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## The Wildlife Economy and Agrarian Transformation in the Context of the Deepening Land Question in South Africa

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## Abstract

The increase in wildlife ranching (game farming) has spawned a number of issues surrounding the character and trajectory of the private wildlife ranching sector in relation to local and global contexts. Wildlife resources are anchored on land which is subject to fierce debate given the recent passing of a parliamentary motion of 'expropriation of land without compensation' as part of the means to redressing the persistent skewed ownership of land in South Africa. This is amidst increased investment in the wildlife economy witnessed through the deepening of the supply and demand value chains based on wildlife on privately owned land. This development in the wildlife economy is backed by tacit government support through recognition of wildlife ranching as an agricultural activity by the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and the recent adoption of the Biodiversity Economy Strategy by the Department of Environmental Affairs. The development of the wildlife economy is also in line with massive investment leading to rapid growth of agribusiness in South Africa that is also spreading throughout the African continent to the extent of land grabs. This paper seeks to explore the role and influence of the emerging wildlife economy in shaping South Africa's deepening agrarian question. The paper adopts an institutional approach incorporating a theory of access by Jesse Ribot and Nancy Peluso in analysing the developments in the wildlife economy in the context of the broad agrarian sector. Using documentary evidence and in-depth interviews of key players linked to the private wildlife ranching sector, the paper concludes that wildlife capital seem to have forged to sway the agrarian question in its favour through discourses of the need to respect property rights and not disrupting the current levels of agricultural production. However, the growing populist call for transformation in the wildlife economy as part of the broad agrarian question is starting to rattle this discourse. It remains to be seen how far the transformative interventions stipulated in the Biodiversity Economy Strategy and the broad measures around land reform will go to shape the trajectory of the much needed transformation in South Africa's agrarian question.

## Keywords

Wildlife; Biodiversity Economy Strategy; Land; Agrarian; Transformation; South Africa

## Acronyms

ABSA	Amalgamated Bank of South Africa
ANC	African National Congress
BES	Biodiversity Economy Strategy
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
DAFF	Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
DLA	Department of Land Affairs
DRDLR	Department of Rural Development and Land Reform
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEAR	Growth, Employment and Redistribution Strategy
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
GEG	Global Environmental Governance
NDP	National Development Plan
TEI	Transformative Enabling Intervention
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNCSD	United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development

## 1. Introduction

The increase in wildlife ranching (also referred to as game farming) in South Africa has spawned a number of issues surrounding the character and trajectory of the private wildlife ranching sector in relation to local and global contexts (Spierenburg, Steenkamp and Wels, 2008; Kamuti, 2014; Spierenburg and Brooks, 2014). The phenomenal growth in the wildlife ranching sector has been characterised by transformations from livestock production to wildlife based production, a trend which was noted since the 1960s, growing exponentially since the 1990s to the current levels (Smith and Wilson, 2002; Hearne, Santika and Goodman, 2008; Brink, Cameron, Coetzee, Currie, Fabricius, Hattingh, Schmidt, and Watson, 2011; Snijders, 2012; Kamuti, 2017, 2018). Wildlife resources are anchored on land (Gray and Teels, 2006; Snijders, 2012, 2014) which is subject to fierce debate given the recent passing of a parliamentary motion of 'expropriation of land without compensation' as part of the drive to redressing the persistent skewed ownership of land in South Africa (Kamuti, 2017, 2018). Land, with its wildlife resources, is a focus of this study and is seen as part of 'space' that in turn "is often regarded as the fundamental stuff of geography" (Thrift, 2009: 95). In the discipline of geography, space is no longer seen "as a fixed and absolute container within which the world proceeds" but instead is conceptualised "as a co-production of those proceedings, as a process in process" (Thrift, 2009: 95). Space is a contested domain, and we can examine the social construction of space and its inherent social relations (Harvey, 1990; Kaal, 2015). For example, uneven geographical development has been experienced due to fundamental changes in the capitalist system (Neves and Igoe, 2012).

The current South African debates concerning land are happening at a time when increased investment in the wildlife economy witnessed through the entrenchment of the supply and demand value chains based on wildlife on privately owned land (ABSA, 2015; Department of Environmental Affairs, 2015). These developments in the wildlife economy are backed by tacit government support through recognition of wildlife ranching as an agricultural activity by the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (Kamuti, 2016) and the recent adoption of the Biodiversity Economy Strategy (BES) by the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) (2015). The development of the wildlife economy is also in line with massive investment leading to rapid growth of agribusiness in South Africa (Oberem, 2016, 2017) that is also spreading throughout the African continent to the extent of land grabs (Hall, 2011; White, Borras Jr., Hall, Scoones and Wolford, 2012; Lavers, 2012; Costantino, 2014). This paper seeks to explore the role and influence of the emerging wildlife economy in shaping South Africa's deepening agrarian relations now dominated by the recalcitrant land question. This working paper proceeds by looking at the theoretical and conceptual approach (anchored on institutions and the idea of access) to the wildlife economy and agrarian transformation. This will

be followed by influence of global environmental governance to understand integration of the national regulatory framework and the wildlife sector as part of the global agricultural realm. South Africa's agricultural economy and agrarian transformation come next followed by a discussion of the country's biodiversity economy and strategy for transformation. Finally, concluding remarks will close off the paper.

## **2. Theoretical and Conceptual Approach to Wildlife Economy and Agrarian Transformation**

The paper attempts to make a contribution towards understanding the “human-environment relationships” as the “raison d'être of geography” (Castree, 2002: 358). This attempt is in line with the reasoning that “people and nature are inextricably linked in a socioecological system” (Morrison, 2014: 961, see also Miller, Caplow and Leslie, 2012). This study is relevant to the current problems facing the country with respect to the regulation of the broad agricultural and environmental sectors, including the private wildlife sector, and the call for radical economic transformation manifested through for instance, the need to speed up land reform through expropriation of land without compensation. The lack of a coherent game farming policy is a case pointing towards the particular challenges bedevilling the governance of the private wildlife sector (Kamuti, 2014, 2016) above all general issues that are directly linked to the private wildlife sector. These general issues relate to land rights, wildlife conservation and social justice (Weber, García-Marmolejo and Reyna-Hurtado, 2006; Boudreaux, 2010; Sikor, Martin, Fischer and He, 2014) with regards to the status of communities who are not benefitting from this sector and yet lay claim to the same resources that are under private ownership. Rural development has also come under the spotlight, particularly under President Jacob Zuma's administration which came to power after the 2009 general elections and amplified the shift towards the concept of the developmental state (see Jara and Hall, 2009). Natural resources that include wildlife could be used to contribute towards uplifting people's living conditions in the rural areas for example, if agriculture is well integrated into the value chain of industry (Kay, 2009). A more pronounced focus on rural development as part of the developmental state is one of the reasons why the national Department of Land Affairs (DLA) was ‘transformed’ into the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (DRDLR). With this in mind, it was timely to look at how the state would further its developmental agenda through mobilisation of natural resources.

Due to the historical background of land ownership in South Africa, most of the prime land is in private hands (mainly white owned). Private property and the market play a critical role in a capitalist system which explains uneven power

relations between different classes of people (Palermo, 2007). When it comes to nature conservation, a lot of studies have focused on the tension between the management of national parks or public protected areas and the surrounding communities (Benjaminsen, Rohde, Sjaastad, Wisborg and Lebert, 2006; Milgroom and Spierenburg, 2008; Ramutsindela and Noe, 2012; Ramutsindela and Shabangu, 2013). Given the increasing extent of high fences that have been erected by game farmers, one wonders whether this is the best way through which the government can manage the wildlife resources that the country is endowed with. As Bennett, Ainslie and Davis (2010) argue, the fence has become a signifier of ownership of land and can be a source of conflict over natural resources. This is very significant, particularly if such a trend has the effect of locking out other stakeholders from wildlife resources at a time when there should be a drive to bridge the gap between the poor and the rich under the democratic dispensation since 1994. However in the South African context, the wildlife resource under examination here is a privately owned resource, and thus associated with the institution of private land tenure. In this context, I argue that institutional analysis needs to be widened by going further than just looking at conventional authority structures - such as the state - by including community and familial structures and customs, and exploring the process of institutional transformation which allows new institutions to develop on the basis of prevailing political, economic, social and cultural arrangements (Toner, 2003; Suzuki, 2005). There is a need to look at how rules, norms and shared strategies are influenced and shaped together through repetitive interactions of the stakeholders.

In this way, I view the private game farmers as the entrepreneurs who are operating in a market economy which according to the South African Constitution guarantees private property rights. Schirato, Danaher and Webb (2012: xxiii), discussing the work of Foucault, argue that “neo-liberalism constitutes a permanent critique on behalf of market forces of the limits and extent of state and government mechanisms”, suggesting that other forces rather than the state have significant power in such a context. There is need to highlight some of the tensions arising there from with regard to the voices of the actors involved in private wildlife governance, bearing in mind the background of the land issue in the South Africa, and its conservation history. With the focus on institutions, I also consider the issue of structure and agency, as Cleaver describes below:

*Agency matters to the form institutions take. Individuals are resource appropriators but their actions are also shaped in relation to identity, attachments and the configuration of societal structures. Agency is operationalized in collective contexts; not just in public decision-making spaces, but through intersecting networks of social, political and professional relationships at a variety of scales. It is also strongly shaped by the ability of local actors to link their initiatives to wider authoritative discourses - in these cases, international discourses about*

*decentralization, democratization and globalised environmental management* (Cleaver, 2012: 204).

With this in mind, I have tried to understand the actions of those who directly own or have access to wildlife resources and the manner in which they project their ideas with regard to the regulation of the sector by the state. This is important in order to appreciate the basis of the workings of institutional processes. As Cleaver says, “critical realist thinkers offer one explanation by suggesting that the structures (or resources) of society are mediated into effects (events, outcomes) by mechanisms. Mechanisms do not reliably produce the same outcomes for everyone, even in similar contexts” (Cleaver, 2012: 40). These mechanisms have to be contextualised, for example, through the various ways in which people interact based on their power relations with regard to ownership of land (and inherently wildlife) and therefore access to these resources. I therefore aim to explore the different governance mechanisms in the wildlife industry and how they are working out to produce different outcomes, with variable impacts on the stakeholders concerned. The concept of access as postulated by Ribot and Peluso (2003) has been chosen in this regard and there is need to briefly look at what it involves.

The idea of access is seen to be further than property in the sense that access is seen as “the ability to derive benefits from things”, while property is seen as “the right to benefit from things” (Ribot and Peluso, 2003: 153). The argument by Ribot and Peluso is that access is mainly concerned with ability which is broader than rights as the core of property and access brings in a broad spectrum of factors that can enhance or hinder people to gain from resources. This view is appropriate in the current debates going on in South Africa with regard to the proposition to expropriate land without compensation. One major outcry has been that if government indeed proceeds to expropriate land from the private (and mainly white) owners without compensation, they will infringe upon their right to property which is enshrined in the South African Constitution. The right to property is seen as one subset of the idea of access which determines who will gain from a resource, the manner in which they will use it at a given period. Ribot and Peluso (2003: 154) explain this dynamic relationship in that:

*Focusing on natural resources as the “things” in question, we explore the range of powers—embodied in and exercised through various mechanisms, processes, and social relations—that affect people’s ability to benefit from resources. These powers constitute the material, cultural and political-economic strands within the “bundles” and “webs” of powers that configure resource access. Different people and institutions hold and can draw on different “bundles of powers” located and constituted within “webs of powers” made up of these strands. People and institutions are positioned differently in relation to resources at various historical moments and geographical scales. The strands thus*

*shift and change over time, changing the nature of power and forms of access to resources.*

Land and its associated wildlife are the focal resources in this paper and these have a long history of how various groups of people have appropriated and accessed them at different times to the present topical moment. The argument goes further that this dynamic relationship of access arises through various ways in that certain individuals and entities get access by exercising control over a resource while others gain access indirectly “through those who have control” (Ribot and Peluso, 2003: 154). In this way, a focus on access will assist to “understand *why* some people or institutions benefit from resources, *whether or not* they have rights to them” (Ribot and Peluso, 2003: 154).

### **3. The Influence of Global Environmental Governance on National Regulatory Frameworks**

Issues of global environmental governance (GEG) are not the major focus of this study, but they are important as they are pervasive enough to influence policy in South Africa. Most environmental problems are not confined within national boundaries (Arts, 2005) as the idea of nature has become pervasive in the new millennium (Castree, 2000). Environmental issues too have dominated public discourse especially government circles (Castree, 2002). Thus it has been widely recognised that environmental regulation can be better achieved through multilateral agreements (Common and Stagl, 2005; Hart, 2007), hence the emergence of global environmental governance. Global environmental governance refers to “the sum of organizations, policy instruments, financing mechanisms, rules, procedures and norms that regulate global environmental protection” (Najam, Papa and Taiyab, 2006: 9). Such a governance system, “which consists of the sets of rights, rules, and decision-making procedures that are created by humans to guide actions, including those that may have disruptive impacts on biophysical systems”, can be regarded as an institutional filter that mediates between human actions and biophysical processes (Kotchen and Young, 2007: 150).

The development of GEG can be traced back to 1972 (Arts, 2005), when the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) was formed by the UN General Assembly following the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm during that year. The number of organizations, multilateral agreements, agencies, funds and programmes that deal with environmental activities at a global scale has increased tremendously since then (Najam et al., 2006; UNEP, 2007). There are now more than 500 international treaties (Najam et al., 2006; UNEP, 2007) and other agreements related to the environment, including 323

regional agreements as well as 302 further agreements that were established from 1972 up to the early 2000s (UNEP, 2007). Trouwborst (2015) for example, examines the role of the international regulatory arrangements in the conservation of carnivores. However there are major challenges of co-ordination, overlapping responsibilities culminating in duplication of work, and increased pressure on ministries and governments, not to mention the lack of financial support (Andresen, 2001).

Within the context of the development of global environmental politics and policy processes, there also emerged the framework of sustainable development (Najam et al., 2006). Sustainable development was widely accepted after the World Commission on Environment and Development's (WCED) report, entitled *Our Common Future*, in 1983 (Common and Stagl, 2005). Subsequently the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro of 1992 came up with Local Agenda 21, and this was followed by the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg in 2002 to assess the implementation of Local Agenda 21 (Common and Stagl, 2005; Meadowcroft, 2007). The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development of 2012 (Rio+20) was a follow up to the 2002 World Summit and was meant to bolster measures for the implementation of sustainable development (UNCSD, 2012).

Since the period leading to the 1992 Rio Summit up to now, there was an inclination towards a neoliberal order that places markets at the centre of environmental governance with its dominance extending to the global South (Okereke, 2008; see also Bond, 2002, 2006b; Büscher, 2009; Arsel and Büscher, 2012; Büscher and Arsel, 2012). The neoliberal order is characterised by the "eclipse of the interventionist state in many parts of the world" (Castree, 2008a: 140). Prukop and Regan (2005) noted the insidious upsurge in the privatisation of wildlife resources. Environmental improvements are attached to the value of land where property rights are secured and thus saleable to gain profits (Yandle, 2004). The property rights in this case go beyond the mere ownership of land by including the right to use the land and "the right to commercialize services generated from natural assets" (Muradian, Corbera, Pascual, Kosoy and May, 2010: 1203) for which private game farming is relevant. For example, Harvey (1990: 419) highlights the seriousness of the definition of the property rights and that they are a part of how the capitalist system is organised to spread its effects:

*The spread of capitalist social relations has often entailed a fierce battle to socialize different peoples into the common net of time discipline implicit in industrial organization and into a respect for partitions of territorial and land rights specified in mathematically rigorous terms.*

Privatisation associated with globalisation (Allegret and Dulbecco, 2002) has increased and causing both positive and negative consequences on the

environment (Von Weizsäcker, Young and Finger, 2005; Ervine, 2011) for instance, by even causing harm to wildlife (Spierenburg and Wels, 2010).

International environmental law has developed rapidly over the past three decades and this has made a great impact in the international governance of protected areas (Scanlon and Burhenne-Guilmin, 2004). Proponents of environmental governance claim that a new dispensation in the management of protected areas has been built spanning environmental, social and economic objectives, and (in theory at least) including the interests and aspirations of local people (Scanlon and Burhenne-Guilmin, 2004). Despite the fact that sustainable development garnered some political will, environmental issues remain low on the policy agenda of regular politics while poverty alleviation, economic growth, security, education and health are the most favourable policy items (UNEP, 2007). Perhaps with the exception of global warming and climate change, political aspects of adapting to long-term environmental challenges have received scant attention (Sprinz, 2009). Sustainability policies and sustainability politics are not always in alignment (Sneddon, Howarth and Norgaard, 2006). Transnational and domestic non-governmental organizations have emerged, ushering in non-state, market-driven governance systems with the aim of developing and implementing environmentally and socially responsible management practices (Cashore, 2002; Duffy, 2006). Non-governmental organisations have also increased tremendously to participate in international negotiations and they too have influenced global environmental politics (Gulbrandsen and Andresen, 2004; Duffy, 2006).

The current market-driven approach, however, has been heavily criticised. Bond (2002, 2006b) criticises the World Summit on Sustainable Development for its inclination towards the commodification of nature. Bond, Dada and Erion's (2009) critique of carbon trading is one example. Bond (2006b: 339) also articulates that the Millennium Development Goals maintained the status quo of "adverse power relations, unreformed global-scale institutions and capital accumulation patterns that work against the poor and the environment." Commodification also extends to labour according to Marx (Palermo, 2007; Buck, 2009; Razavi, 2009). According to Harvey, capitalists can even gain profit without further capital investment through just taking advantage of wage-labour (Buck, 2009; Negi and Auerbach, 2009b; Harriss-White, 2012). Snijders (2012) similarly critiques the private ownership of South African wildlife which involves "putting a monetary value on the world's biodiversity" as one of the ways through which commodification of nature occurs (Castree, 2003: 285).

Neoliberalism in its various forms from a critical realism perspective (Castree, 2006) and its connection to a "diversity of biophysical resources, geographical scales, places, and actors" (Castree, 2008b: 153) is inclined towards the consumptive use of nature (Büscher and Dressler, 2012; Coffey and Marston,

2013). Castree (2008a; 2008b: 154) argues that “in a capitalist world, attempts to neoliberalise nature can be understood as ‘environmental fixes’ that are, in theory at least, ‘rational’ for private producers and also the state (as a key regulator of human - environment interactions).” The same can also be contextualised in the South African case given the government’s neoliberal leanings and the boom of the wildlife sector under ‘private producers.’ Bond and Dugard (2008) give an example of the corporatisation of water in South Africa while Barret (2013) highlights the spread of commodification in environmental governance through peace parks in southern Africa. The surge in payments for ecosystem services (PES) in the past two decades shows the growing influence of market approaches to conservation (Wegner, 2015). The study of PES programmes on livelihoods in countries such as Costa Rica, Mexico, Vietnam, China including South Africa have shown to be “more effective in environmental terms than [being] socially equitable” (Calvet-Mir, Corbera, Martin, Fisher and Gross-Camp, 2015: 159).

Although the new era of global environmental governance is characterised, according to Arts (2005), by a ‘multi-rule’ system, this does not necessarily lead to a sudden shift from government to governance (Lange, Driessen, Sauer, Bornemann and Burger, 2013). There is segmentation and fragmentation of the governance system across levels and functional areas (Biermann and Pattberg, 2008; Meadowcroft, 2007). Bulkeley (2005) states that environmental governance needs to be analysed beyond the nested hierarchies and levels of decision-making, often occurring in isolation. Also, a distinction needs to be made between the territoriality of states versus the fluid nature of non-state actors. A “multidimensional ‘system’ of global environmental governance” (Najam, Christopoulou and Moomaw, 2004: 23) has developed and it is inherently fragmented (Biermann, Pattberg, van Asselt and Zelli, 2009). The idea of “window dressing” also means that a country’s consent to an international environmental agreement does not necessarily translate into action (Atkinson, 2015: 154).

The study of international environmental cooperation has shown that international institutions promote common interests, though distributive issues are not prominent and this is reflected in the mainstream neoliberal institutional discourse (Dai, 2008), fostered by the ‘Washington Consensus’ (Bond, 2003b; Castree, 2009). While concerns over North-South equity, equality and fairness in environmental regimes have been raised, efforts to reform these institutions have not been impressive despite appreciation that a social justice approach is necessary in formulating institutions for global environmental governance (Doherty, 2006. Okereke, 2008; Bond, 2007; Bond, Dada and Erion, 2009). African ruling elites, for example, have largely failed to challenge this skewed North-South power balance (Bond, 2006a). The focus on regulation and the pretext that global concerns need multilateral agreements to overcome the challenges, often leads to dualism between international cooperation and state

action, since it overlooks the local causes of global problems and exaggerates the effectiveness of globally crafted solutions (Sanwal, 2004). In addition a “commonality-within-difference” situation arises as multi-lateral institutional arrangements have a unique effect on regions and their inherent resources (Castree, 2008a: 137).

South Africa is a signatory to numerous international laws, conventions, and protocols that have to do with the environment, its conservation and sustainable use. These agreements have an impact on the way the South African state etches out its own trajectory of environmental regulations. At the same time, while South Africa’s neo-liberal macro economic and political stance augurs well with the sustainability discourse, the imperative to address apartheid legacies poses challenges. Bond (2002: 20) observes that:

*South Africa’s inherited environmental challenges and the policies, projects and laws that emerged to address and in important ways, to compound these problems, together illustrate the elite’s chosen macropolitical route: neoliberalism disguised by sustainable-development rhetoric.*

South Africa’s embrace of the international regulations and global economic dictates has thus not been without challenges (Bond, 2000, 2003a). There are three major sources of relevant wildlife regulations which are the “international treaties and agreements, national legislation; and provincial ordinances” (Rumsey, 2009: 394). In the next section, reference will be made to those international regulations that particularly relate to the interface between the agricultural sector and wildlife sector. International agreements include: the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) of 1973; the International Convention on the Conservation of Biological Diversity of 1992; and the Protocol on Wildlife Conservation and Law Enforcement in the Southern African Development Community (Rumsey, 2009).

#### **4. South Africa’s Agricultural Economy and Agrarian Transformation**

Major characteristics of the South African agricultural economy are its dualistic structure (Hall, 2004; Hall, Wisborg, Shirinda and Zamchiya, 2013) and its neoliberal and deregulated nature (Carnegie, Cooper, and Urquhart, 2002; Ashton, 2009; Tregurtha, Vink and Kirsten, 2010). The South African agricultural economy is composed of the large-scale, commercial sector, consisting of 45,818 farming units, with about 82 million hectares of productive land, and on the other hand 14 million hectares of the ‘small-scale sector’, consisting of 1.3 million agricultural-based households predominantly in the former homelands (Tregurtha *et al.*, 2010). Capital in commercial agriculture has agglomerated towards corporations (for

example in seed, fertiliser, pesticides and the food value chain) along the broad agricultural value chain (Bernstein, 2013; Martin, 2013.). This consolidation of agricultural capital is further subsuming and sidelining the peasantry (Amin, 2012) and this has seen south African agribusinesses being part of current African 'land grabs' involving large-scale land transactions intended to drive economic development whilst often neglecting food security in recipient countries (White *et al.*, 2012; Lavers 2012; Costantino, 2014). Overall, South Africa's agricultural policy also illustrates the dominant role of private capital. For example, through the Growth, Employment and Redistribution Strategy (GEAR), the government intended to establish a free market pricing system within the agricultural sector (Bond, 2005) so as to be competitive on the global scene (Bernstein, 2013) where tariff restrictions would be set within GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) targets (Carnegie et al., 2002; Bond, 2004).

An important aspect is the post-apartheid land reform programme encompassing land redistribution, restitution and tenure reform and also "agricultural support programmes to disadvantaged farming communities" (OECD, 2006: 1). The land redistribution programme is based on the World Bank's model of negotiated land reform which relies on the voluntary sale of commercial farms at fair market value (Moseley, 2007; Bernstein, 2013). For example the Micro-Agricultural Finance Scheme is a state sponsored programme to make micro and retail financial services more accessible in rural areas (OECD, 2007). Bond (1999, 2002, 2003a, 2004, 2005) articulates the influence of the World Bank in the adoption of a neoliberal South African macroeconomic policy and criticises both the Bretton Woods institution and the South African government (see also Patnaik, 2012). While broadly there are questions around the strategy of market based agrarian reform (Borras Jr, 2003; 2009; Patnaik, 2012) land restitution has also been criticised in the manner through which it has been conducted (Walker, 2008). In many instances, land beneficiaries are forced into partnerships with white-owned agribusinesses (for example, see Shaker, 2003). Cousins (2009b: 421) contends that the "land question" is still a highly contentious issue (see also Du Toit, 2013) given the promises by the African National Congress (ANC) leadership to revisit the 'willing seller willing buyer' principle upon which land acquisition is based, in order to address the failure of land reform.

The Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (DRDLR) is critical in the successful execution of the agricultural policies, particularly when it comes to the issue of alleviating poverty through sustainable livelihoods. But the challenges in that department relating to capacity, knowledge levels and its bias towards livestock production are a hindrance to that goal (Ashton, 2009). Nevertheless agriculture contributes about 3% to South Africa's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and a significant proportion of employment on commercial farms, amounting to about 10% of total employment in the country (OECD, 2007; Tregurtha et al.,

2010). Despite the small direct contribution of agriculture to the overall economy, it is well integrated vertically with other industries, and facilitates linkages regionally and internationally (OECD, 2007; Tregurtha et al., 2010). Hence, by contributing more than 8% of the country's exports as primary agricultural products, it is a net foreign exchange earner (Tregurtha, et al., 2010). This puts agriculture with its connection to land and its inherent resources in the spotlight.

Fraser (2007) notes that agriculture in the country has undergone deregulation, a process completed by the post-apartheid government. The empowerment of agribusiness has been one result in this neoliberal period as the state reorients and "acts exclusively in the interests of the corporate-financial elite" (Prabhat, 2014: 10). Francis and Williams (1993) wrote about the transition to democracy as it occurred. This phase was characterised by the abolition of racially-based land measures and enactment of new legislation such as the 1991 "Land Act" that provided the legal basis for the transformation of South African agriculture to new forms of capitalism. They pointed out the dissonance between the principle of prioritising individual property rights against other forms of rights in land, while simultaneously trying to regulate the division and use of land for conservation and commercial development (Hamilton, 2006). According to these scholars, underlying these policies was an assumption that Africans are not capable of farming. The new laws in effect entrenched the position of land-owning whites, in that it worked against the broadening of access to rights in land that were for a long period reserved for them. In the same vein Francis and Williams (1993: 381) pointed out that in 1993, government according to the new laws ruled out "any form of redistribution of agricultural land whether by confiscation, nationalisation or expropriation" pending the development of a coherent land reform policy. However, this position on 'confiscation, nationalisation or expropriation' gradually changed to the current stage where there is fierce debate around expropriation of land without compensation.

For instance, these changes can be noted to have crept in through the suggestions that were mooted in the Green Paper on land reform announced by the former South African President Jacob Zuma at the State of the Nation address on 12 February 2015 said that:

*In terms of our new proposed laws, a ceiling of land ownership will be set at a maximum of 12 000 hectares. Foreign nationals will not be allowed to own land in South Africa but will be eligible for long term lease. In this regard, the Regulation of Land Holdings Bill will be submitted to Parliament this year. Through the Land Reform Programme, more than ninety thousand hectares of land have been allocated to small holder farmers, farm dwellers and labour tenants. The process of establishing the Office of the Valuer-General is underway, which is established in terms of the Property Valuation Act. Once implemented the law will stop*

*the reliance on the Willing Buyer-Willing Seller method in respect of land acquisition by the state. (State of the Nation Address by His Excellency Jacob G. Zuma on the occasion of the Joint Sitting of Parliament, Cape Town” 12 February 2015 [Online] URL: <http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/pebble.asp?relid=19024> Accessed: 11/03/2015.)*

This seems to be an indication of the new legislation that would come into place on the basis of the Green Paper on land reform.

On the issue of a proposed cap on land ownership, the then Deputy Minister of Agriculture Pieter Mulder said in an interview with the *Farmer's Weekly* of 16 September 2011 that:

*Although better than the first draft, the Green paper on Land Reform is still a cause for concern. This will have a big impact on food security and will be detrimental to both the economy and the land reform process. Currently, 15% of the farmers produce 80% of the country's food, but the land ownership platform will ruin these numbers.*

Pieter Mulder is the leader of the Freedom Front Plus and this statement could be taken to represent his constituency which constitutes the white landowners or farmers, some of whom are participants in game farming. The argument of the negative impact of land reform on food security, is a discourse emanating from agrarian capital composed of white commercial farmers and agribusiness to project and protect their interests, especially their stronghold on land (Jara and Hall, 2009). Such an argument has also been accentuated by Mukondzongi and Brandt (2018: 4) that:

*“...a minority of landed elites and agribusiness have exercised undue influence over government policy; for example, they have been able to utilise productivity discourses as a form of scare-mongering tactic to delay the transfer of land right to the historically marginalised black population.*

In this way agrarian capital has managed “to secure a weak legislative and policy framework, which it has exploited to block meaningful land reform” (Jara and Hall, 2009: 214). This is a manifestation of the entrenchment of a capitalist mode of agricultural production characterised by “... increasing integration into global markets and commodity chains” (Carlson, 2018) that is dominating the South African agrarian transformation.

## **5. South Africa's Biodiversity Economy and Strategy**

Carruthers (2008a) comments that South Africa is considered number three in the world in terms of biodiversity conservation. However in spite of the ratification of the Convention on Biological Diversity in 1995 and the subsequent development of relevant national policies in South Africa, there is massive loss of species

(Cousins, Saddler and Evans, 2008). Loss of species is attributed to the effect of human activities (Morrison, 2014). The country comes second out of 19 southern African countries in terms of the highest number of threatened species. Scholes and Biggs (2004) explain that the major causes of the loss of species and habitat are the conversion to cultivated land, expansion of urban areas, invasion by alien species, and the growth of the plantation forestry sector. In another article, Carruthers (2008b) describes the scientific and cultural changes that promoted the use of wildlife and views the expansion of wildlife ranching as a milestone in the transformation of agriculture in South Africa. Hoffman, Crafford, Muller, and Schutte (2003) referred to the tourist industry as the fourth largest in the South African economy.

Conservation tourism is a growing subsector of ecotourism, and includes what is called volunteer tourism whereby the tourists pay to participate in conservation projects in the host area (Cousins, Saddler and Evans, 2009). Private game ranchers are also involved in the breeding of rare species which would otherwise be threatened if the game ranchers were not involved in the sector (Cousins *et al.*, 2008), although the value of this contribution is contested by conservationists. The game industry is anchored by three major activities which are trophy and biltong hunting (the dominant driver), live game sales, and ecotourism (Cloete, Taljaard and Grove, 2007). Radder and Bech-Larsen (2008) assert that there are approximately 200 000 hunters who practice commercially regulated hunting, who are referred to as biltong hunters (that is, they hunt lower value animals for sport, as opposed to expensive trophy game). With recognition of game farming as an agricultural activity (Department of Agriculture, 2006) it is palpable that wildlife ranching feeds into the agricultural economy of South Africa. This is the reason why the Department of Agriculture (now Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries) (DAFF) spearheaded the efforts to come up with a game farming policy (Department of Agriculture, 2006), while the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) has been playing its mandate to safeguard the biodiversity of the country. In the Government Gazette of the 7<sup>th</sup> July 2006 (Notice 874 of 2006), the then Department of Agriculture published a policy proposal on game farming which highlighted that:

*While game farming may have been recognised as an agricultural activity by the former Department of Agricultural Development in 1987, this was not formalized during the amalgamation of the Departments in 1993, with the result that uncertainty still exists as to where this sector belongs (Department of Agriculture, 2006: 5).*

These efforts do not seem to have yielded the required results as currently there is no clear policy on game farming in South Africa.

However, the development of a Biodiversity Economy Strategy by the DEA shown by the publication of the Government Gazette of the 15<sup>th</sup> October 2015 (No. 39268

of 2015) wades into the recognition and promotion of the commodification of the country's biodiversity. The BES stresses that South Africa's species richness is an anchor for economic growth and sustainable development for its masses. Hence there is recognition that, "the biodiversity of economy of South Africa, encompasses the businesses and economic activities that either directly depend on biodiversity for their core business or contribute to conservation of biodiversity through their activities" (DEA, 2015: ii). This paper focuses on wildlife as a major subsector of the BES besides bioprospecting which already has its commercial industry value chain. The businesses referred to here involve wildlife-based production which encompasses various ways of "the commercial utili[s]ation of wildlife species, including meat (venison), parts, by-products, sport hunting, aesthetics, and recreation" (Butler, Teaschner, Ballard and McGee, 2005: 381). The long time development of the wildlife ranching sector to its current status with a robust value chain is palpable, though the BES notes that, "despite South Africa having an incredibly rich diversity of genetic and biological resources, the biodiversity economy has not reached its full potential, as it remains largely unrecognised, underdeveloped and untransformed" (DEA, 2015: v).

The agenda for transformation in the wildlife sector is imperative given the current debates on the need to speed up land reform through expropriation of land without compensation, high levels of unemployment, widening inequality since the advent of democracy in 1994 and worsening poverty (Bond, 1999, 2004; Martin, 2013; O'Laughlin, Bernstein, Cousins and Peters, 2013; UNDP, 2018; World Bank, 2018). The BES is also envisaged to work in conjunction with efforts for South Africa to move towards a green economy in addition to impact livelihoods through employment creation, poverty alleviation and overall transformation of the economy especially for vulnerable people in rural areas. In pursuit of the much needed transformation in the wildlife sector the DEA (2015: 18-34) lists transformative enabling interventions for putting the BES into action as follows:

1. Lead Collective Ownership of BES
2. Streamlining the Regulatory Environment
3. Optimise Supporting Institutional Arrangements
4. Enhance Research and Development
5. Enhance Education, Skills and Capacity
6. Fostering and Supporting Entrepreneurship
7. Marketing and Public Relations
8. Improving Access to Finance, Raising Levels of Investment and Increasing Net Exports
9. An Economic Transformation Initiative
10. Advocacy for the Wildlife Sector

Each transformative enabling intervention (TEI) is accompanied by prescribed enabling actions. The ninth TEI is critical in this case as it highlights the need for economic transformation of which in South Africa it should build upon ongoing

efforts laid out in a framework provided for by the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act of 2003 (DEA, 2015). It is also interesting to note that, the “BES envisages the development of a revolutionary economic transformation for the Wildlife Industry” (DEA, 2015: 31) though a quick analysis of the enabling actions for this TEI shows that the BES is thin on detail of how this revolutionary economic transformation will be rolled out. It is critical therefore to point out that without land reform which will result in the transfer of wealth from the minority as the status quo to the majority in the near future, transformation in the wildlife sector will not succeed. Of course, the BES underscores the need to “develop wildlife-linked land reform models” (DEA, 2015: 32) but the fundamental issues of access to resources as explained by Ribot and Peluso (2003) need to be addressed by going beyond the idea of rights to property as enshrined in the South African Constitution. This will require unlocking the value of land and its inherent wildlife resources from the minority to the majority who have been disenfranchised for a long period.

## 6. Concluding Remarks

The pervasive effect of global environmental governance framed on the basis of neoliberalism which favours the commodification and consumptive use of nature is palpable in South Africa. The private wildlife sector has grown alongside the growth of South African agribusinesses and this is a manifestation of the consolidation of agricultural capital which is further undermining the peasantry. This poses a great challenge for the much needed transformation in the economy underscored by a drive to implement radical measures on the access to resources beyond just a right to property. The paper concludes that wildlife capital seem to have forged to sway the agrarian question in its favour through discourses of the need to respect property rights and not disrupting the current levels of agricultural production. However, the growing populist call for transformation in the wildlife economy as part of the broad agrarian question is starting to rattle this discourse. It remains to be seen how far the transformative interventions stipulated in the Biodiversity Economy Strategy and the broad measures around land reform will go to shape the trajectory of the much needed transformation in South Africa's agrarian question. Otherwise, the South African state remains seized with the triple challenge of unemployment, inequality and poverty.



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