

African Land buying Syndicates in Natal, 1850-1920

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Introduction

“If anyone would visit such farms as Driefontein, Klienfontein [sic: Kleinfontein] and Watersmeit [sic] near Ladysmith, he would not be slow to say that lands owned by Native communities are under far better control and use than similar lands owned by companies of Europeans. Such a provision as this would be very much resented by our better informed and enlightened natives...

May justice and right prevail. Some farmers especially one who has recently written from New Bergville, show that their reason for approving the Bill is jealousy on account of the black man's success.”

In this letter, ‘Luvalo’ (not his real name) writes to the editor of *Ilanga lase Natal* on the 8th of March, 1912, to critique the Native Settlement and Squatters’ Registration Bill. One of the Bill’s provisions stated that landowners should pay a tax to the government for every “squatter” (including rent-payer) on their land. Luvalo says the Bill will put a huge burden on black landowners, many of whom were making a living from the rents paid by their tenants.¹

This paper is about the dynamics of land buyers and land buying groups in Natal between the 1850s and 1920s. It is about how land buyers negotiated a set of laws, policies and attitudes from British colonial officials and particularly from white settlers, that did not favour their purchase of land. What emerges is a particular network of land buyers – described in records of the time and by historians as *amakholwa* – mission educated, Christian and relatively better-off than the majority of black people in Natal in the late 19th century. Many of these figures knew each other and bought land together across various parts of Natal, aided by one or two prominent legal firms

¹ Luvalo, “Life of Misery Awaits the Native,” *Ilanga Lase Natal* (Durban, South Africa), March 15, 1912: 4. *Readex: African Newspapers*.

who acted as intermediaries in navigating the law and in using their clout to convince officials to approve title deed transfers.

My original goal with this paper was to explore the ideas and networks that I argue came to inform processes of collective land purchase and management by land buying syndicates in the Transvaal in the 20th century. I am not certain if the sources I have found so far in the KwaZulu-Natal provincial archives actually offer much insight into this history of ideas. Instead, what I perhaps offer here, is an account of collective land purchase by syndicates in Natal led predominantly by *amakholwa* figures who sought incorporation into the ranks of the colonial economy and its citizenry as owners of the means of production – but who were denied entry.

Land buying became a site for claim-making on the colonial administration for recognition of the rights and status of Christian and educated Africans – and therefore for the configuration of political subjecthood. My modification to existing arguments is that land-buying syndicates' fusing of private title deeds with collective forms of property ownership also opened the space to refuse and reshape certain aspects of colonial property and trust law.

Why do accounts of land buyers in Natal matter? They offer insight into how black South African farmers and landowners combined aspects of customary law ownership with the deeds registry system of individual title deeds as a way of both securing land tenure and making claims on citizenship. I am not arguing that this was a hybrid form of law because that would reiterate an argument about the binary between common law and customary law. Instead, I suggest that syndicates gave expression to a set of ideas already percolating among *amakholwa* families and expressed by land purchasers in writing (e.g. in newspapers and petitions). On a broader scale, these stories matter because they offer evidence of political traditions around land ownership that are often forgotten in debates about land reform in South Africa.

In 1912, in the Transvaal, Pixley ka Seme initiated a huge land buying scheme via his company, the Native Farmers Association (hereafter, "The Association"). Under the auspices of the company, Seme had taken out several mortgages to buy the farms Daggakraal, Driefontein and Vlakplaats near the town of Wakkerstroom, south-east of Johannesburg. The Association rallied

over 200 families from around the country to buy land on the farms it had acquired in the Transvaal. The farms were located close to the three-way border between the Transvaal, Natal and the Free State, and in a part of the country where the languages spoken were a mix of Zulu, siSwati and SeSotho. Many families who bought land via the Association, had previously owned and farmed land via land-buying syndicates in what was then the Natal colony.

While researching the Association, it became clear to me that understanding the proliferation of black-owned land buying syndicates in the early 20th century Transvaal requires tracing the history of syndicates in Natal. Between 1905, when black church minister Edward Tsewu set a legal precedent for black individuals to buy land in their own names, and 1913, when the notorious Natives Land Act was introduced, hundreds of black individuals and syndicates bought land in both urban and rural parts of the Transvaal.² In Natal, black-owned land syndicates date much further back, with Edendale usually identified as the first, in 1850. A Natal farm in Ladysmith, named Driefontein (like the Association's farm in the Transvaal), was also the site of a prominent syndicate under the leadership of Johannes Kumalo.

The archives of the former Natal colony note the existence of over 50 syndicates in that province by 1916.³ Black farmers and intellectuals in Natal viewed syndicates as a way for people to buy land as groups outside of areas that the early colonial Natal government had declared 'reserves' or 'locations' for 'native occupation.'⁴ In most syndicates, buyers registered their land in the Natal Deeds records via 'trusts.' Land purchased via two kinds of trust predominated: missionaries who held land ostensibly in trust for black people and the Natal Native Trust, with the Lieutenant Governor of Natal as trustee.⁵ There were also trusts held in the names of individual trustees – sometimes land buyers themselves. *Amakholwa* families made up the majority of black landowners in Natal. Many of these families took on black tenants, particularly

² H. M. Feinberg, *Our Land, Our Life, Our Future: Black South African Challenges to Territorial Segregation, 1913-1948* (Pretoria, South Africa: Unisa Press, 2015); Phil Bonner and Noor Nieftagodien, *Alexandra: A History* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2008); Vusumuzi Khumalo, 'The African Struggle for Independence: A History of the Wilberforce Institute, Evaton 1905-1950s' (PhD thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 2018).

³ Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository, South Africa (hereafter NAB), SNA II/5/6, 'Statistics, schedules of farms (1917-18): Natives Land Committee, Natal', 29/04/1916.

⁴ John Lambert, "African Reasons for Purchasing Land in Natal in the Late 19th, Early 20th Centuries," *Kleio* 31, no. 1 (1999): 33–54; Sheila Meintjes, 'Edendale 1850-1906: A Case Study of Rural Transformation and Class Formation in an African Mission in Natal' (PhD thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, 1988).

⁵ Lambert, "African Reasons for Purchasing Land," pp. 45-46.

as the screws tightened on black farmers' ability to make a profit in Natal in the 1890s.⁶ Paul la Hausse de Lalouviere writes that although black farmers owned around 37,400 acres of land in Natal (particularly in the Klip River and Newcastle districts), by 1890 it was becoming clear that their hopes of assimilating into white society would not be met.⁷

In their work on land buying syndicates in Natal, John Lambert and Sheila Meintjes argue that black farmers in Natal bought land as part of collective syndicates because it was pragmatic to do so. Paul La Hausse suggests that syndicates in Natal “sprung more out of weakness than strength.”⁸ Buyers could not afford to purchase land as single families – whether Crown land or from private landowners – hence they clubbed together to put down the first payments for land. No doubt this played some role in the decision-making of syndicates. My point of departure is to ask: what can we learn about land buying syndicates beyond the notion that they bought land for pragmatic reasons? What happens if we look we at and beyond the formal legal and financial operations of syndicates, for clues as to how they operated as collections of individuals with goals and ideas working in a fundamentally hostile system?

This paper relies mostly on records from the Natal Provincial Archives in Pietermaritzburg (government records, surveys, account books and some court cases), newspapers from Natal (particularly *Ilanga lase Natal*) and work by other historians on land buying and amakholwa communities.

Context

In the nineteenth century, black South Africans had a variety of property forms and mapping systems (both spatial and social). But these forms and ideas generally did not register within the vision of settler and colonial mapmakers.⁹ Both the Boer (ZAR) and British governments emphasized a racialized division between two simplified property forms—private title deeds for

⁶ Paul la Hausse, *Restless Identities: Signatures of Nationalism, Zulu Ethnicity, and History in the Lives of Petros Lamula (c. 1881-1948) and Lymon Maling (1889-c. 1936)* (University of Natal Press, 2000), 162.

⁷ la Hausse, *Restless Identities*, p. 160.

⁸ la Hausse, *Restless Identities*, p. 161.

⁹ Lindsay F. Braun, *Colonial Survey and Native Landscapes in Rural South Africa, 1850 - 1913: The Politics of Divided Space in the Cape and Transvaal* (BRILL, 2014).

white people versus “communal land” held by the Crown or government ostensibly for black people to use (known as Crown land).

The British administration drove the development of “land reservations” for black people between 1850 and 1913, rolling out technologies of surveying, mapping, and boundary making.¹⁰ This move toward a simplified version of communal land in the name of protecting customs and traditions played out throughout British colonies in the late nineteenth century.¹¹ In South Africa it went hand in hand with the British administration’s appointment and protection of chiefs, who would carry out government policies on Crown land.

Like all governments, the British colonial administration was not monolithic. Although land was becoming more segregated, black farmers could legally own land in parts of the British South African colonies before the South African War (1899–1902). This legal option was extended to the country as a whole after the British won the war. However, in practice, African purchasers faced discrimination that made it hard to achieve an equal footing with white landowners. Hence, black individuals or groups would generally pay for land via a white-owned institution or white individual (often a mission station, lawyer, or politician). Following on from earlier colonial debates about chiefs being the “custodians” of “customary land,” government administrators also accepted some purchases made in the name of a “tribe,” with the chief as the sub-trustee and the Native Commissioner as the main trustee.

John Lambert draws together archival research and other historians’ works on African land buyers in Natal to trace Africans’ reasons for buying land. He sets out two main categories of land buyers: first, *amakholwa* land buyers who believed that individual title deeds would set them on the path to securing their status as respectable, well-off, Christian citizens; second, chiefs and traditional leaders who were concerned with land shortages and combined forces with *amakholwa* to buy land, as a means of protecting against land dispossession.¹²

¹⁰ Braun, *Colonial Survey and Native Landscapes in Rural South Africa, 1850 - 1913*.

¹¹ Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire* (Princeton, 2010); Sara Berry, *No Condition Is Permanent* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1993)

¹² Lambert, “African Reasons for Purchasing Land,” 46-47.

Lambert and La Hausse point out that a “Swazi diaspora” played an important role in the land buying movement in Natal. Many of the land buyers at Edendale had been “refugees” from the *Mfecane* and disruptions of the 1930s in south-east Africa, who had settled in Swaziland. One example is the prominent Edendale family of Reverend Daniel Msimang. Msimang’s father’s family were amaHlubi people from the Mzinyathi area of Eswatini, who moved to a BaTlokwa area at the Mparane mission station in the Free State. They then travelled with Reverend Allison to Edendale in the 1850s, where they became the second-largest land holding family, with 7 plots in total (44.9 hectares).

Lambert argues that mission stations were also important spaces for cultivating ideas about land purchase. These were often lands held in trust by mission boards (made up of missionary representatives and the Secretary for Native Affairs) for black converts who lived on the missions.¹³ Edendale is the most-well known example of this. Families then then moved away from white-owned missions to purchase land independently of white missionaries, such as in Driefontein in Natal. These farms were set up to produce land for the colonial market, although that does not preclude the other forms of value they had for residents (social, spiritual etc.)¹⁴

Edendale landowners found resonance in ideas of Christian self-help. Many had interacted with other black intellectuals and preachers from across the Atlantic via the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the teachings of Garveyism.¹⁵ In particular, Shula Marks argues that Natal land buyers took up Booker T. Washington’s view that industrial education was an important pillar of black liberation.¹⁶ Economic nationalism at turn of century found expression in land buying syndicates.

¹³ Lambert, “African Reasons for Purchasing Land,” 16.

¹⁴ Lambert, “African Reasons for Purchasing,” 17.

¹⁵ La Hausse, *Restless Identities*; Lambert, “African Reasons for Purchasing Land in Natal in the Late nineteenth, Early twentieth Centuries,” 33–35; Heather Hughes, “Doubly Elite: Exploring the Life of John Langalibalele Dube,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27, no. 3 (September 1, 2001): 445–58; Simangaliso Kumalo, “Meeting the Cowboy Turned Renegade Missionary: William Cullen Wilcox,” *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 39 (August 2013): 337–52.

¹⁶ Shula Marks, *The Ambiguities of Dependence: Class, Nationalism and the State in 20th Century Natal* (Johns Hopkins, 1986), p. 59.

Some of the families also participated in savings clubs and joint stock companies such as the Zulu Industrial Company and the ‘Isivivane’ (“Small Savings”) Society.¹⁷ Many black lawyers, political leaders and intellectuals of late 19th and early 20th century, such as Simeon Kambule, Timothy Gule¹⁸, Stephen Mini, Pixley ka Seme, Richard and Selby Msimang, Alfred Mangena, and the Dube family owned land in or moved through Edendale. Residents were also keen readers of newspapers like *iLanga lase Natal* (of which Dube was editor), *Abantu Batho* (of which Seme was editor) and *Inkanyiso yase Natal*. Families heard about land buying opportunities via these networks. Their debates and advocacy for land buying appear in letters to the editors of these newspapers.¹⁹

Lambert argues that syndicates tended to establish a kind of communal system of land ownership that marked a hybrid between chiefs’ custodianship over land and individual title deeds. In 1860s and then again 1880s, economic precarity spurred by two waves of economic depression, meant that it was difficult for individual land buyers to get finances together to buy land outright. Many individual buyers had mortgages but could not meet their annual installments, and as a result their land was foreclosed.²⁰ Drawing on Meintjes’ work on Edendale, Lambert argues that black farmers sought the “communal support” that came from buying land as a group.²¹ Though as my accounts of syndicates in this paper discuss, collectives were also risky.

The common factor in syndicates in the late 19th and early 20th century was that they involved undivided shares or indivisible shares, an interest in accumulation via agricultural production and farming, and willingness to rent to tenants. Most syndicates held the title deed in the name of a single person or chief as “trustee”. This caused problems when the single person or even each individual landowner died and did not transfer the name of their title deed. Or when a trustee

¹⁷ La Hausse, *Restless Identities*.

¹⁸ Timothy Gule was an induna in Edendale, and had also bought land in Dundee. He was declared a “kholwa chief” of the “Swazi tribe” on “freehold” farms in the Newcastle district. La Hausse, *Restless Identities*, 162.

¹⁹ For more on *Ilanga’s* readership, see Hlonipha Mokoena, “An Assembly of Readers: Magema Fuze and His Ilanga Lase Natal Readers,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 35, no. 3 (2009): 595–607.

²⁰ J. Lambert, “African Reasons for Purchasing Land in Natal in the Late 19th, Early 20th Centuries,” *Kleio* 31, no. 1 (1999), 47.

²¹ S. M. Meintjes, ‘Edendale 1850-1906: A Case Study of Rural Transformation and Class Formation in an African Mission in Natal’ (PhD thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, 1988), pp. 195-197.

remortgaged a farm without consulting the whole syndicate. This is clear from the disputes that ended up in court.

Often prosperous land buyers who took the lead in syndicate purchases were made chiefs by government via the 1891 Natal Code. *Amakholwa* syndicates sometimes themselves pushed to classify themselves as “amakholwa tribes” with syndicate leaders as their chiefs. Examples include: Stephanus Mini in Edendale, Johannes Kumalo in Driefontein and Martin Luthuli in Groutville.²² In 1897, Kumalo wrote to the Magistrate of Klip River to ask to receive a salary commensurate with that received by “native chiefs.”²³ It is unclear if this process emerged because the colonial administration was more likely to recognise syndicates and do business with them if they constituted themselves as “tribes”; or because the groups understood themselves to have a connection or inheritance to traditional leaders.

In an obituary on the occasion of Johannes Kumalo’s death in 1907, *The Ladysmith Gazette* argues Johannes Kumalo had royal heritage – that he was a descendant of leaders of the “Ama Ntungwa” and that when Natal Governor Henry McCallum met the people of Driefontein, he met in Kumalo not an “underling, but one of ancient Zulu aristocracy...”²⁴ The article reports that over 1000 people attended Kumalo’s funeral. In 1912, when Johannes’ son Joseph H. Kumalo died, the language of succession used by the Magistrate of Klip River is very similar to that of “tribal affairs.” For example, the Magistrate writes that since Joseph’s son Walter is 21 and at school at Lovedale, his uncle Timothy Kumalo is appointed “regent.” He states that he has handed letters of appointment to Timothy Kumalo “in the presence of the principal men of his tribe.”²⁵

Those who bought land were not divorced from the affairs of traditional leaders. Many of the syndicates who bought land in Natal were led only by amakholwa men but also by chiefs who suggested each family pay a tribute or amount towards land purchase. Marks suggests that these

²² J. Lambert, “African Reasons for Purchasing Land in Natal in the Late 19th, Early 20th Centuries,” *Kleio* 31, no. 1 (1999), 51-52.

²³ Letter from Johannes Kumalo to Magistrate, Klip River, SNA 1/1/24/4 822/1897 (NAB).

²⁴ Obituary, Late chief Johannes Kumalo, *Ilanga Lase Natal* (Durban, Natal), 21 June 1907.

²⁵ Letter from Magistrate of Ladysmith in the Klip River district to the Chief Native Commissioner of Natal, 28 November 1912, 1/LDS 3/3/21 L924/12 (NAB).

amakholwa-traditional leader alliances were largely strategic. She argues that in the context of the undermining of amakholwa farmers in the late 19th century by a combination of the newly opened markets on the Rand and the increase in the white settler population on Natal's farms, black landowners "had to protect the gains they had made so far...And this meant forging links with the wider African community."²⁶ However, it is likely that these connections were not only made out of economic necessity, but also out of kinship ties that meant amakholwa and traditional leadership sometimes overlapped – for example, in terms of mission education backgrounds.

The Natives Land Act of 1913 made it illegal for black people to own land outside the reserves, except with the permission of the governor general. It also severely undermined the bargaining power of labour tenants. A relatively small number of black individuals and groups continued to buy land outside the reserves after 1913 by obtaining permission from the governor general. Harvey Feinberg argues that between 1913 and 1936 Africans bought around 3,200 farms outside the reserves—more land than historians previously thought.²⁷ Feinberg quantifies these numbers in reference to exceptions to the 1913 Land Act granted by the governor general. However, because he fails to account for black land buyers who had to buy the same land twice, or who transferred the same piece of land between family members, or whose land was foreclosed on account of unpaid debts, only to have it bought by another black family, his numbers are inflated.

By the middle of 20th century, most African owned lands were being farmed communally or via chiefs' control, not individually. Lambert argues syndicate members by then were mostly drawing income from tenants' rents, not from farming. Due in part to the need to take on tenants, syndicate land in Natal became overpopulated and overgrazed.²⁸

Marks writes about the "structural ambiguity" or "contradiction" faced by amakholwa families living in colonial Natal. Mission stations promoted agricultural production for the market, accumulation of wealth and missionary education. Many of those who bought land in Natal were

²⁶ Shula Marks, *Ambiguities of Dependence*, p. 59.

²⁷ Feinberg, *Our Land, Our Life, Our Future*.

²⁸ J. Lambert, "African Reasons for Purchasing Land in Natal in the Late 19th, Early 20th Centuries," *Kleio* 31, no. 1 (1999), 164.

also writers for John Dube's newspaper, *Ilanga lase Natal*. Yet, embracing these capitalist and literary realms did not bring full citizenship for black people in a society that "left little room for an enfranchised black peasantry and artisan class."²⁹

Furthermore, Marks argues that it is also too simplistic to view the black landowning amakholwa class as complicit in the actions of the Natal colonial government. By the time of the Bambatha Rebellion against taxes in 1906, the majority of black land buyers did not as easily support the Natal government against the rebels, in the same way that residents of Driefontein and Edendale had done in the Anglo-Zulu war of the 1870s.

In Natal, white farmers – and white settler society more broadly – fear-mongered that black syndicates would take over the country. As the writer Luvalo from *Ilanga* warned in the excerpt provided at the start of this paper, white farmers were jealous of the initial success of black farmers in the 19th century, who responded to the demands of markets on the Rand. Martin Luthuli for example ran a huge sugar farming operation, with labour tenants and wage labourers working for him. Marks quotes a white farmer whose letter appeared in the *Natal Witness* in 1928: "The Native Land Act is the only thing which stands between the European landowners of Natal ... and the wholesale acquisition in future by natives of lands all over the country..."³⁰ White settlers feared the power that might be generated by black large-scale landowners who could accumulate and take on tenants of their own.

Influenced in part by white settler farmer complaints, Natal government officials in the 19th century were willing to support land purchase by black people but were against collective syndicates with undivided shares. The report of the Natal Natives Commission of 1881-1882 states that "tribal" land purchases are the "least desirable, politically" because they "extend the locations" but without "supervision" by the colonial government. The Commission's report implied these purchases operated within the trojan horse of the title deeds framework, with customary land management ideas and practices inside. Of the locations, where land would be held by "trustees for the natives", the report remarks [a cynical chuckle is warranted here]: "it is

²⁹ Shula Marks, *Ambiguities of Dependence*, p. 57.

³⁰ Shula Marks, *Ambiguities of Dependence*, p. 50.

much too late now to discuss the question whether or not the location system was wise; we are certain that it was intended kindly and justly.”³¹

Land-buying intermediary networks and key role-players

The districts where black-owned syndicates bought the most land were Umngeni / Pietermaritzburg (Edendale), Ladysmith / Klip River (Driefontein, Watersmeet, Kleinfontein, Burford, Roosboom, Matiwaneskop etc.) and Newcastle (Jobstown, Suspence, Cecil, Gardens etc.). Other important syndicates included Inanda near Durban, Langekloof in Bergville, Peach Hill in Dundee and Cornfields in Estcourt. Syndicates acquired land from mission stations, the Natal government (Crown land), individual Boer landowners and the Natal Land and Consolidation Company. The latter operated as a land speculator and absentee landlord, and by 1861 held about 261 619 acres of land. Many black farmers initially rented or occupied this land and then clubbed together to buy it.³² Most syndicates negotiated their purchase and trustee agreements through a few prominent legal firms, such as Allison & Hime, and Walton & Tatham. An accounts ledger for payments received for mortgages, kept on file in the Newcastle Magistrate’s office, lists Walton and Tatham as a go-between who were paid by syndicates, and then their instalments on to the mortgagers.³³

Prominent syndicate land buyers also were major accumulators of land. For example, Stephanus Mini’s son Stephen was an even more successful landowner than his father. By 1890s, he was second-largest landowner in Edendale with 143,25 acres (where as in 1889, had only 0.5 acres). Stephen Mini also held land in Driefontein in Natal and had bought 1250 acre crown lands farm called Eden (on Mkomazi river in Ipoela) — he intended to draw rentals from 45 huts on that land.³⁴

The figures who initiated or led land buying syndicates often played complex intermediary roles between communities of land buyers on one side, and lenders and government administrators on

³¹ Natal Natives Commission, 1881-1882, pp. 7-8.

³² J. Lambert, *Betrayed Trust*, p. 9.

³³ Land Sales Ledger, 1884-1911 1/NEW 6/2/2 (NAB).

³⁴ Marks, *Ambiguities of Dependence*, p. 52.

the other. The trajectory of two important figures in Natal syndicates – Simeon Kambule and Petrus Maling – offer evidence of this balancing act. Simeon Kambule was one of the most prominent black landowners in Natal. His grandfather, Job Kambule, was the first headman of Edendale in 1850, and his father, Elijah Kabule, died protecting the British Colonel Durnford in a battle against Langalibalele’s forces in the Drakensburg in 1873.³⁵ *Natal Witness* editor Francis Reginald Statham described Simeon Kambule arriving with 50 troops to meet him on a visit to Edendale “distinguished by a magnificent sealskin cap.” Statham went on, “He is the son of that faithful old native Elijah Kambula, who fell fighting in Bushman’s Pass in 1873” and whose name is recorded “on the monument that stands opposite the Maritzburg post-office.”³⁶

Simeon Kambule owned several plots of land across Natal, including at Driefontein in Klipriver and at Jobstown in Newcastle. He took out loans from the Land and Agricultural Loan Fund, Natal, to fund some of his purchases.³⁷ His name features in numerous petitions and meetings with government officials, around land purchases and extensions for mortgage payments.

Kambule’s sister Johanna married Petros Maling in 1880. The couple joined Kumalo’s syndicate at Driefontein in the Klip River district. They had also bought land at Edendale, Doornhoek, Kirkintilloch and Klippoort.³⁸ Maling’s father, Mahlalela Gombe Malinga had moved to Edendale from Swaziland around 1848. Maling’s politics were similar to that of the Kambule family. He had regularly expressed his loyalty to the Natal colonial government, served as an induna for syndicates in the Newcastle district and was a founder of the Natal Native Congress.³⁹ He was also one of the founding members of *Funamalungelo*, a group that demanded civic rights for black people in Natal.

As a member of land buying syndicates, Petros Maling purchased 7 farms in the Klipfontein and Newcastle districts between 1892 and 1896, making up around 8,110 acres. With a 21-member

³⁵ La Hausse, p. 157.

³⁶ Francis Reginald Statham, *Blacks, Boers, & British; a Three-Cornered Problem* (Hathi Trust; Google, 2026 (originally 1881)), p. 183.

³⁷ “Proposed Mortgage of 450 pounds over Lot 1 of ‘Rooival’ and Lot 1 of ‘Riversdale’, Klip River Division,” 1 April 1916, Chief Native Affairs Commissioner: Natal to Secretary for Native Affairs, Pretoria, CNC 231A 318-1916 (NAB).

³⁸ la Hausse, *Restless Identities*, p. 160-161.

³⁹ la Hausse, *Restless Identities*, p. 165.

syndicate, he bought the farms Mountainside and Gerzim in Klipriver. And with an 80-member syndicate, Loch Lomond, Gardens, Crane Valley and later Cecil, in Newcastle. He served as the “chairman, trustee and chief organiser” of these syndicates.⁴⁰

Maling’s fortunes began to decline in 1897, when a combination of environmental factors, the Rinderpest epidemic and demands from white farmers for preferential access to markets, made it difficult for black-owned syndicates to survive from farming.⁴¹ In 1911, court proceedings began in which Maling was tried for misappropriating syndicate funds. John Radebe and several other members of the Cecil syndicate approached the Magistrate in Newcastle, where they handed over a petition complaining that Maling had remortgaged the farm they had bought together in 1895.⁴² Maling had taken out bonds on two farms in Newcastle – Cecil and Stijlkrantz – to pay instalments on other mortgages. But he had done so without the consent of the majority of residents (syndicate members).⁴³ As a result the Cecil residents were facing eviction.

According to the terms of the Cecil title deed, a group of families had bought the farm via a Trust deed, with Maling listed as the trustee. But they claimed Maling was obliged to consult them if he sold or remortgaged the farm. The group requested a criminal case against Maling because they guessed that a civil case would not bring them compensation, given that Maling was bankrupt. In their petition, Radebe and co remarked that they had been pressured by the Surveyor General into nominating Maling as trustee:

*We understand that these farms would never have been, as they are, in the name of one individual in his private capacity, were it not for some objection that the Surveyor General had at the time to grant a Deed of Purchase and Sale in the names of several Natives.*⁴⁴

⁴⁰ la Hausse, *Restless Identities*, p. 160.

⁴¹ la Hausse, *Restless Identities*, p. 164.

⁴² Letter from Crook & Ingram, Solicitors and Conveyancers, Newcastle to the Secretary for Native Affairs, Natal, 3 June 1910; Letter from Acting Secretary for Native Affairs to the Acting Under Secretary for Native Affairs, Natal, 1 February 1911; both SNA 1-1368 1869-1910 (NAB).

⁴³ Letter from acting Sergeant Natal Province (GH Pardon) to Magistrate Newcastle, 09/03/1912, SNA 1-1368 1869-1910 (NAB).

⁴⁴ Letter from Crook & Ingram, Solicitors and Conveyancers, Newcastle to the Secretary for Native Affairs, Natal, 3 June 1910 (NAB).

In 1912, Maling was declared insolvent and sentenced to 5 months hard labour for criminal fraud in relation to Cecil.⁴⁵ Maling was one of many intermediary figures involved in land buying syndicates, who fell into debt, the subjects of complaints by ordinary syndicate member and hauled before courts for misuse of funds. The wide-spread nature of this dynamic in syndicate suggests, as Paul la Hausse argues, not just personal faults but the “racially repressive workings of the colonial system.”⁴⁶ The petition by Radebe and co also illustrates how collectives were forced to translate their group land purchases into trust deeds that lent power to the trustees. The political and economic conditions – including higher interest rates on mortgages, the challenges of accessing markets, and the heavy rates of taxation in Natal – stacked the odds against black farmers and syndicates.

An analysis of the Watersmeet syndicate in the Ladysmith area of the Klip River district also offers insight into how land was managed as a collective. In Watersmeet, like in Driefontein, the land buyers established a committee to make decisions about the land.⁴⁷ Many of the Driefontein families, including Simeon Kambule and Joseph Kumalo, also owned undivided shares in the Watersmeet syndicate. The committee’s duties included resolving disputes, calling general meetings of owners, consenting to land transactions (including transfers, subdivisions, questions around use etc.) The committee consisted of 11 people to “govern all matters affecting the township” (includes water and commonage rights).⁴⁸ In 1923, residents raised issues with the committee and its chairperson, Joseph Sondezi, via their lawyers, Walton and Tatham. They alleged that the committee was not responding to their requests for decisions about land matters.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ His case was decided by the Dundee Magistrate. Acting Sergeant for Natal Province (GH Pardon) to the Magistrate, Newcastle, 09/03/1912, SNA 1-1368 1869-1910 (NAB); la Hausse de Lalouvière, *Restless Identities*, p. 167.

⁴⁶ la Hausse, *Restless Identities*, p. 167.

⁴⁷ Letter from Simon Tatham (on behalf of the Walton and Tatham firm) to the Magistrate, Klip River District, 16 April, 1923. 1/LDS 3/4/2/15 3/1/20/10/1 (NAB).

⁴⁸ Terms of the title deed for Watersmeet Syndicate, 1912, on file in Magistrate’s file, Klip River District, “Watersmeet Native Syndicate: Walton and Tatham,” 1/LDS 3/4/2/15 3/1/20/10/1 (NAB).

⁴⁹ Letter from Simon Tatham (on behalf of the Walton and Tatham firm) to the Magistrate, Klip River District, 16 April, 1923. 1/LDS 3/4/2/15 3/1/20/10/1 (NAB).

As other scholars have argued, land buying was also an important site of early nationalist organising.⁵⁰ Although born in Fort Beaufort in the Eastern Cape, by the 1880s, Josiah Gumede had a base at Rookdale, a syndicate in Bergville. He joined Simeon Kambule in petitions and organising meetings amongst syndicate members and their tenants. He was a founder, alongside John Dube and Simeon Kambule, of the Natal Native Congress in 1900. In 1905, he took up a position as a land agent with the firm of Thackeray Allison and Albert Hime solicitors, a position he held for the next 14 years. He represented land claimants and buyers in the Free State (BaTlokwa and Barolong) and went to England to make representations on their behalf. All of this meant the eyes of the state were on him. Gumede was arrested on his return home from England in May 1907, charged with wrongfully and unlawfully leaving the Colony of Natal without the pass or permit prescribed by one of the laws of the Colony of Natal. Gumede was found guilty and fined 10 pounds for this ‘crime’. The court records and correspondence surrounding his case make it clear that government officials in both the Orange River and Natal colonies, sought to restrain Gumede from his petitions around land claims for syndicates both provinces.⁵¹ Gumede’s solicitor, Mr. Willis, remarked, “I have never seen such perverse and biased views of a case presented by a judicial mind to bolster up a wrong judgment and an illegal prosecution.”⁵²

Women residents of Driefontein, Natal, played an important role the syndicate. Cecilia Lillian Tshabalala was born in Driefontein, Natal in 1888 and educated at the American Zulu Mission, the Ohlange Institute and the Hampton Institute in the United States. In 1937, she founded the Daughters of Africa, an organisation that was inspired in part by her experience with African American women’s clubs. The Daughters of Africa supported women to start agricultural projects, vegetable gardens, *stokvels* and small businesses. Bertha Mkhize, also of Driefontein, Natal, took up Tshabalala’s mantle of the Daughters of Africa. Both Tshabalala and Mkhize were supported in their work by Angelina Dube (nee Khumalo) who too had grown up in Driefontein, Natal and had imbued the Ohlange Institute with some of the Driefontein syndicate’s ideas

⁵⁰ Tembeka Ngcukaitobi, *The Land Is Ours: Black Lawyers and the Birth of Constitutionalism in South Africa* (Penguin, 2018); a Hausse, *Restless Identities*.

⁵¹ Letter from Magistrate, Bergville, to W Wyndham Esq, Secretary for Native Affairs, 7 January 1907, SNA 1/1/369 1469/1907 (NAB).

⁵² Letter from Solicitor Willis to Secretary for Native Affairs, 11 Nov 1907, SNA 1/1/369 1469/1907 (NAB).

around collective land ownership and agricultural production. The records of the Chief Native Commissioner for Natal also lists several women amongst the owners of plots in syndicates.⁵³

Credit and trust in syndicates

As was commonplace with syndicates in the Transvaal in the 20th century, most land buying syndicates in Natal bought farms in instalments, which they paid off with the aid of mortgages from mission stations, private moneylenders, law firms and banks linked to other properties their members had purchased. Edendale, as discussed above, set the foundation for the syndicate model in Natal.

In the 1840s, about 400 families left a Wesleyan mission community at Mahamba in Swaziland (now Eswatini) with the missionary Reverend Allison. Paul la Hausse describes them as “refugees” from the “intensifying political conflict within the Swazi kingdom.”⁵⁴ They settled on a piece of land called Edendale, that they had clubbed together to purchase as a group, under Allison’s name, in 1848. The community had Edendale was diverse, comprising not only families from Swaziland, but also amaHlubi, Zulu and baTlokwa groups. Since Edendale families did not have wide-ranging access to labour from their extended families, as precolonial farmers had often relied upon, they found working on a smaller scale as individual families to be attractive.⁵⁵ Unlike the line pushed by many white missionaries, including Edendale’s Allison, residents were interested in working for themselves rather than for the Wesleyan Church.

Many Edendale residents were united by their desires for individual ownership, cultivating intensely via family labour, and landownership as a way of securing their status as respectable, well off, Christians.⁵⁶ They saw individual land ownership as a signifier of progress in society.⁵⁷

⁵³ For example, at another farm called Driefontein in Lion’s River near Pietermaritzburg, Sikeliwe Mlile was considered an important role-player in the syndicate. The 12 families making up the syndicate sent a letter to the Chief Native Commissioner asking to be placed under the authority of Stephen Mini at Edendale, rather than Isaac Mkhize, who was their “farm manager”. The community explain that they are descendants of land buyers at Edendale. The notes say “the authority of kraal head granted to this woman [Mlile].” NAB CNC 234 1916 484.

⁵⁴ la Hausse, *Restless Identities*, p. 159.

⁵⁵ Lambert, “African Reasons for Purchasing Land in Natal in the Late nineteenth, Early twentieth Centuries,” 38.

⁵⁶ Meintjes, “Edendale 1850-1906.”

⁵⁷ Khumalo, “From Plough to Entrepreneurship.”

Francis Reginald Statham describes Edendale in the paternalistic vane of English-speaking liberals of the time, as an “industrious” village that reminded him of Yorkshire and “it is not until a veritable black baby is seen peeping out a window that conviction on the subject is possible, and that the fact is realized that we are in the centre of black civilization.”⁵⁸

The establishment of a syndicate in Driefontein in Natal in 1867⁵⁹ most closely foreshadows the Association syndicate that black farmers built in Daggakraal and the other Driefontein in the Transvaal in 1912. With the assistance of a Wesleyan missionary from Ladysmith, Johannes Kumalo led a group from Edendale to purchase the farm in the Driefontein in Klip River: “I acquired the land when we were in great trouble [depression]. I met the fathers of these men who are with me today [at Driefontein], and we formed a company, and we obtained land in order to hide our heads in it.”⁶⁰

Pietermaritzburg lawyer Kenneth Hathorn, who had worked with Edendale residents before, assisted Kumalo to draw up a Trust deed, with the Secretary of Native Affairs as trustee. This meant that although residents in Driefontein had bought their land, they remained beholden in the decisions they made about it to the government trustee. The trust deed system and involvement of Native Affairs officials distinguished the Natal Driefontein syndicate from Pixley ka Seme’s Association’s syndicate in the Transvaal in 1912. Seme’s project was particularly insurgent in the eyes of government officials perhaps because it specifically eschewed the Trust deed system and sought out an arrangement where black board members and landowners could call the shots. However, in practice, even in Seme’s syndicate, the Association’s reliance on white businessmen for credit, meant black farmers’ decision-making power remained limited.

The two Driefontein syndicates – in Natal and the Transvaal, 40 years apart in their founding – were quite similar in the land ownership forms they envisioned. In the Natal Driefontein in the 1870s, the buyers held land in “undivided shares.” In South African property law, undivided

⁵⁸ Francis Reginald Statham, *Blacks, Boers, & British; a Three-Cornered Problem* (Hathi Trust; Google, 2026 (originally 1881)), p. 183.

⁵⁹ The obituary states that Driefontein was established in 1841 by Kumalo, alongside Jonathan Xaba and Abraham Twala, but others report it as a breakaway from Edendale (the latter established only in 1850). Obituary: Late chief Johannes Kumalo, *Ilanga Lase Natal* (Durban, Natal), 21 June 1907.

⁶⁰ Kumalo, quoted by Meintjes, “Edendale 1850-1906,” 202.

shares represented a form of individual title deed that was particularly common among Boer landowners in the nineteenth century but was also taken up by black landowners. Each landowner had a title deed which indicated an unsurveyed share in the same piece of land. When further landowners were added to the land ownership picture (via marriage, birth etc.), the land would be further divided into additional shares, all of which had to be registered in the Deeds Office.⁶¹ In practice, black landowners at Driefontein in Natal diverged from the law of undivided shares. They managed their land as if they owned it as a collective, even though the title deeds for undivided shares were meant to represent individual interests.

Meintjes argues that the Driefontein, Natal syndicate's management of land marked an "entirely new form of land tenure and community organization."⁶² It represented a "synthesis of customary patterns of land holdings and the village mode established on mission stations." At Driefontein in Natal, there was a central commonage, shared large fields and individual plots. Like within the Association, the families who bought land at the Natal Driefontein created a committee to manage the administration of the land and handle disputes, including land transfers, inheritance and sales. The committee registered itself with the government as a "civil authority in the form of an *ibandla* or customary court, with one amongst the community elected to perform the duties of a headman."⁶³ It also handled payment of taxes on behalf of the community.

According to Meintjes, the Natal Driefontein collective venture entailed some of the same philosophical underpinnings that had been circulating in Edendale: a protective communal structure within which individual control over private resources could take place, aimed as a "buffer against discrimination and hostility of colonial society."⁶⁴ After initial waves of purchase in Driefontein in the 1860s, people continued to buy land next to it (Kleinfontein in 1875 and Doornhoek in 1879). All of these syndicates had the same "trust deed" model and so are referred to in colonial archives as "Trust Farms". Meintjes notes that all three farms involved committees of land buyers and that these committees' AGMs continued at least into the 1980s.

⁶¹ Allan West, "Shares in Land," LexisDigest, accessed April 2, 2023, <https://www.ghostdigest.com/articles/shares-in-land/54358>.

⁶² Meintjes, "Edendale 1850-1906," 204.

⁶³ Meintjes, "Edendale 1850-1906," 205.

⁶⁴ Meintjes, "Edendale 1850-1906," 209.

John Dube described Driefontein laudatory terms, after a visit in 1903:

I also realized that no one had told me to come here, and people said we were in our own country and we had bought it. The thing that makes me happy is that this gentleman and his wife are not even close to me. I find them sitting in a hut behind the house. All the way I went, I asked if I was from the country of the dead? Yes, my lord, all the way we are going. And these houses that you see are for us. I felt joy in my body and I thought I was going to die there too.⁶⁵

Natal Driefontein farmers initially did well economically. Kumalo, alongside fellow Driefontein resident Robert Grendon, were awaiting the building of an industrial school in Driefontein. As Grant Christison points out, the “government reneged on its promises and the school was not built.”⁶⁶ Markets and legislation skewed towards the benefit of white farmers meant that by the end of the nineteenth century, most black landowners in Natal had to rent their land to other African cultivators, including labour tenants, to survive.

One of the results of farmers struggling to make ends meet emerges in relation to syndicates defaulting on mortgage instalments. For example, Samuel Mavimbela and 48 others purchased the farm Rasmoir [sp?] in the Umsinga district in 1893. In 1894, they asked for an extension for the payment of their second instalment, worth £79.1.1. This was granted, but soon afterwards the group asked for another extension for future instalments. Mavimbela explained that he had “borrowed money and had to pay interest thereon to Walton and Tatham, Ladysmith, that borrowed was to pay the first installments on the purchase of Crown Lands.”⁶⁷ The conversation between government officials reveals at the debates at play amongst administrators about black farmers’ land purchases. One official casts aspersions on the land buyers, saying they do not understand the “liability” involved in land purchase and that it would be less risky to buy land as

⁶⁵ John Dube, editorial, *Ilanga Lase Natal* (Durban, South Africa), April 24, 1903: 1. *Readex: African Newspapers*. My translation.

⁶⁶ Grant Christison, “Robert Grendon: A very dissatisfied man and his involvement with *Ilanga lase Natal*,” in Bongani Ngqulunga (ed.), *Ulibambe Lingashoni! A History of Ilanga lase Natal Newspaper* (Jacana, 2025), p. 73. Driefontein landowner Solomon Kumalo served as editor of the newspaper *Inkanyiso yase Natal* between 1895-1896, so it would be worth looking at the paper’s issues during that period, for clues about the Driefontein project.

⁶⁷ Resident magistrate, Umsinga Division, to Surveyor General, 26 Nov 1884, SGO III-1-53 (NAB).

individuals, than as a syndicate. Another, the resident magistrate of Umsinga, then tells the Secretary of Native Affairs that the problem is that the purchase price typically offered to black land buyers is double that of white land buyers:

Europeans object as a rule to having semi-civilized Native Land owners for neighbors — with but few exceptions this class of natives as neighbors would be unbeatable. Under these circumstances it is indeed hard on such men as these 48 [Mavimbela's syndicate] - who struggle to buy land and are run up beyond their reach to procure sufficient money to pay for land — over £20 per acre, when Europeans frequently buy choice land at £10 per acre.⁶⁸

Johannes Kumalo and “other Christian natives”, including Simeon Kambule and Timothy Gule, petitioned the Klip River magistrate for assistance “by the Government in tilling their grounds” on behalf of the Driefontein syndicate in 1897. Kumalo asked for a donation of 50 donkeys, writing that:

We the undersigned the Tribe under the Chief Johannes Kumalo are ever submissive to the authority of HER MAJESTY in times of peace and in times of trouble, and have never been oppressed under the rule of her majesty.

But Sir, this year we bring to your notice the trouble which has befallen us in the cattle disease (Rinderpest) and we are at a loss to know with what we are to plough this year, because we are people who usually plough with oxen.⁶⁹

The district decided not to provide assistance because “government can do no more than it has done by selling mules and donkeys on the deferred payment system.”⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Resident Magistrate, Msinga to Sec of Native Affairs, 17 March, 1885, SGO III-1-53 (NAB).

⁶⁹ Letter from Johannes Kumalo to Resident Magistrate, Klip River district, November 1897; signed by Johannes Kumalo, SE Kambule, SJ Sondezi, Z Dhlamini, L Xaba, M Ndaba, Amos Nkosi, Elias Mabaso, E Msimang, S Xaba, P Mounu, A Msimang, L Mdaweni, Job Kumalo, Joel Sivele, Laban Kumalo, T Gule, A Twala, M Ndaba, Joseph H Kumalo; 1/LDS 3/3/13 L818/1897 (NAB).

⁷⁰ Minister of Lands to Resident Magistrate, Klip River district, November 1897; 1/LDS 3/3/13 L818/1897 (NAB).

Isiah Dlamini was part of a syndicate who purchased the farm Peach Tree in Dundee district from C.M. Grobbelar and C. Koster. By 1911, with the 1913 Land Bill in the works, records imply that Natal government officials are trying to obstruct purchases by syndicates. The Acting Commissioner of Inland Revenue writes that, “it has been practice for a long time to disallow applications by Natives for Crown Lands under alienation from a European.”⁷¹ In addition, Dlamini and co.’s purchase was thought to be “irregular” because they paid their instalments to the Clerk of the Peace in Dundee, and not to the owners. As with many syndicates in Natal, the legal firm Walton and Tatham, handled instalment payments on the syndicate’s behalf. Yet, black farmers continued to seek a way to navigate the legal system.

The fortunes of Natal land buying syndicates

In the wake of economic troubles syndicate members sought a move away from Natal to the new syndicates being set up in the Transvaal, such as the Association. Records from the Klip River and Newcastle magistrates’ offices show many applications from landowners in Natal, to move to Seme’s Native Farmers Association syndicate in the Transvaal in 1912. For example, Andries Hlongwane moved from Newcastle to Daggakraal in the Transvaal, where he became one of the board members of the Association.⁷² Government officials corresponded about this outflow of people to the Association’s lands in the Transvaal, complaining that it would “lure” black workers away from white farms in Natal. In 1916, the Secretary for Native Affairs in Pretoria instructed the magistrates of every district in Natal to keep an eye on activities involving the Association to recruit land buyers.⁷³ When land buyers moved to the Transvaal, it is likely brought knowledge of syndicates in Natal with them and infused them into the new syndicates.

The magistrate of Ladysmith also mentions that Seme, Gumede, Dube and Saul Msane had been holding meetings in Natal to promote an organisation called the “Native National Land Settlement and General Corporation of South Africa.”⁷⁴ The Corporation seems to be a similar

⁷¹ 28 Feb 1912, Acting Commissioner for Inland Revenue FC Duggan, to Receiver of Revenue, Ladysmith. 1/LDS 3/3/20 Klipriver (NAB).

⁷² Requests to move from Newcastle to Native Farmers Association lands in Transvaal, Newcastle Magistrate’s Records, CNC 85 1525/1912 (NAB).

⁷³ “Natives Land Act: Alleged Evasion,” Report from Chief Native Commissioner, Natal to Secretary for Native Affairs, Pretoria, 22 March, 1916, CNC 231B 350-1916 (NAB).

⁷⁴ Memorandum, Chief Native Commissioner, Natal, 18 August 1916, CNC 231B 350-1916 (NAB).

body to the Native Farmers Association. It had already acquired some properties in Barberton and Zebediela in the Transvaal and Babanango in Natal, with the assistance of two white intermediaries, Mr. Martyn-Mason and Mr. J.A. Mostert.⁷⁵ The Corporation's constitution states that it is "open to all Natives of South Africa regardless of age, sex and creed," and that its goals include:

- 1) *To do all such acts, matters and things as will tend to raise the native race and Native members individually in the scale of civilisation; to advance their best interests and to promote a sentiment of loyal Native nationality.*
- 2) *To advise and carry into execution methods of easy acquisition of land by members under the Natives Land Act.*
- 3) *To provide and carry into execution easy means of acquisition by members of houses, fencing, seed, cattle, etc.*
- 4) *To establish and assist Native ranching on ordinary business lines...*

The constitution ends with the goal "to take any steps necessary to influence the Imperial or union government in favour of national spirations or interests."⁷⁶ Its first chairperson would be Saul Msane, and it would have a board of black members as well as an "Advisory Board of Europeans" comprising Harris Horwitz (a land speculator and financier who had also supported land-buying schemes by black people in the Cape province), Aaron Harry Myers (a Johannesburg banker) and William Lee (a Johannesburg lawyer). The main financier of the Corporation, as with the Native Farmers Association, was Johannesburg movie and property tycoon, Isidore William Schlesinger.⁷⁷

On 18 October, 1917, another similar organization was founded at a meeting at Ladysmith in Natal – the Bantu Farmers Union. The Union was led by Josiah Gumede and consisted of "various Native Farmers, dotted in different places of Natal Province." The Union's aim, as stated in the Preamble to its constitution, was, "whereas they ["native farmers"] have found their

⁷⁵ Memorandum, Chief Native Commissioner, Natal, 18 August 1916, CNC 231B 350-1916 (NAB).

⁷⁶ Constitution of the Native National Land Settlement and General Corporation of South Africa, on file with the Chief Native Commissioner, Natal, 18 August 1916, CNC 231B 350-1916, pp. 1-2 (NAB).

⁷⁷ Memorandum, Chief Native Commissioner, Natal, 18 August 1916, CNC 231B 350-1916 (NAB).

position as farmers is being jeopardized by the Land Act of 1913 ... [they] resolved to constitute themselves into a body ... and to enjoy the free use of all lands movable and immovable properties that shall be acquired on behalf of the said Farmers Association for rendering effectual the trust created by purchase of grants...⁷⁸

[The fate of these two Natal land buying associations is unclear to me. Anyone with further information, please come forward!]

Concluding thoughts

In her book *The Moon is Dead*, Keletso Atkins includes land buying syndicates in her argument that black people refused to offer their labour time to white settler farmers and industries in a way that met these settlers' demands. This refusal, she argues, came in part from an unwillingness to buy into the work ethic articulated by settler colonial capitalists.⁷⁹ At first glance, Atkins' argument seems to run counter to the ideas put forward by black land buyers around a sense of subjecthood defined by self-help, a protestant work ethic and Christian education. However, Atkins suggests that by purchasing land, black landowners could opt out – to a certain extent – from a capitalist work ethic in which black people were the labourers, and never the owners of the means of production. This seems to be a crucial political intervention articulated by land buying syndicates in Natal.

In both Natal and the Transvaal, syndicate land became havens for black workers, who left white farms in their numbers to buy into or work as a tenants on black-owned syndicate lands. Like the syndicates in the Transvaal, the Natal syndicates offer glimpses of visions for political liberation and economic incorporation into capitalism on terms determined not only by white settlers and the colonial government, but also by black entrepreneurs, farmers, lawyers and intellectuals.

⁷⁸ Preamble and Constitution, Bantu Farmers Association, sent to the Chief Native Commissioner, Natal by Josiah Gumede, 29 August 1918, CNC 329 2113-1918.

⁷⁹ Keletso Atkins, *The Moon is Dead! Give Us Our Money! The Cultural Origins of an African Work Ethic, Natal, South Africa, 1843-1900* (Heinemann, 1993), p. 49.