

# **The ‘contestation of crime’: Using a spatial theory of crime to examine livestock theft among small-scale farmers in Swartruggens, North West province**

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## **Abstract**

Crime is a complex and multi-layered phenomenon that impacts the lives of every South African. One crime type - and its causes and consequences - that has been relatively under-researched in the country is livestock theft. This crime is becoming of increasingly concern due to its progressively organised nature and its consequential impact on local and national food security. In this study, we use a seminal spatial theory of crime – the routine activities theory - to examine the incidence of livestock theft in the farming community of Swartruggens, a small town in the North West Province of South Africa. Using group conversations with local community members as well as a series of interviews with farmers we obtain a better theoretical understanding of the causal and contributory factors to the occurrence of livestock thefts in the area. We further motivate for a ‘contestation of crime’ in this community whereby various role players provide different and distinct rationales behind this scourge afflicting this town and its surroundings. A collaborative approach is recommended between community members and farmers to change the narrative depicted by both groups. This will hopefully deescalate existing tensions in the community and reduce the likelihood of further thefts occurring.

**Keywords:** livestock theft; farm; crime; North West province; Covid-19

## Introduction

Livestock farming plays a major role in South Africa's agricultural sector, accounting for over 40% of agricultural output's total value and occupying roughly 80% of available agricultural land (Farming Market Research, 2020). According to Statistics South Africa (2017), the largest percentage of farms involved in the commercial agriculture industry in the country are livestock farms which comprise roughly 34% of all farming units. **According to the Stock Theft Act 57 of 1959 (now the Judicial Matters Amendment Act 55 of 2002) livestock is defined as “any horse, mule, ass, bull, cow, ox, heifer, calf, sheep, goat, pig, poultry, domesticated ostrich, domesticated game or the carcass or portion of the carcass of any such stock”.** Livestock not only provides both food and financial security to a large number of households, particularly in rural communities (Maluleke et al., 2016) but has also been recognised to hold some level of traditional importance (Gueye, 2013).

Its counterpoint, livestock theft, is the deliberate and illegal acquisition of livestock for an individual's own or economic gain. **The Act itself refers to stock theft as any person who is found in possession of livestock or produce to which there is reasonable suspicion that it has been stolen and is unable to give a satisfactory account of such possession. Importantly, the Act also refers to any person who enters any enclosed land (i.e., fence or any kraal, shed, stable or other walled place) with intent to steal as guilty of an offence.** It is categorised as a property-related crime by the South African Police Services (SAPS) (2021) and was declared a priority crime in 2011 in the National Rural Safety Strategy (NRSS) (Maluleke et al., 2016). Initially thought to be a crime committed out of need and/or starvation (i.e., 'potslagting' – stealing for consumption) (Doorewaard, 2020), livestock theft has increasingly become more organised, having associated adverse effects on farmers and their workers (see Clack, 2013; Kempen, 2017; Kynoch et al., 2001; Lombard & Bahta, 2019; Maluleke et al., 2016; Matooane & Dzimba, 2005; Nommoyi, 2000; Osama, 2000). Indeed, the

consequences of livestock theft are felt both in the short and the long term. In terms of the former, livestock theft can adversely affect the nature of the relationship between farmers and their employees with trust becoming increasingly strained (Lombard & Bahta, 2019). In terms of the latter, livestock theft can adversely impact food prices and other related by-products (Clack, 2013) as well as increase intra- and inter village relations (Kynoch & Ulicki, 2000).

While a lot is known about crime and its causation in South Africa in general (see Breetzke, 2010; Breetzke, 2018; Lancaster & Kamman, 2016) relatively little is known about livestock theft. This is unfortunate given the importance this sector of the economy plays in contributing to the livelihoods of people, particular those who reside in rural areas (De Haan et al., 2001) but also given that livestock theft remains one of the biggest challenges faced by South African livestock farmers. Notable exceptions include Lombard and Bahta (2019) who investigated the economic impact of livestock theft in KwaZulu-Natal and found the total annual direct financial impact of sheep and goat theft in the province to be roughly R45 million annually. Similarly, Maluleke et al. (2016) examined the extent of livestock theft in Limpopo and found incidences of livestock theft to be rising at an alarming rate, greatly affecting the livelihoods of farmers and their employees. Other related studies include Clack and Minnaar (2018); Maluleke et al. (2019); Maluleke et al. (2022); and Pasiwe et al. (2021). Clack (2015) notes how focusing on ‘popular’ rural crimes such as rhino poaching and farm attacks (which receive relatively widespread media attention) in South Africa, has created a disparity for other rural crimes such as livestock theft, which remains largely under-researched and misunderstood. Moreover, past researchers have failed to examine this type of crime from a ‘spatial’ perspective and/or use any spatial theory of crime to explain its incidence.

The aim of this study is to examine livestock theft in the small rural farming community of Swartruggens, in the North West province of South Africa using one of the seminal spatial

theories of crime, namely the routine activities theory. The North West province is a popular target for livestock theft with incidences having increased by over 17% over the past decade.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, the Taung Police Station (which is located adjacent to Swartruggens) ranks 18<sup>th</sup> out of roughly 1300 police stations countrywide for livestock theft (SAPS, 2021). These combined statistics are of concern and suggest a growing need to understand this issue in certain high-risk policing precincts. Importantly, this study aims to examine livestock theft from the perspective of both the local community and farmers. Tangentially, we also aim to briefly investigate the possible impact that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on livestock theft in the area. A study by van der Walt (2020) found that livestock theft increased by two-fold in certain areas of the Free State and Gauteng during the ‘lockdown stages’ of Covid-19 in 2020. We aim to determine whether there has been a similar perceived increase in livestock theft in this small farming community.

The rest of the paper proceeds as follows. We next outline the spatial theory of crime that can be used to explain livestock theft before we outline our geographical focus area for the research. We then outline the methods we used to obtain our data before we highlight the key themes that emerged from our data collection. A number of solutions are proposed in effort to reduce these crimes conclude.

### **Theoretical framework**

One key spatial theory of crime that can be used to understand and/or interpret livestock theft is the routine activities theory of Cohen and Felson (1979). According to the theory, the risk of crime occurring is greatly heightened when there is a convergence in space and time of three essential elements: a *motivated offender*, a *suitable target* and the *lack of a capable guardian*.

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<sup>1</sup> Nationally, stock theft has increased by five percent from 2010 to 2020.

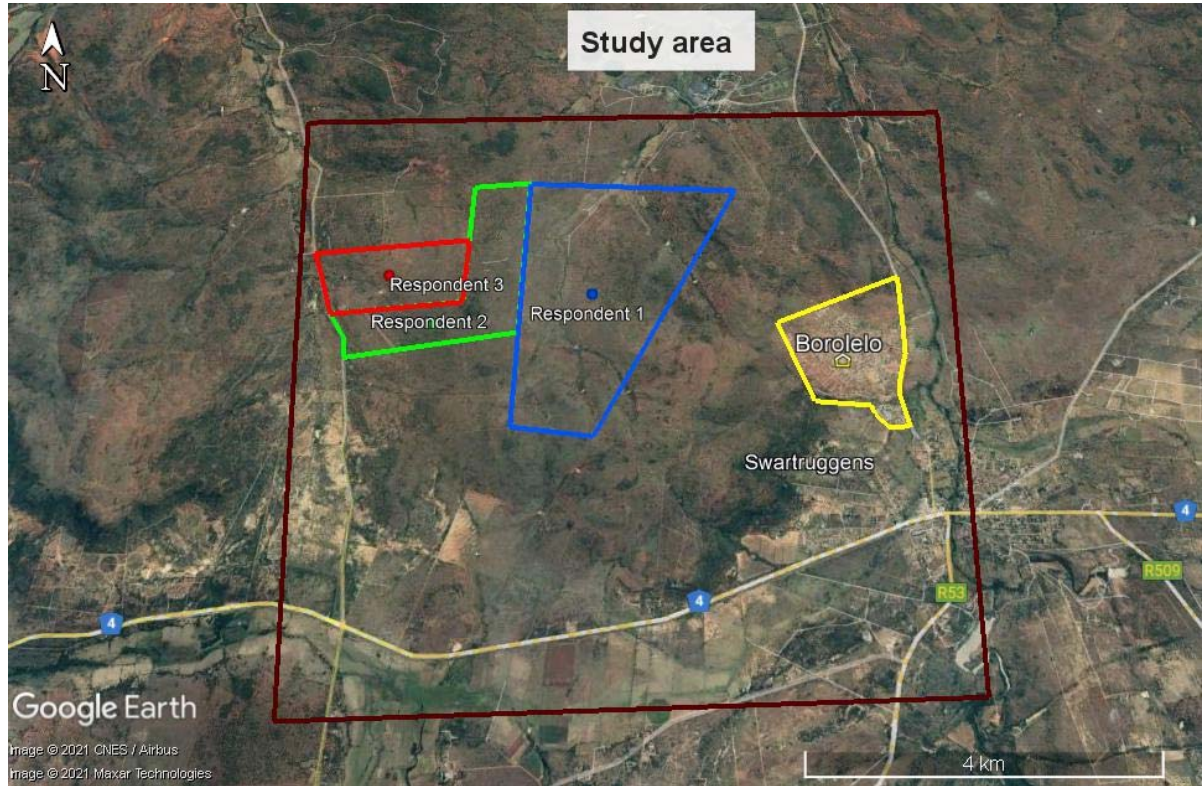
The availability of each of these three elements varies over space and time, affecting the likelihood that they will co-occur and thus impacting the possibility of criminal events and subsequent criminal victimisation. Routine activities theory suggests that the emergence of criminal opportunities within an environment is essential to understanding their frequency of occurrence as the risk of crime is governed by the convergence of these three elements. Within the context of livestock theft, a motivated offender would refer to the perpetrator of the theft who could potentially be motivated by any number of factors, including economic (hunger or wealth), social (prestige), and/or personal (revenge). A suitable target would refer to the livestock itself (i.e., cow, sheep, pig). Livestock as a suitable target is determined by its value as well as how desirable and visible it is to the would-be perpetrator. Livestock in general makes a desirable target due to its monetary value and the ease in which it can be taken (Doorewaard, 2020). A capable guardian refers to the security on the farm in the form of dogs, electric fences, CCTV and/or simply the farmer himself or herself.

Previous studies have most often used either no underlying theoretical framework and/or employed other ‘non-spatial’ theories to explain livestock theft (see Clack, 2013; Matooane & Dzimba, 2005; Kynoch et al., 2001; Nommoyi, 2000; Osama, 2000; Kempen, 2017; Lombard & Bahta, 2019). The results of this research have found that offenders of livestock theft have different motives, varying from those who steal solely for consumption (‘potslagting’) (Clack, 2013); to those who steal for financial enrichment (Doorewaard et al., 2015); or for revenge (Kynoch et al., 2001) and, finally, those who steal as a part of an organised crime syndicate (Lombard & Bahta, 2019). Doorewaard et al. (2015) profiled the perpetrators of livestock theft (motivated offender) and found that there was no ‘one-size-fits-all’ description for offenders however all offenders did demonstrate risk-taking behaviour and a lack of self-restraint. Interestingly, the offenders interviewed were all employed in positions within and/or associated with farming, further complicating the relationship between farmers and the local community.

We are aware of only a limited number of studies that has specifically used a spatial crime theory to explain livestock theft. These include Clack (2015) who used RAT to explain ten specific incidences of livestock theft across South Africa and Doorewaard (2020) who compiled a sample-specific profile of the perpetrators using interviews with offenders, the SAPS and victims. Both researchers found the theory suitable in explaining this type of crime although none analysed the problem from the perspective of the local community as well as from affected farmers collectively. In this study we aim to further untangle this association.

### **Geographical focus area**

The study was undertaken in the small farming town of Swartruggens, situated in the Kgetlengrivier Local Municipality in the North West province of South Africa. At approximately 12.60 km<sup>2</sup>, the town is characterised by its tranquil and serene farming environment. On the northern periphery of Swartruggens is the local township of Borolelo (see Figure 1) which encompasses an informal settlement known as ‘Bacha baa e rata’, directly translated to ‘the youth loves it’ which provides some insight into the predominant age of the population that resides there. A number of predominantly wildlife farms surround Swartruggens including three farms that were approached in this study (named Respondent 1; Respondent 2 and Respondent 3 respectively in Figure 1). Swartruggens is dominated by Afrikaans (57%) and Setswana (22%) speaking residents and is made up of a predominantly White (52%) and black African (40%) populations (SSA, 2021).



**Figure 1:** The location of Swartruggens and surrounding communities

## **Materials and methods**

Data for this study was generated from a case study that examined livestock theft from the perspectives of both residents of the local township of Borolelo as well as from three local white farmers whose farms lie adjacent to the township. Availability sampling was used to recruit participants. The first phase of the data collection was to engage the local township community in group conversations to allow them to share their experiences of livestock theft. Two group conversations were conducted with seven participants in the first group, and six participants in the second group. Group conversation is a research method in which knowledge sharing and a deeper understanding of a phenomenon occur through unstructured meaning-making processes (Feldman, 1999). The participants were aged between 18 to 70 years, and all resided in Borolelo. The group conversations took place at the local community centre on two

consecutive days. The conversations consisted mainly of open-ended questions which allowed the participants to share their perspectives on livestock theft openly. To create an environment where participants could discuss this sensitive topic, we enlisted the support of a local prominent community leader who facilitated both group conversations. The community leader had previously been engaged with community upliftment programmes with local youth from Borolelo. A conversational approach was adopted because it was imperative that all participants felt that the research space was conducive for them to speak freely. These conversations were conducted in Setswana (the local language of Borolelo), and ran for approximately two hours each, audio-taped, and later transcribed. The transcripts were later translated into English for analysis. Thematic analysis was used to organise the data.

The second phase of the data collection involved a series of one-on-one interviews with three local farmers. All farmers were white Afrikaans-speakers. Farmer 1 (Respondent 1 on Figure 1) was a small-scale<sup>2</sup> cattle farmer and the owner of a farm of roughly 600 hectares. The farmer lives on the farm and relies on the farm for his income. He employs a farm manager as well as a number of employees together with their families. Farmer 2 (Respondent 2 on Figure 1) is a ‘weekend’ farmer who does not reside permanently on the farm but stays on the farm most weekends. The farm is roughly 380 hectares. The main farming practice is small-scale wildlife (mainly Sable and Kudu). The farm is managed by a farm manager and two other employees that reside permanently on the farm. Farmer 3 (Respondent 3 on Figure 1) is a small-scale cattle farmer and the owner of a 200-hectare farm. The main farming practice is cattle, but there is also wildlife on the farm. This farmer is also a ‘weekend’ farmer and does not reside on the farm permanently but employs a farm manager and one other employee who reside on the farm. Interviews were held in Afrikaans and were unstructured but guided by a series of

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<sup>2</sup> By ‘small-scale’, we refer to the scale of the farming and not the size of the farm itself. As Kirsten and van Zyl (1998, p. 54) note: “one hectare of irrigated peri-urban land, suitable for vegetable farming or herb gardening, has a higher profit potential than 500 hectares of low-quality land in the Karoo”



questions. All questions were standardized for all farmers following a uniform approach of questioning to allow for a comparison of results. Due to the fact that these were discussion-led interviews, participants were not restricted in their answers and were given the freedom to express their opinions outside of the proposed scope. These interviews ran for approximately three hours each, audio-taped, and later transcribed. The transcripts were later translated into English for analysis. Again, thematic analysis was used to organise the data. Finally, all Covid-19 protocols were observed during all conversations and interviews.

## **Results**

### *Motivated offender*

There was a general consensus from all participants that the challenging socio-economic circumstances faced by the residents of Borolelo was a major contributing factor towards the growing incidence of livestock theft in the area, and that these have been exacerbated during the pandemic.

*‘If there were jobs available, no one would be stealing anything’.*

(Respondent – Community member, 24 April 2021)

*“There is almost every week someone on my farm trying to steal wood or busy with poaching activities. This only increased during the lower levels of lockdowns. The main cause, I think, are the people in the community of Borolelo that are poor and struggle to provide for their families. Most of them don’t have jobs, so they fall into traps with syndicates running the poaching operations”* (Respondent – Farmer, 25 April 2021)

Interestingly, **according to the white farmers**, livestock theft was also attributed to the lack of education among the youth in Borolelo with a high number of children not attending school. Reasons **they suggested** ranged from apathetic parents, lack of identity documents to register for school, to the schools actively expelling learners due to their social and economic standing within the community.

*“When I walk in the community of Borolelo I usually see kids during school time walking around with no purpose, so I think the school system is very degraded and students grow up without a purpose. I feel this is one of the main reasons we have an increase of crime in our area overall.”*

(Respondent – Farmer, 25 April 2021)

**It should, however, be mentioned that these perceived motivations for livestock theft in Swartruggens are the opinions of the three white farmers interviewed. They do not reflect the opinions of the numerous subsistence (mainly black African) farmers in the community that also experience periodic incidences of livestock theft albeit at a much smaller scale. Gaining their perspectives would provide greater insight into this scourge afflicting the community and certainly is an avenue for future research.**

Sadly, there is a strong racial undertone to livestock theft within Swartruggens that became increasingly evident as the group conversations and interviews progressed; this increased motivation for these kinds of incidents. Indeed, longstanding racial tensions between the white farmers and black African members of the Borolelo community (specifically those residing near the edge of the township adjacent to the farms) was evident with multiple encounters of dangerous and oftentimes near-death interactions between farmers and the local community.

*'Many years ago, one of the white farmers stole cows from people in Borolelo and from the auctions, and then blamed locals from Borolelo, after the locals found out about this, they retaliated and started stealing from white farmers but specifically from that white farmer and his son'* (Respondent – Borolelo community member, 25 April 2021)

*'[white farmer B] is racist and assumes that black people are just going to steal from his farm even when they're just collecting wood or grazing their animals around [white farmer A]'s plot, him and his sons always intimidate people with guns, threatening to kill them'* (Respondent – Borolelo community member, 25 April 2021)

*'His sons have held a gun to my face while I was collecting wood, it has happened multiple times, they do this to kids too'*

(Respondent – Borolelo community member, 25 April 2021)

These racial tensions were found to be contributory factors in livestock thefts, particularly those that occurred on the neighbouring farms as historical quarrels and past interactions have bred hate and negative emotions within members of the Borolelo community. Borolelo respondents in particular affirmed that the livestock thefts occurring on these farms are motivated by resentment and retaliation which is rooted in their perceived historical ill-treatment by the farmers.

*'Some people have buried their families on farms that were later bought by these white farmers like [white farmer B] but they don't give them access to visit or even perform the cultural or religious rituals necessary, which creates even more hatred from black people'*

(Respondent – Borolelo community member, 26 April 2021)

*Suitable target*

All farmers interviewed had recently fallen victim to livestock theft. Cattle were the most ‘suitable targets’ in the area however warthogs were also frequently stolen. The theft of warthog in particular was perceived as being a sign of the increased desperation that members of the Borolelo community were experiencing, especially since the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic

*“... my main problem is poaching of warthogs on my farm. People don’t have much to do in Borolelo, so they are opportunistic and try to find easy ways to make money, and it’s easy to sell warthog meat in the community”* (Respondent – Farmer, 25 April 2021)

*“During the hard lockdown I was really surprised to see a decrease in people walking freely on my farm, but as the time continued more and more people started to poach and tried to steal my cattle for meat. A lot more women were collecting wood, probably to use for energy and warmth during the later stages of lockdown.”* (Respondent – Farmer, 25 April 2021)

*“More poaching of warthogs on my farm happened. I can remember when I bought the farm in 2013, there were lots of warthogs and now, especially during the lockdown, they all disappeared, and I really struggle to find one on my farm. The crime definitely increased on my farm during lockdown and I had to enhance my security, together with the neighboring farm owners.”*

(Respondent – Farmer, 25 April 2021)

All participants who fell victim to livestock theft expressed the financial (and emotional) toll it had taken on them and that their safety and security were compromised after these events.

*'They steal more than just the stock, they steal our safety and our trust in one another, which is why Swartruggens is like this. It's because we don't trust each other'* (Respondent – Farmer, 25 April 2021)

The perception behind livestock theft as a crime differed amongst participants with some respondents providing no justification for the act whatsoever (farmers), while others expressing some sympathy towards it (Borolelo community members).

*'When a person would find an open field or farm, and would take something, cook it and eat it – it was not a crime, that was hunger not theft but once there's money involved and they steal it and sell it, that's a crime, its theft'* (Respondent – Borolelo community member, 25 April 2021)

Interestingly, the Borolelo participants were all aware of the livestock thefts occurring not only in the neighbouring 'white' farms but also within Borolelo itself. **Subsistence (mainly black African) farmers and their livestock within Borolelo itself were also seen as being suitable targets for offenders. This was largely attributed, by the local community, to internal competition between local subsistence farmers within Borolelo although we iterate that we did not interview local subsistence black African farmers themselves for this study so we make no inferences here regarding motive.** A degree of hatred was also experienced between members of the community resulting in the disintegration of sustainable agricultural strategies such as group farming.

*'When someone sees that your farm looks good or that your business is improving, they feel the need to take that away from you and say that they can't suffer while you progress, so they steal'*

(Respondent – Borolelo community member, 25 April 2021)

Tangentially, cable theft was also seen as a potential ‘target’ within Borolelo and was seen as a major concern in the community. Respondents complained about the subsequent effects that cable theft would have on their community as they would have no electricity, and due to the lack of service delivery, would have wait over long periods for the electricity to be restored.

*‘This is now a syndicate, it’s not just theft. People see it happening and are too afraid to report it because it’s so dangerous now’*

(Respondent – Borolelo community member, 25 April 2021)

#### *Lack of a capable guardian*

A number of safety and security measures have been used by farmers to protect their livestock from theft. These include guards, electric fencing, CCTV cameras among numerous others.

*“I have electrical gates at the house and the entrance of the farm. Electrical fencing at the main road where the boundary of the farm is and between me and my neighbour. Also, electrical fencing around the farmhouse where we live. I have an alarm together with teargas in the house and lots of dogs to warn me.”* (Respondent – Farmer, 27 April 2021)

*“The safety measures we have put in place till thus far is an extra employee walking with the cattle so that there is constant two herders. If there is only one employee, the thieves wait until the employee goes for a bathroom break and then they steal small calves and run away. We try to find all the snares and dismantle them, but that is quite an impossible task for this big farm. I think the best way is too engage with the community to try and help them rather than fighting with them. That’s one of the main reasons we have the outreach programme with school children to educate them better.”* (Respondent – Farmer, 25 April 2021)

Ineffective and inefficient policing (*the* primary capable guardian) was noted by all participants. As was their complete distrust in the capability of the SAPS to maintain law and order in their community. Nominally, and constitutionally, the SAPS are in charge of preventing, combating and investigating crime in Swartruggens however all participants were generally in agreement that the police have failed in their mandate to maintain public order and protect the inhabitants of Borolelo, the local farmers, and their property. There was also a distinct lack of any community policing forums (CPFs) active within the community. CPFs are a legal civilian structure created in the 1990s and mandated to liaise between local residents and local police members on matters of local crime control and reduction. Again, the pandemic was seen as contributing to the decline in policing in general in the area.

*“Policing was bad before COVID-19 and has only degraded since the pandemic has started. Small petty crimes like stealing wood or laying out snares to poach animals by criminals would not be seen as important enough by the police. Therefore, they do not even come out to the farm if you report it”* (Respondent – Farmer, 25 April 2021)

In fact, all participants had completely lost faith in the police to the point of accusing them of being complicit in the commission of livestock theft. The lack of trust in the police has reached the point where residents are reluctant to report crime to the police for fear of reprisals. Residents believe that police often disclose who reported the crime to the suspected offenders and once released, the accused will attempt to extract revenge. Participants also believed that this bias in policing was largely as a result of the fact that the majority of police officials originate from Swartruggens, and reside with the people they are now arresting and having to prosecute. This made familiarity an issue as these police officials fail to hold offenders accountable for their crimes.

*'You can't go to school with someone today and then arrest them tomorrow, it's difficult and that's why the police here don't do anything because they don't want to arrest their friends'* (Respondent – Farmer, 25 April 2021)

*"They do extremely poor police work and this exacerbates the fact that criminals can do what they want and will never be caught because of this. I feel sometimes that the police are involved in some ways in the crime because how can you catch a criminal in the act and the next day he walks freely?"* (Respondent – Farmer, 27 April 2021)

*"We raided a group of ten criminals together with their dogs busy poaching on this farm and we managed to catch one of them. When the police eventually arrived, they just took him with no real statements taken. The Sunday when I visited Borolelo that same criminal was walking past me in the streets as a free man."* (Respondent – Farmer, 27 April 2021)

## **Discussion**

This study examined the incidence of livestock theft in the small farming community of Swartruggens using the routine activities theory as a guiding theoretical framework. Using group conversations and a series of one-on-one interviews this unique crime was unpacked within the increasingly complicating context of the Covid-19 pandemic. The motivation behind this crime was largely economic, with the socio-economic challenges faced by the local Borolelo community being the crucial determinant driving the frequency and occurrence of these thefts. Previous research has also found economic factors to be the main drivers of livestock-theft in southern Africa. **For example, Kynoch and Ulicki (2000) interviewed 146 people across six districts in Lesotho and also found how poverty was the main**



**contributing factor to this type of crime while Khoabane and Black (2009) found a reciprocal relationship between poverty and livestock theft. Indeed, they found how poverty not only drives livestock theft in Lesotho but also how livestock theft adversely impacts the economic prospects of effected communities.** As a point of difference from previous research we noted however growing and concerning racial undertones behind the occurrence of these thefts that, if continue unchecked, could lead to more serious violent incidences in future. Indeed, respondents in Borolelo largely attributed livestock thefts occurring on the neighbouring ‘white’ farms to revenge and retaliation for past perceived indiscretions.

Suitable targets were mainly cattle but an increase in warthog poaching suggests a growing desperation for food from local residents. Participants were largely in agreement that this desperation has been exacerbated since the Covid-19 pandemic begun. Official statistics indicate that livestock theft has declined since the pandemic begun (see Clack, 2022) although other studies have found increases in certain areas of the country (see Maluleke et al., 2022; van der Walt, 2020). It is unclear whether this trend is similar in Swartruggens but it seems reasonable to assume that this would be the case although this was not explicitly investigated in this study. In terms of capable guardianship, farmers relied heavily on ‘formalised’ guardians such as existing employers, electric fences and CCTV cameras to reduce the risk of livestock theft occurring on their farms. The supposed primary capable guardian available to all participants – the police - were simply not trusted by participants and were seen as being incapable and/or unwilling to reduce the risk of livestock theft. Importantly, distrust in the police is not new in a South African context. Indeed, according to the South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) - a nationally representative household level survey of citizens’ attitudes – roughly two-thirds of South Africans believe that the most corrupt government officials in South Africa are located in the national police service (SASAS, 2013) with the

police even been described as the primary agent of corruption in the country (see Bruce, 2008; Ivkovic & Sauerman, 2016). Currently, trust in the SAPS is low (Faull, 2007) with the reporting of crime considered to be a waste of time and effort by the majority of the South African population (Burger, 2011). A study by Clack (2018) also found gross under-reporting of livestock theft in the country. This was attributed to the fact that most farmers feel that the police do not really care about their problem. While the inability of law enforcement agencies to effectively prevent livestock theft in Swartruggens could represent a broader failure of the police to build bureaucratic capacity for effective service delivery, it could also simply reflect a generalized apathy on the part of the police in dealing with this type of crime. Either way, roughly 66% of South Africans do not trust the single agency tasked with providing them with security (see Afrobarometer, 2018). This presents complex challenges for the local farmers in Swartruggens. Do they continue with the status quo and let perpetrators continue to commit livestock theft unabated? Or do they seek to define (or redefine) the relationship between the local community in an attempt to reduce the risk of these crime occurring in the future? In terms of the latter, a series of local community meetings should take place that outlines the concerns of both parties; this was previously noted in conversations. This, in fact, was one of the few ‘solutions’ proposed by all participants.

*“If we engage with the community and help everyone where we can, they will have more respect for us and that way they will not target us.”* (Respondent – Farmer, 27 April 2021)

*“We need to find a way to help the community and create jobs for them, this way we can significantly decrease the crime in our area. Yes, sure, you will still get crime and criminals will stay criminals, but at least we can help the people that are in desperate need for money and that wants to make a living”* (Respondent – Farmer, 27 April 2021)

*“Most certainly, we need to help the community. The most difficult part of it, is to get all the farmers together and have the mindset of coming up with a strategy to try and help the community. If we can manage to do this, we will not only be helping the community, but we as a farming community will also benefit from it.”*

(Respondent – Farmer, 25 April 2021)

Indeed, a collaborative approach between community members and the neighbouring farmers is required to change the narrative depicted by both groups. **Farming laws and practices, notably the Agricultural Laws Rationalisation Act 72 of 1998, should also be distributed and shared to community members to start a dialogue on the environmental impacts of poaching as well as its impact on food security.** Another ‘solution’ would be to address the underlying socio-economic circumstances of residents of Borolelo. This is a challenging undertaking that would ideally include providing sustainable employment opportunities for residents as well as development programmes for the youth in particular.

Finally, the growing reliance of farmers in Swartruggens to rely on themselves to police their farms raises security concerns. However, this debate must take place in the light of the boundaries between ‘formal’ (police) and ‘informal’ security becoming increasingly blurred in South Africa. We would argue that the example of Swartruggens is not unusual but rather increasingly common across the country. Informal security nodes such as WhatsApp groups and informal ‘neighbourhood watches’ are already integrated into complex networks of authority throughout most regions of the country that challenge any clear-cut distinction of formal versus informal authority. Far from being ‘illicit’, these forms of security form a vital cog in the wheel of security provision especially in rural areas in the country, and especially for crimes such as livestock theft.

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