell tell us, used their superior firepower to kill the men and enslave the women and children.

The European infiltration, the authors tell us in their conclusion, proceeded “one spring or *spruijt* at a time” (824) and over several generations. The geographic area is meticulously defined, and we are not encouraged to generalize from this study to Dutch or European colonial policies in general. What, then, are we to make of this account? If it does involve violence, which it surely seems to, how are we to understand the kind of violence involved? And is this a narrative of one powerful group imposing its own worldview over another, less powerful group? Added to these imponderables, is the problem of the historiographical record itself, to which Guelke and Shell are also addressing themselves.

We return to the question: how did a comparative handful of Europeans wrest land from 50,000 inhabitants? Was it through gaining possession of the livestock of the pastoral peoples, thus attacking their livelihood? Was it because a smallpox epidemic in the early 18th century that decimated the Khoikhoi population? Was it because the Khoikhoi resisted and were killed off by superior weapons? These are explanations that have been given by other scholars. Guelke and Shell reject those explanations in favor of their own sense that the Dutch gained control of the area “one spring at a time”, using the law they had brought with them to substantiate their individual claims.

ENVIRONMENTAL VIOLENCE #2

DOGS

Hunting dogs in South Africa were often bred and trained to enhance very specific characteristics that would make them especially useful to their owners. Not only were dogs bred and trained to guard stock by day and houses by night, but special breeds could be trained to “herd differently colored cattle according to the way their owners whistled.” They could drive and track game, “root out game from forest cover,” and catch wild animals. They were “valued herders, policemen and guardians”, and at least one of them slept on “a dried ox hide, hair uppermost, placed at the top end of the hut and next to his master’s resting place.” Why did British colonizers in the newly annexed Transkei region of the Cape Colony in the 1880s and 1890s institute a policy of trying to eliminate the African hunting dog? And how did the Africans whose dogs were attacked react to the new colonial policies?

Here we have questions of motive, and how to impute it, and of response and how to analyze it. In instituting a policy of forest preservation that involved laying poison, often resulting in the death of dogs, what were the colonizers trying to do? Were they consciously trying to impoverish Africans and drive them into the growing migrant labor force that Cecil Rhodes was organizing in the Cape Colony? When Africans responded, through petitions to the government, avoidance of laws, or violence against colonial enforcers, were they resisting specific and discreet policies, or were they making a more inclusive protest? How can issues like these be addressed? How does the historical study of the ways in which people interact with the environment and each other over environmental issues help us to understand such complex issues as motive and response in history?

In attempting to assess British colonial motivation in the treatment of African hunting dogs in the Transkei in the 1890s and after, Jacob Tropp tells us that the land was newly annexed, and policies already in place in the larger Cape Colony, to the south, were extended to the new area. By the 1890s the British were themselves aware that colonial expansion had an impact on the African environment, and they wanted to conserve the Transkei for its natural resources. Tropp tells us that they also wanted to create a hunting reserve for white sportsmen. What did they think about the Africans who inhabited the regions they were interested in? Since the area was inhabited, it is difficult for us to grasp the British perspective enough to enable us to figure out why and how the British could have held the views that they apparently did.

First, consider that the British colonizers never constituted a group all holding the same views in exactly the same way at the same time. In the period Tropp writes about there were conservationists representing the scientific incursion, who brought European ideas about how to manage forests to the situation in Transkei; there were European settlers who got along well with African neighbors, and those who did not; there were colonial administrators in the region and in Cape Town, who wanted to avoid starting trouble by

causing “natives” to rebel against laws; there were forest officers who were supposed to enforce new provisions, but were not numerous enough; and of course there were missionaries, who represented a range of opinion. There were policy makers in Cape Town, and then there were colonial officials in London. The colonizing society was certainly not monolithic; nonetheless, there were commonalities.

In a general way, as Tropp suggests, there was a land policy aimed at bringing the land under administrative control; and administrative control included scientific ideas about agriculture and forest management as well as about settlement by colonists. It is possible to get some idea of how Africans fitted into this general policy by looking, as Tropp does, at the language colonial administrators and white settlers used to describe African people and African hunting dogs in relation to their own intentions: colonizers save animals and plants from “abuse” and “destruction”; Africans are “licentious” and “defiant” in their attitude toward colonial policies, and they cannot be trusted; they are poachers and trespassers. African dogs are “vicious”, “wretched,” and “uncivilized.” They are “curs” and “vermin.”

European attitudes toward African interaction with the environment in South Africa can be traced back to the beginnings of contact in the 17th century. Whether Dutch or British, Europeans had ideas about how to use land that were based on ideas about private property and intensive farming. By the late 19th century, Europeans also had ideas about conserving natural resources, especially forests, and protecting animal species which were based on what Europeans thought were sound and universal scientific principles. In addition, as Tropp mentions, by the 1890s in Britain the dog had undergone a major transformation, from hunting hound to household pet; new breeds were developed, pedigreed hunting dogs like the beagle were highly valued and pampered, and in the place of the ownerless mutt begging for food in low class taverns was the civilized Victorian bourgeois lap dog. No wonder the British colonizers disliked the hard working African hunting dog!

Still, dislike does not necessarily lead to policy. In the case of the Transkei, settlers and conservationists’ goals of preserving the forest of the region as a natural resource and a hunting preserve for themselves were successful in having laws passed; but Africans would not pay any attention to the laws, and there were never enough officials to enforce them. Poisoning the Africans’ hunting dogs was in some senses a last ditch measure, and not one that all in the colonizing community agreed with. Nevertheless, poisoned meat was put out in the forest, and hunting dogs did die from eating it.

One of the major reasons for why environmental historians like Jacob Tropp are able to probe issues of such local interest as this one is because the British colonizers kept minute administrative records. Archival sources that Tropp looked at include records from the Agricultural Department in Cape Town, numerous Chief Magistrates’ reports, reports from district officers, annual reports from regional officers, reports from the Chief Conservator of Forests and from Native Affairs’ officers; reports from Frontier managers, and reports from Commissions on Crown Forests. Such a listing also gives a sense of the administrative structure of the Cape Colony, as the territory it encompassed expanded

through annexations in the late 19th century. It took an extensive colonial bureaucracy to run a colony. All these sources, collectively, can tell a great deal about how the colonial project was imagined and, to some extent, realized. But what can they tell about such questions as how Africans who were being colonized used the land they lived on and off of, and how they reacted to intrusive colonial policy initiatives?

Africans tend to enter much of the colonial archive as deviants of one sort or another, through outright refusal to obey the law, or out of ignorance. They destroy without conserving, they own little, and they have to be taught how to farm. The archival record also includes materials that can be mined to give a more nuanced view of African views of how their lives are being changed through processes of colonial expansion. In addition, historians' willingness to pay attention to a much wider range of behavior than used to be thought relevant for historical reconstruction and interpretation can help to release Africans from representational constraints in order to reveal them as historical agents in their own right. In the case of the poisoning and shooting of hunting dogs, the question is how did the Africans interpret what was happening to them.

In numerous protests lodged with colonial officials after the poisoning campaign had been introduced, Africans focused on three issues: the intentional placement of the poison; the use of meat and bread for bait; and the danger to children. Had the program been intentional? Did colonial officials intend to eliminate African hunting dogs?

Tropp argues that specific references to dogs in complaints about the poison have to be seen as part of a larger picture which appears in the official record as rumors circulating among the "natives." There are rumors about traders and government officials being in league to sell poisoned goods to Africans in the European shops frequented by Africans; rumors about inoculation programs for children and livestock being really aimed at the spread of disease so that herds will be destroyed and men will be forced to join the migrant labor force; rumors about the government poisoning of water supplies during periods of drought; rumors about government bewitching the landscape. How do these rumors stack up as explanations of policy when put against rational and scientific arguments about disease eradication, pest control and forest conservation? When one group of headmen complained to a forest official that poison laid out in the forest was killing dogs and threatening children, the official responded by saying that the poison was only targeted for wildlife and vermin. No doubt his words were accurate, but when hunting dogs did die from eating poisoned meat, other officials remarked on how effective the poison was in keeping African hunters out of forests reserved for white sportsmen.

Is it accurate to say that colonizers were bewitching the landscape? What did Africans who used the term actually mean by it? How can environmental historians help us here? Tropp says that the colonial poison policy did have the effect of limiting African hunting in forests at the very time when Africans were experiencing increased pressure from drought, disease, and added tax burdens. Government officials did use sprays on the ground to destroy locusts and other vermin, and in some instances nearby water supplies were polluted. Were they guilty, as Africans said, of "official treachery and sorcery"?

Did the language of witchcraft and sorcery embody an accurate representation of what it was like to live under expanding British rule in the Transkei?

ENVIRONMENTAL VIOLENCE #3

CACTUS

Until the middle of the 1920s Malagasy pastoralists in southwestern Madagascar lived under environmental conditions very similar to those of the Khoikhoi and Tswana peoples in southern Africa. The land was semi-arid and to make the best of it, Malagasys practiced swidden farming (in which farmers move yearly from one field to another), cattle herding, and foraging. During the dry season, and especially during periods of extended drought, the cactus plant *opuntia* (also called prickly pear and *raketa*) provided both food and water to people and cattle. In 1924, under the direction of an amateur scientist and authorized by the French colonial governor general, an insect, the cochineal, was imported into the region of the pastoralists. Within five years the cochineal and its descendants had destroyed all the cactus in the region, and in the following year famine raged throughout the area. Many starved and those who did not went to join the colonial labor force working the sugar plantations in the north of the island. With the eradication of the cactus, the life of Malagasy pastoralists was also eradicated. How and why did such a seemingly violent event occur?

From the perspective of French colonialism, the eradication of the Malagasy cactus was a most desirable outcome, whether that outcome had been specifically planned or not. French colons in Madagascar shared with Dutch and British settlers in South Africa the view that settled agriculture, fortified in dry regions through irrigation, represented civilization, while moving about on the land was a sign of “native” backwardness, laziness, and ignorance. The land that supported the way of life of the Malagasy pastoralists appears in French colonial documents as itself anarchic and uncivilized. Could such a landscape be left untouched in a progressive French colony?

Though the effects of what the introduction of the cochineal would be were not known through experimental trials beforehand, and though no studies of the economic role the cactus played in the lives of the inhabitants of the region had been undertaken, still, eradication meant that the land could be settled by colonial farmers, and natives could join the labor force. Both of these were goals of the French colonial administration under the reforming Governor General Marcel Olivier, who took up his post at the same time that the cochineal arrived in the Androy region where the cactus grew. Yet, as Karen Middleton tells us, the motive and the desire do not exactly mesh. Was the cactus destroyed by accident, or by design? If it was by accident, were the French colonial officials guilty even though they did not know precisely what would happen?

The French had been in Madagascar officially since 1894, long enough for conflicting policy directives to have been developed and for the island and its natural environment to

be incorporated into the French scientific endeavor to understand the natural world. Though of course no one knew it at the time, the fate of the Malagasy cactus, and of the people for whom it was such a valuable resource, hung in the balance between proponents of a native policy, which would have left untouched the lives and economies of the island's inhabitants, and advocates for the incorporation of Madagascar into the French civilizing mission, which meant reorganizing and restructuring the island economy and society to conform to standards of French rationality. Within the scientific community, these divisions were between those who advocated pure science, which meant research with as little interference in the environment as possible, and applied science, which meant instituting measures to improve farming, for instance, on the basis of supposedly proven scientific principles. Under Governor General Olivier, the winners were the civilizing mission and applied science. Were these policy designs in themselves violent? Since there were many among the French colons in Madagascar who did not agree with Olivier and his policies, is he the primary culprit rather than the French in general? Since scientists in Paris, not Olivier, were responsible for the shift from pure science to applied science in the colonies, are they also culpable? Since Olivier could not carry out his policies alone, are those who helped and advised him also responsible for what happened, not only to the cactus, but to the people who suffered in the famine following cactus eradication?

Along with Olivier, three figures emerge from Middleton's study as major players in the drama of Malagasy cactus eradication. Perrier de la Bathie had arrived in Madagascar in 1896 and over the years, of prospecting for gold, planting and variously making a living, he had become well known in official circles on the island and in scientific circles in France. He fancied himself an amateur scientist and was an avid collector of Malagasy flora. He also fancied himself knowledgeable in agricultural matters, and to him the land where the cactus grew was prime country for farming once the offending plant had been removed and irrigation introduced. De la Bathie was the person responsible for sending a batch of cochineal to the cactus region. Was he responsible for the devastation, human and environmental, that followed? Georges Petit was a scientist at the Museum of Natural History in Paris who was in regular communication with de la Bathie, and their relationship was typical of the colonial relationship in general, in which the colonial area served as a resource for the metropolitan center. De la Bathie provided Petit with data that was meant to be incorporated into larger scientific hypotheses being formulated in Paris. Petit supported de la Bathie in his views of how profitable the southwest corner of Madagascar could become, once the prickly pear was removed and irrigation introduced. Karen Middleton's third actor in this drama is Raymond Decary, another amateur scientist who had come to Madagascar in 1916 as a soldier and stayed on as a colonial administrator. Unlike de la Bathie, however, Decary represented that part of French colonial society that favored native policy. After finishing his service in the army, Decary served as a colonial official in the area of Androy, home of the cactus *opuntia*, and he had some knowledge of how the plant was used by inhabitants of the semi-arid region. He was a strong opponent of the introduction of the cochineal to eradicate this valuable resource.

Olivier, as Governor General, was responsible for articulating a reform policy in which colonial settlement of the Androy region and incorporation of former inhabitants into the migrant labor force was desirable. De la Bathie was responsible for advocating cactus eradication, promoting the belief (which turned out not to be true) that once cleared of prickly pear, the area would be suitable for irrigation and productive farming, and for sending the cochineal from the north of Madagascar to the cactus region. Petit was responsible for conferring scientific authority on the projects of de la Bathie. And what about Decary? He was not alone in opposing the eradication program, but he is the actor Middleton concentrates on, since it was actually his earlier actions that made possible the introduction of the virulent cochineal into the area. Decary, apparently, had toyed with the idea of cultivating cochineal for their red dye, and a friend on the French colony of Reunion had sent him some specimens. It was from these specimens that the cochineal de la Bathie sent to the Androy were harvested. What, then, was Decary guilty of?

Middleton wants us to recognize that in colonial matters there is no necessary straight line from the formulation of colonial policy to its completion, and no easy way to assign motive. Olivier could formulate as many policies as he wanted to, but he needed people and funds, and consensus from officials in Paris and other French settlers in Madagascar to carry them out, which he did not have at the time when the cochineal began its devastation. At the time, no measures had been introduced by the French colonial government to elicit the views of Malagasy natives, and there was no structure through which they could lodge complaints against government policy. De la Bathie and Petit seem by today's standards of practice to have been guilty of improper action by not conducting trials before the introduction of the pest and for not carrying out an environmental study of the cactus before participating in its eradication. Yet, as Middleton tells us, the 1920s was a time of indecision in French colonial science, as proponents of pure science and advocates of applied science in the empire debated what approach was desirable. Only in the 1930s, too late for the cactus, did the applied science party triumph, and institute guidelines which might have mitigated the results of eradication. It seems unfair to blame Decary for anything, and yet he was responsible for introducing the voracious insect in the first place.

Middleton does not blame DeCary, but lets him stand in her analysis for the element of contingency that muddles our attempts to reduce history to a story of good guys and bad guys. French colonial policy, however, is not left completely off the hook. On the issue of responsibility Middleton is clear. French colonial desire was to transform Madagascar into a manageable arena for French settlement and the production of wealth. What was not clear was whether and how such policies could be realized.

ENVIRONMENTAL VIOLENCE #4

CATTLE

In the official state mandated cattle culling on Gutu and Victoria Reserves in Southern Rhodesia in 1938, Africans, many unwillingly, sold off some 30,000 head of cattle. The cattle were herded off to a near-by meatpacking factory that specialized in “low-grade cattle,” and it is not at all clear whether they were allowed adequate grazing opportunities on the way. Was this an act of violence on the part of the colonial state exercised against cattle and their owners?

Is cattle culling (reducing the size of a herd by eliminating some of the animals) an exercise in violence? The practice has scientific justification, based on studies of how large a herd can be supported on a given parcel of land, and prior to 1938 it was a regular state sanctioned practice in Southern Rhodesia. What attracted historian Allison Shutt’s attention about the cattle culling in 1938 is that some very vocal people in the white community objected to the way the state carried out the policy, even accusing the native affairs commissioner in charge on the Reserves of cattle theft, and precipitating a crisis of authority in the colony. Before things cooled down, the parliament in London and the press in Southern Rhodesia had become involved, and in exonerating native commissioner Eric Hulley, the three white critics, two missionaries and one wife of a native affairs commissioner, were publicly vilified. What were the issues in this case, and what does it tell about the exercise of authority in a colonial setting?

First, did the Africans, whose cattle were culled, consider state policy to be violent? The cattle themselves, of course, are least able to provide us with their views of what cattle culling meant. The Africans who sold their cattle in conformity with state directives are also largely silent in Shutt’s analysis of the event, but there were plenty of people vying for the right to speak for them. Most interesting among these voices, I think, was Mrs. Rose Le Noir Comberbach, the commissioner’s wife, who felt that she knew and understood Africans because, as she said, she had lived among them and they had told her their secrets. Whether she could actually speak or understand the languages in which Africans would have spoken to her or not was not made clear in the hearings. Mrs. Comberbach believed that Africans had a special and unique attachment to their cattle, even endowing them with spiritual qualities, and thus found parting with them painful and difficult. They would only sell their cattle under harsh duress, she thought; and when asked in the public hearing why, in that case, Africans had not complained about the culling, Mrs. Comberbach explained that they were too afraid of state reprisals.

How would Mrs. Comberbach, or any white settler for that matter, be likely to know about African attitudes toward their cattle? Interestingly, Mrs. Comberbach was not alone in thinking that African cattle had spiritual meaning, and the source for the belief in the white community was an article by anthropologist Melville Herskovitz, published in the journal *American Anthropologist* in 1926, twelve years before the crisis over cattle culling in Southern Rhodesia. In that very influential piece Herskovitz had maintained

that East African behavior toward cattle was economically irrational, since even if on the point of destitution, they would not sell them. Apparently, Shutt tells us, Herskovitz' views about the African "cattle complex" had become the common wisdom among native affairs commissioners, and would certainly have been familiar to Mrs. Comberbach. Why, we are forced to wonder today, were the views of an American anthropologist thought to be authoritative enough so that the Africans who owned the particular cattle in question did not have to be consulted? Did it not occur to anyone in the white community, even the critics of state policy, to ask Africans how they dealt with the all too common question of scarcity of resources on the land? Shutt's own view on this question can be guessed in her title, "The Settlers' Cattle Complex..." through which she endows the white community with the irrationality they wanted to impute to the Africans. Were the officials who mandated it and carried it out irrational? Wasn't cattle culling scientifically justified? What kind of knowledge would Africans have had comparable in authority to European scientific knowledge?

Along with the belief that cattle culling was scientifically justified, colonial officials in Southern Rhodesia also accepted the belief, commonly expressed in colonial circles in South Africa as well, that Africans did not know how to maintain the land they lived on. Through over-grazing, itself due to over-crowding the land with more cattle than it could sustain, Africans participated in the process of land degradation, so colonial officials maintained. Official wisdom was that only Europeans had the larger picture in mind, hence there was no need for African input. The only reason for holding back on immediate implementation of any scientifically backed policy was fear that it would foment "native" unrest.

Along with the belief in the African cattle complex and the view that Africans did not know how to conserve the land went a third attitude strongly held in white settler society: that Africans were cruel to animals out of ignorance, while Europeans knew how to love and nurture them. Southern Rhodesia had a chapter of the S.P.C.A. (Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals), which, Shutt suggests, gave white women in the colony a place where they could voice their own opinions about African behavior outside the official circles dominated by their husbands and fathers. After Mrs. Comberbach and the two missionaries, Reverends A.S. Cripps and A.C. Jackson, had brought charges against Eric Hulley for stealing African cattle, the S.P.C.A. sponsored an essay contest on the African treatment of animals. The winning essays appeared in the *Bantu Mirror*, which Shutt identifies as "the state-funded newspaper for the emergent African middle-class." Published essays by Africans voiced opinions about overstocking as "a sin contrary to God's order," and Africans as "simply ignorant of their own cruelty" in their treatment of animals. Such support for the official position on cattle culling coming from Africans bolstered the paper's stance in support of state policy. Did such views reflect those of the people whose cattle were culled?

Some voices of Africans on the Reserves come through in the archive of the official inquiry, which seems to have been largely aimed at challenging the credibility of Comberbach, Cripps and Jackson; but they are muted with such qualifiers as "We are afraid to say a lot..." No voice, not even that of Mrs. Comberbach, who claimed that

“...it has been the interest of these native people which has made my life bearable in this world,” questioned the legitimacy of cattle culling as sound environmental policy.

Was there a general consensus, on and off the reserves in Southern Rhodesia in 1938, that cattle culling was beneficial for all in the colony? Hardly; it was certainly not beneficial for the cattle, and though the Africans most affected seem to have been reluctant to speak out against the policy, Shutt hints that they did have ways of resisting. Joni Ratisai, for instance, was loud and impolite as his ox was being taken, and the official in charge hit him. In his testimony later, when asked why he had said he had not complained, he said he was afraid of being arrested. Were the British colonizers in Southern Rhodesia running a police state?

Whatever we may think about the scientific justification for eliminating some cattle in the belief that you are benefiting others, it does seem that there is more at stake in this event than the lives of livestock. Why were the officials making policy about African animals in the first place? Why were the views of American anthropologists relevant? Why did some Africans think other Africans were so ignorant that they didn't know when they were being cruel? Why did some Europeans feel so certain that they could understand Africans? Is always speaking for others, and never letting them speak for themselves a form of violence?

Shutt clues us into the big picture at the very beginning of her essay, before she gives us enough of the knitty gritty to complicate the picture. “Historians of Africa have long realized that the control of animals was just as much a part of colonial rule as was the control of people,” she says. Controlling animals, in this case culling cattle, was part of the overall policy of managing people's movements and alienating land from African to European hands. The people whose cattle were culled had already been moved on to reserves which restricted them to much smaller space than they had lived in before; and as the space was progressively chiseled away Africans were accused of degrading the land through allowing over-grazing, and of cruelty to animals who did not have enough to eat. After these conditions had been established, science was called in to justify reducing the number of African cattle on the reduced amount of land.

ENVIRONMENTAL VIOLENCE #5

DONKEYS

In the early 1980s there was a severe drought in the independent black African homeland of Bophuthatswana. In early 1983 the state ordered the reduction of the donkey population in the area. To carry out the order, trucks of armed soldiers arrived in the Kuruman region; without getting out of their trucks the soldiers opened fire on any donkeys they saw, including four that were pulling a loaded cart. By the time the shooting was over as many as 20,000 donkeys had been killed. People whose donkeys were killed considered the massacre to be the worst manifestation of apartheid they had

experienced. Why, especially under state sanction, did such a ghastly event take place? What could possibly have been the state's motive in slaughtering so many donkeys?

Animals, suggests historian Nancy Jacobs, can be considered as historical subjects, on the same terms environmental historians have introduced for considering the environment itself as an historical subject. The donkeys of Kuruman region in Bophuthatswana suffered terribly in the mass shooting. Eye-witnesses reported that the soldiers did not even take aim, just firing randomly into the gatherings of donkeys, and shooting until the last animal dropped. Jacobs asks us to view these donkeys as particularly disadvantaged subaltern subjects. What, then, is their story? As Jacobs reconstructs it, it is a tale of class conflict in which Bophuthatswana elites, who owned cattle and had friends in high places, were trying to break into the competitive beef market, and acted to advance their own interests at the expense of poor subsistence farmers and laborers for whom donkeys were a valuable resource.

The official desire to promote the raising of beef cattle had been strong for some time before the 1980s drought, and donkey culling, with scientific backing, had been practiced before. The issue in 1983 was one of excess: donkeys were slaughtered indiscriminately, and the state made no attempt to recompense the owners. The state bureaucracy in Bophuthatswana shared with the South African bureaucracy in general the belief that African subsistence farmers degraded the land through over-grazing and over population of animals. Moreover, donkeys were thought to be less valuable than cattle. They ate up the grass that might support cattle; they endangered traffic by walking on roads and refusing to get out of the way of on-coming cars and trucks; they reproduced without any restraint; and they were ill cared for by the owners, if indeed they had owners. Needless to say, the owners of the donkeys did not agree with the official discourse. For the owners, donkeys were hard and useful workers: they helped plow fields, served to transport people and goods, provided meat when food was scarce, produced dung which could be used in building, and gave milk which was especially good for sick children. Many of the people who eked out a living with the help of donkeys before the 1983 massacre had once been pastoralists in this semi-arid region of South Africa. Since the beginnings of European colonization in 1896 their ancestors had been progressively confined to smaller and smaller parcels of land. When the area was granted independence in 1977, the political changes did not benefit the mass of the people, but rather served to strip them further of any legal rights they might have claimed as inhabitants of South Africa. For people whose parents and grandparents might well have herded cattle, the donkey was a lowly but useful substitute in the harsh conditions of the homeland. Furthermore, many of the people who kept donkeys were women, who did not even have access to Bophuthatswana chiefs and headmen. These chiefs and headmen, appointees of the South African government, were among the only people who prospered in the homeland. They were the beneficiaries of the South African government's "Betterment" policy, introduced in the 1930s, which encouraged farmers to produce for the larger market.

As excessive as it was, the slaughter of donkeys with the official sanction of the state fit into what Jacobs calls the "received wisdom" of environmental policy in South Africa.

Even before formal colonization, in the late 1800s, missionaries in the area had voiced the view that Africans were ignorant of how to properly use the land. The pastoral way of life, in which people moved with the herds, did minimal farming, and foraged when necessary, did not measure up to the settled agriculture which early European settlers in the region considered the mark of civilization. Along with African ignorance, according to this scenario, went land degradation: Africans seemed to pay no attention to issues of over-grazing and the like, brought to settlers' attention through the development of the science of conservation. According to the "received wisdom" about African land use, Africans themselves were responsible, if not for the drought of the 1980s, then for the condition of the land that made the drought so terrible. The land was practically overtaken by bush, where grass had been, and the reason, according to the official discourse, was over grazing and over population of animals. In the decades since the 1950s the number of cattle in the Kuruman region had actually decreased, but the number of donkeys had risen exponentially. According to official reasoning, then, donkeys were responsible for the drastic situation the elite cattlemen found themselves in in 1983.

Only in the 1990s, says Jacobs, have historians, natural scientists, and social scientists begun to refute the premises of the degradation discourse that had been at the center of South African land policy for a century. Mainstream ecologists in the past, Jacobs informs us, favored a crisis approach, concentrating on immediate rather than long term environmental changes. These new approaches, in which scholars draw on indigenous knowledge as well as non-climax ecology, are disproving the "received wisdom" about "inexorable linear processes of decline." Belief in those "linear processes of decline" as part of state land policy, has been so costly to so many Africans, even as it has served the interests of a few.

III.

What more can we learn?

(Group develops this part)

Possible illustrations:

- Maps of Dutch expansion

- Chronological chart of European incursions: Portuguese, Dutch, British

- Dutch engravings of Cape Town in the 17th and 18th centuries

- Landscape pictures of the land

- Photographs of "springs"

Contact Peter Vale as source for photos.

