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THE ECONOMIC FUNCTION OF AFRICAN-OWNED CATTLE IN COLONIAL ZIMBABWE*

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SEVERAL RECENTLY PUBLISHED studies[1] have effectively challenged that most resistant of European assumptions about African cattle-ownership, the so-called 'Bantu cattle complex'.[2] The approach usually adopted has been to demonstrate that Africans were perfectly willing to sell their livestock to Europeans, both in pre-colonial and colonial times, provided that they judged the prices offered to be adequate. While this fundamental principle is not disputed here—and further evidence will be given to corroborate it for the period of the study (*c.* 1914–*c.* 1945)—it will be argued that an analysis based primarily on the exchange function (and at that, on only *one* type of exchange, between Black herdsmen and White traders) does not fully appreciate the multiform economic character of African cattle-ownership that developed at a very early stage in the history of colonial Zimbabwe. This emphasis on the exchange function[3] in studies of African cattle appears to have two root causes. The first stems from an understandable urge to attack the 'Bantu cattle complex' head-on by controverting its main assumption (that on religio-social grounds Africans were reluctant to sell their cattle to Europeans) rather than examining the wider economic context of African cattle-ownership. Secondly, there has been the influence, conscious or unconscious, of the formalist

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[1] P. Stigger, 'Volunteers and the profit motive in the Anglo–Ndebele War, 1893', *Rhodesian History* (1971), II, 11–23; E. C. de Carvalho, '"Traditional" and "modern" patterns of cattle raising in southwestern Angola: A critical evaluation of change from pastoralism to ranching', *Journal of Developing Areas* (1974), VIII, 199–226; R. J. Fielder, 'The role of cattle in the Ila economy', *African Social Research* (1973) [II], (xv), 327–61; R. M. G. Mtetwa, 'Myth or reality: The "cattle complex" in South East Africa, with special reference to Rhodesia', *Zambezia* (1978), VI, 23–35. R. S. Roberts, 'Cattle in Pre-Colonial Zimbabwe', *NADA* (1980), XII, ii, 84–93, arrived while I was redrafting this article.

[2] The classic statement is M. J. Herskovits, 'The cattle complex in East Africa', *American Anthropologist* (1926), XXVIII, 230–72, 361–80, 494–528, 630–64. For a very recent restatement of this view, see 'Rhodesia is cattle country', *Focus on Rhodesia* (n.d. [1977]), II, ix, 9: 'One problem in persuading Africans to take an active and profitable part in cattle farming is their traditional attitude to the animals'. Ironically, the peoples whose attitudes may have involved something of a 'Bantu cattle complex' (the Masai, Dinka, Nuer, etc.) were not Bantu.

[3] This is particularly the case in Mtetwa, 'Myth or reality', 27, which dismisses the productive function in a single sentence.

school of economic anthropology[4] with its emphasis on the exchange function. But, as Meillassoux has pointed out, production (and the associated phenomenon of reproduction) is a much more central concern in societies of the type presently under discussion.[5]

This article seeks to establish one main thesis: that the sale of cattle to Europeans constituted only one, and often the least attractive, of several economic choices normally available to African owners. In the first place, there were two other forms of exchange, *lobola* (bride-wealth) transactions, and sales between Africans themselves; secondly, there was the long-standing utilization of cattle as a form of saving against future need; and thirdly, there was the productive use of cattle for ploughing and transport, and as suppliers of milk and manure. There is abundant evidence that what was so often considered to be irrational behaviour on the part of the African owner (i.e., a refusal to sell or an 'exorbitant' price demand) represented on the contrary a careful weighing-up of the advantages and disadvantages of disposal to the European market, with reference to his personal needs as defined above, leading to a final and quite rational decision *not* to sell.

One significant socio-economic aspect of cattle-ownership, 'herding out', technically falls outside the scope of this discussion; it has been discussed in detail elsewhere with reference to Zimbabwe and its neighbours,[6] but may be briefly mentioned here. Large stock-holders acquired prestige by leasing out cattle to less fortunate men, making them into virtual clients. Cattle thus became an important agency in social stratification, a trend established a long time before the European intrusion and continuing well into the colonial period, especially in the Ndebele districts. The 'herding out' system was also a convenient way of securing adequate grazing for large herds and reducing the level of risk from localized natural disasters facing the big owner.

CATTLE IN THE AFRICAN ECONOMY

One reason often advanced to account for the reluctance of Africans to respond to

[4] i.e., S. Cook, R. Firth, E. E. LeClair, H. K. Schneider and others. The most extreme statement of this school is S. Cook's 'The obsolete "anti-market mentality": A critique of the substantive approach to economic anthropology', *American Anthropologist* (1966), LXIII, 323–45. Useful introductory texts are R. Firth (ed.), *Themes in Economic Anthropology* (London, Tavistock Publications, 1967), and E. E. LeClair and H. K. Schneider (eds), *Economic Anthropology* (New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968).

[5] C. Meillassoux, 'From reproduction to production: A Marxist approach to economic anthropology', *Economy and Society* (1972), I, 94, 98, 101.

[6] e.g., A. J. B. Hughes and J. van Velsen, 'The Ndebele', in D. Forde (ed.), *The Shona and Ndebele of Southern Rhodesia* (London, International African Institute, 1954), 90; Fielder, 'The role of cattle', 339–41; Carvalho, '"Traditional" and "modern" patterns', 218; S. I. Mudenge, 'The role of foreign trade in the Rozvi empire: A reappraisal', *The Journal of African History* (1974), XV, 389; Q. N. Parsons, 'The economic history of Khama's country in Botswana, 1844–1930', in R. H. Palmer and Q. N. Parsons (eds), *The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa* (London, Heinemann, 1977), 113–17.

market opportunities by the European commercial sector was the assertion that they regarded stock as a form of currency. Officials, and not a few Africans, likened cattle to a banking system.[7] Holleman has pointed out that the Shona term for livestock *(pfuma)* shares a common root with the word for wealth *(upfumi)*.[8] But what type of wealth did cattle represent? Writing on the Tiv of Northern Nigeria, Bohannan has defined horned stock as 'special purpose money', serving a strictly limited function (the payment of *lobola*) within a multi-centric exchange system employing other forms of currency.[9] Dalton has applied this classification to the continent as a whole with the implication that it was valid for the colonial, as well as the pre-colonial period.[10] In fact, in so far as the Shona and Ndebele were concerned, cattle fulfilled all the three criteria of 'general purpose currency':[11] they were stores of value, standards of value and media of exchange.

The importance of cattle as stores of value has often been treated as antithetical to other economic functions. Thus Barber asserts that Africans still 'in large measure regard cattle as stores of value, and not of income'.[12] While there is little evidence that stock-owners went in purely for ranching, delaying sales until the price was right—an oversimplification in the opposite direction—Barber's conception of income is too circumscribed, ignoring the productive and reproductive roles of cattle in creating potential new income. As stores of value, cattle had major advantages over other forms of investment. Their reproductive capacity normally guaranteed a higher rate of interest than Post Office savings accounts.[13] They were a relatively liquid asset which, subject of course to the vagaries of the market, could fairly easily be converted into other assets; in contrast, cash withdrawals from a savings account often involved lengthy journeys to the Native Commissioner's office or nearest urban centre. Cattle lacked the perishability of grain and bank-notes and moreover were movable assets in the most literal sense. It is small wonder that even educated and urbanized Africans regarded them as a highly

[7] See, for example, [National Archives, Zimbabwe, Salisbury; all references to archival sources are in this Archives], S607 (Native Affairs Dep[artment], N[ative] C[ommissioner], Bubi, Correspondence, General, 18 Feb. 1918–29 Nov. 1935), Chief Somvubu at Chiefs' and Headmen's meeting, Inyati, 22 June 1925.

[8] J. F. Holleman, *Shona Customary Law* (London, Oxford Univ. Press, 1952), 318.

[9] P. Bohannan, 'The impact of money on a subsistence economy', in G. Dalton (ed.), *Tribal and Peasant Economies* (New York, Natural History Press, 1967), 122–35.

[10] G. Dalton, 'Economic theory and primitive society', *American Anthropologist* (1961), LXIII, 1–25.

[11] cf. H. K. Schneider, 'Economics in East African aboriginal societies', in M. J. Herskovits and M. Harwitz (eds), *Economic Transition in Africa* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), 62. As LeClair and Schneider, *Economic Anthropology*, 468, point out, the substantivists' dichotomy of special and general purpose money is a false one, as in principle, cash cannot buy a wife in Western society.

[12] W. J. Barber, 'Economic rationality and behaviour patterns in an underdeveloped area: A case study of African economic behaviour in the Rhodesias', *Economic Development and Cultural Change* (1960), VIII, 239.

[13] The interest rate stood at 3.5 per cent in 1932. The average annual rate of net increase in the African cattle population between 1923 and 1932 was 7.38 per cent.

satisfactory type of investment;[14] apart from financing *lobola* transactions, they represented a form of social security for the unemployed and elderly at a time of increasing dislocation in the African rural sector. Nor is it surprising that cattle-owners generally interpreted the Government's wartime destocking measures as a kind of capital levy.[15]

The role of cattle in *lobola* payments, to be discussed in the next section, was supplemented both prior to and during the period of this study by a wide range of transactions which defy any attempt at a neat 'multi-centric' classification and show that, on the contrary, cattle operated as a 'general purpose currency' within the African economy. Traditionally, restitution for torts and fines for offences committed against the common weal took the form of cattle, a practice which continued clandestinely after the chiefs' judicial powers were stripped away by the Government.[16] Communities which lost crops because of inclement weather traded meat for grain: Mtetwa and Roder have described one such system in the pre-colonial period, involving the Sabi Valley and adjacent plateau societies.[17] In the present century, the exchange function of cattle became more diversified. A European witness told the Morris Carter Land Commission that Black stock-owners were selling cattle in order to purchase carts, which they leased out for ten shillings a day.[18] The launching of the African Purchase Area scheme in the early 1930s provided an incentive for owners of large herds to convert some of their stock into land. According to one district official, breeding-stock and animals intended for *lobola* purposes were freely exchanged for cash between Africans.[19]

Unfortunately, Native Department records are virtually silent on such important issues as the scope of inter-African transactions and operating prices: a factor which has undoubtedly resulted in the prominence given to the better recorded and quantifiable trade with Europeans. It is likely that for most of the period being discussed here, price levels were generally higher in the former. The frequency with which figures of £5 and £7 appear as the opening demand in price negotiations with cattle traders in the late 1920s and 1930s suggests that, taking

[14] See, for example, Z[Commissions and Committees of Enquiry], BJ/1 [Native Production and Trade Commission, 1944: Evidence], 1[Oral], (2), 993, evidence of C. Mzingeli, W. and B. Ntuli, 4 July 1944.

[15] Report on the Southern Rhodesia Labour Party African Branch Conference, 12–13 Feb. 1944, in *The Rhodesia Herald*, 18 Feb. 1944.

[16] In one important civil case, Mtandwa *v.* Shiota (1929), the appellant alleged that Chief Chihota (the respondent) had imposed upon him a fine in cattle, for incest. For further details, see *Reports of Cases in the Native Appeal Court, Southern Rhodesia* ([Salisbury, Govt Printer, n.d.]), I, (i), 5–20.

[17] R. M. G. Mtetwa, 'The "Political" and Economic History of the Duma of South-Eastern Rhodesia from the Early Eighteenth Century to 1945' (Univ. of Rhodesia, unpubl. D.Phil. thesis, 1976); W. Roder, *The Sabi Valley Irrigation Projects* (Chicago, Univ. of Chicago, 1965), 69–71.

[18] Z/AH/1/1 [Land Commission, 1925: Evidence: Oral], (2), para. 4817, evidence of L. G. Robinson, 1 Apr. 1925.

[19] S1563 [Native Affairs Dep., C[hief] N. C., Reports, C. N. C. and N. C.s, 1934–48], N. C. Lomagundi, Annual Report for 1936.

into account the mechanics of bargaining,[20] a sum slightly below this represented the norm for internal trade, as well as the equivalent standard of value expressed in monetary terms.[21] In both instances, from about 1921 onwards the figure was usually substantially higher than that offered by the European sector. Jasper Savanhu drew the appropriate moral in his evidence to the Godlonton Commission: 'If they [African stock-owners] do not want to sell to Europeans it is because they do not realise prices that are as good as when they sell amongst themselves'.[22]

There were several other factors which inhibited sales of cattle, or certain types of cattle, to Europeans and serve to qualify the general assertion that Africans would sell if the price was 'right'. First, to borrow Schneider's useful analogy, large stock were the 'big notes'[23] of the exchange system. As with high-denomination currency bills, the owner would hesitate to 'break' them down if other, intrinsically less valuable, forms of exchange (e.g. sales of grain or labour) were immediately available to meet financial obligations. Secondly, this hesitation would be reinforced by the innate caution of the peasant living close to the margin of subsistence: as Goodfellow has so rightly commented, where resources are scarce, it behoves the agriculturalist to dispose of them carefully and on economic lines.[24] Thirdly, most cattle offered to traders were elderly and had little further economic value. A Native Commissioner commented in 1918: 'Those who own big oxen are loath to part with them, while "weeds" do not command a ready sale. Breeding stock are very rarely sold.'[25] In time, this practice provoked many official grumbles about African ignorance of market forces, but in point of fact breeding and draught animals were too valuable to be sold to outsiders except in a very buoyant market or in cases of extreme adversity.

The number of African-owned cattle increased rapidly over the thirty years from 1902, the year when Native Department statistics commence (see Table I). During this period owners were recovering from the main disasters of the 1890s: the seizure of cattle by the Chartered Company and settlers after the 1893 War,[26] and the rinderpest pandemic of 1896 which may have destroyed as much as

[20] A very useful account of bargaining between cattle-owners and European dealers at the turn of the nineteenth century is given in S. P. Hyatt, *The Old Transport Road* (London, Andrew Melrose, 1914), 107–39. Hyatt stresses several points of procedure often ignored by later generations of White traders: African cattle owners' dislike of being rushed, since cattle sales were important events in the community; their readiness to sell to those whom they knew and trusted; their willingness to bargain downwards from the usually high opening demand. I am grateful to Professor T. O. Ranger for this reference.

[21] Schneider's study of Turu cattle ownership gives a similar valuation, 'Economics in East African aboriginal societies', 65.

[22] Z/BJ/1/1, (3), 1712, evidence of J. Savanhu, 4 Aug. 1944.

[23] Schneider, 'Economics in East African aboriginal societies', 54.

[24] D. M. Goodfellow, *Principles of Economic Sociology* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1939), 3–17. Goodfellow's book reveals the sometimes overlooked fact that criticism of the 'Bantu cattle complex' is no recent phenomenon.

[25] N/9/1 [Native Dep.: Reports: Annual], 21 [1918], N. C. Lomagundi, Annual Report.

[26] See Stigger, 'Volunteers and the profit motive'.

Table I

AFRICAN-OWNED CATTLE, 1902–1945

Year	*No. of Cattle*	*Year*	*No. of Cattle*
1902	55 155	1931	1 628 299
1913	377 090	1932*	1 755 610
1915	445 795	1933	1 748 621
1917	551 632	1935	1 653 462
1919	652 776	1937	1 582 062
1921	854 498	1939	1 570 310
1923	927 343	1941	1 768 690
1925	1 095 841	1943	1 824 521
1927	1 370 567	1944*	1 915 534
1929	1 495 803	1945	1 911 644

* = Peak years.

Source: Southern Rhodesia, *Report of the Chief Native Commissioner, Mashonaland . . . 1902* and *Report of the Chief Native Commissioner, Matabeleland . . . 1902* (Sess[ional] Pap[er]s, 1902; *Report of the Chief Native Commissioner . . . 1913* (Sess. Paps, A. 8, 1914), and for the succeeding years indicated (title varies).

95 per cent of African-owned stock throughout the country.[27] Arguably this is another factor which may have inhibited sales to Europeans. After 1932, a series of droughts caused a temporary reversal, but expansion of the cattle population resumed at a more modest rate just before the outbreak of the Second World War and continued until the start of statutory destocking in 1945.

LOBOLA

One aspect of the exchange function, *lobola*, merits closer attention if only because the majority of Native Department officials regarded it as the principal obstacle to the commercial exploitation of cattle.[28] The growing impatience discernible in the Department's records was not expressed in terms of hostility to the institution *per se*. No official wanted to abolish *lobola*, as it created a bond between participating kinship groups, helped to ensure the decent treatment of women by their affines, and fostered the security of the marriage arrangement—all vital matters to the

[27] H. Weinmann, *Agricultural Research and Development in Southern Rhodesia, 1890–1923* (Salisbury, Univ. College of Rhodesia, Dep. of Agriciculture Occasional Paper 4, 1972), 105. On the rinderpest pandemic itself, see C. van Onselen, 'Reactions to rinderpest in Southern Africa, 1896–97', *The Journal of African History*, XIII (1972), 473–88.

[28] See, for example, S 235 [Native Affairs Dep., C. N. C., Correspondence, Unnumbered Series, 1909–49] 487 (Native Affairs Dep. Advisory Committee, 1931–3, Minutes of Conference), comments of W. S. Bazeley.

Table II

AVERAGE *LOBOLA* CLAIMED AND ACTUALLY PAID, 1910–1945 (CASH EQUIVALENT)

	1910–14		*1915–19*		*1920–4*		*1925–9*	
	£	s	£	s	£	s	£	s
Claimed	11	0	11	10	15	0	17	0
Actually Paid	11	0	8	0	7	0	7	0

	1930–4		*1935–9*		*1940–5 (sic)*	
	£	s	£	s	£	s
Claimed	15	10	17	10	21	0
Actually paid	6	10	3	0	7	0

Source: Graph in H. Cripps, 'Should *lobola* be restricted by legislation?' *NADA* (1947), XXIV, 42.

Native Commissioner in his role as civil justice.[29] Concern was voiced rather at the 'commercialization' of what was held to be an essentially non-mercenary, social institution: a process attributed to Western materialist influences. One peri-urban Native Commissioner instanced the acceptance of *lobola* cattle by fathers who knew that their daughters had no intention of marrying the suitors.[30] The steady rise in the level of *lobola* demands (as shown in Table II) was cited as further evidence of commercialization. Of course, the mounting discrepancy between claims and actual payments may signify nothing more than a reluctance to pay up in full at a time of growing marital instability. But it could also point to the progressive impoverishment of suitors and ultimately of their paternal kin, who were traditionally responsible for finding *lobola* cattle for their sons. The sudden jump in the average actually paid in the period 1940–5, a time of economic recovery, would tend to confirm this interpretation.

In view of the inability of husbands to pay in full, why did the level of *lobola* demanded continue to rise? The most immediate reason seems to be parental anxiety.[31] Chief Nyakuna succinctly summarized this feeling at a meeting of the Mtoko Native Board held in 1932:

> Pledging is prohibited and our daughters go about engaging themselves to young men of their own choice, strangers they find at stores and other places. These men are not of our own choosing and some of them

[29] As defined in the Southern Rhodesia Regulations Proclamation, 1910 (High Commissioner's Proclamation No. 55 of 1910, Section 14 (a)). Note also the Native Commissioner's extensive powers as Registering Officer for 'native' marriages (Native Marriages Ordinance, No. 15 of 1917, Section 1).

[30] S 1563, N. C. Salisbury, Annual Report for 1934.

[31] Other reasons suggested include the rise in population (cf. Schneider, 'Economics in East African aboriginal societies', 64) and the effect of the erosion of wealth in the African Reserve economy resulting from the demands of the European sector (C. Keyter, personal communication, 16 May 1978).

> are bad characters and we naturally feel that we have the right to demand a comparatively large amount of *lobola* as a guarantee of the son-in-law's worthiness and good intentions.[32]

The sense of socio-economic insecurity felt by the older generation was reflected in the overt commercialization of the *rutsambo* element, paid by the suitor (not his father) and equivalent to a betrothal present. *Rutsambo* had been no more than a token in pre-colonial times, but it was now paid in cash and amounted to several pounds.[33] A further predisposing factor leading to inflation was the ripple effect caused by one family (or group of families) electing to raise the level of *lobola* demanded; not wishing to give the impression that their daughters were of smaller 'value', other families followed suit and eventually established a new norm for the community as a whole.[34]

An element of commercial calculation was thus apparent in *lobola* transactions. Was this a new feature, as the Native Department maintained? Certainly, with the growing diversification of economic life in the economy of the Reserves resulting from the impingement of European values, there was a trend towards 'commercialization': soon, girls with a modicum of Western education were able to command higher levels of *lobola* than their uneducated sisters. But a wide range of recent anthropological research conducted in Africa after about 1950 has cast considerable doubt on the rather idealized social interpretation of *lobola* which had held sway for so long. *Lobola* now emerges as a basically economic mechanism with important social ramifications. First, it represented the most pervasive form of exchange in pre-colonial society, and indeed some formalists like Gray have claimed *lobola* to be the *fons et origo* of the economic system, enabling it to rise above the purely subsistence level.[35] But secondly, and more significantly, women and cattle were 'economic' in the sense that they were both productive units,[36] and their value was enhanced further by their reproductive capacity. Both of these concerns were essential for the community's future survival, and their control was, as Meillassoux has stressed,[37] a key concern. On one level, this can be seen in terms of male dominance over women. But, as Terray and Douglas have pointed out, from differing standpoints, there is a second strand of exploitation in *lobola*—that of juniors by their seniors. The older generation

[32] S1542 [Native Affairs Dep., C. N. C., Correspondence, General, 1914–43], N2 [Native Boards, 1931–9], minutes of the meeting of the Mtoko Native Board, 10 Mar. 1932. On pledging, see below, fn. 40.

[33] Holleman, *Shona Customary Law*, 159, gives a range of £1 to £7 in Buhera for 1928. By 1946–8, the average *rutsambo* in Charter District as a whole was £10.

[34] Ibid., 164.

[35] R. F. Gray, 'Sonjo bride price and the question of African "wife purchase"', *American Anthropologist* (1960), LXII, 34–47.

[36] It is only fair to point out here that Holleman, often dismissed by critics of the 'Bantu cattle complex', is fully aware of the economic nature of the *lobola* transaction: 'Cattle and females, and cattle and food, are in a sense interchangeable values in Shona life', *Shona Customary Law*, 116.

[37] Meillassoux, 'From reproduction to production', 101.

utilize *lobola* as a means of controlling the supply of women to check possible attacks on their status by the young men: Douglas likens it to a rationing system in which the elders 'keep control of the issue desk'.[38]

From about the end of the first decade the pre-colonial *lobola* mechanism began to show obvious signs of strain. The older generation was confronted with a new constellation of forces: a settler society which imposed numerous financial obligations; the entry of labour migrants who sometimes sought wives from amongst local women, but who more often than not were content with forming irregular unions on a temporary basis; and an emerging younger generation who claimed higher status within their society on the strength of such non-traditional criteria as a period of service under Europeans, wealth in the form of cash or trade goods, or education. The elders responded by raising the ruling level of *lobola*, an action which had important social implications: fathers protected their status by keeping their sons dependent on them for the supply of *lobola* cattle, while their sons-in-law were imprisoned in what was in effect a client relationship for a correspondingly longer period. At the same time, the older generation provided themselves with a measure of immediate financial security by insisting upon the payment of *rutsambo* in cash. On the other hand, they were faced with the usual parental responsibility of finding suitable spouses for their daughters, if only to prevent them from absconding to the towns, forming irregular unions with aliens and thus becoming lost to the group as a whole.[39] One possible recourse, the pledging of girls before puberty to elderly and wealthy men in exchange for some *lobola* cattle on account, was greatly hindered by Government legislation, which also required that the consent of the woman should be 'freely and voluntarily' given to the marriage.[40] It is thus likely that to an increasing extent, fathers were compelled to face reality and to accept relatively poor suitors for their daughters: the growing disparity between *lobola* demands and payments may be a reflection of this trend.

Lobola clearly represents a factor of importance in an overall survey of the economic function of cattle, as, at any given time, a proportion of stock was earmarked for *lobola* purposes and excluded from the pool of cattle available for external sale, although they were used in the interim period for other purposes such as ploughing. The existence of statistics relating to the size of *lobola* demands would appear to make the calculation of this proportion a simple task, but in practice they offer little help. *Lobola* was essentially a circular transaction: daughters brought in cattle from other groups, and sons took them out again—yet

[38] E. Terray, *Marxism and 'Primitive' Societies* (New York, Monthly Review Press, 1972), 165–7; M. Douglas, 'Primitive rationing: A study in controlled exchange', in Firth (ed.), *Themes in Economic Anthropology*, 128–33, 138.

[39] A tabulation of Native Board minutes for the period 1931–3 shows that the problem of absconding women was brought up at 15 out of a grand total of 80 meetings; the grievance was most deeply felt in Reserves close to urban centres.

[40] Native Marriages Ordinance (No. 15 of 1917), Sections 6, 11 (1), and 12.

another reason for marrying off daughters fairly promptly. With equal numbers of sons and daughters, a father would in theory eventually break even; and in any case he required a large number of cattle only on a few occasions in his lifetime. Stock transferred to a father on the marriage of his daughter would be held 'in suspense' for an unmarried son, and under normal circumstances would not be sold. The system of paying *lobola* in instalments, usually completed on the birth of one or more children of the union, adds a further element of complexity to any quantitative analysis, especially as it is clear from Table II that *lobola* debtors were falling further and further into arears. Finally, the calculation must attempt to establish the average number of *lobola* animals held by the stock-owner throughout his adult life, relative to the overall size of his herd, and take into account the variables mentioned above. As a practical exercise, it is fraught with difficulties, especially as few marriage registers have survived and the information they provide is fragmentary. Neither do individual assessments by Africans themselves help greatly, as they are either a desideratum, or simply reflect the ruling level of *lobola*.

THE PRODUCTIVE USE OF CATTLE

During the period of this study, the main productive use of cattle was for ploughing, with the hauling of produce to market by means of sleighs, wagons and scotch-carts, and the supply of milk and manure making up various ancillary uses. Taken as a whole, the productive function of cattle assumed greater importance as time passed, with the potential result of removing an increasing proportion of cattle from the external market.

Between 1913 and 1938, the number of ploughs owned by Africans in the Reserves rose sharply from 4,280 to 93,938. Expansion was swiftest during the relatively prosperous years of the mid and later 1920s. The rapid change-over from hoe to plough necessitated the supply of a large number of draught animals, especially as the type of yoke in use at the time required at least four oxen per plough.[41] Although ploughs and ploughing oxen were hired out, and some Africans actually went into business as semi-professional ploughmen, it seems reasonable to assume that there may have been approximately 250,000 draught animals in the Reserves by the outbreak of the Second World War. African peasants castrated their bulls wholesale to make them amenable to the plough, with the added incentive that when they were no longer useful, they would fetch higher prices than bulls.[42] Their enthusiasm had unfortunate long-term consequences: since the larger animals were emasculated, the quality of African stock degenerated and its saleability diminished. Their determination to possess tools and other means of production on an individual basis, typical of peasant proprietors in general, led to

[41] The figures are taken from the Annual Statistical Returns attached to Southern Rhodesia, *Report of the Chief Native Commissioner . . . 1913*, and for succeeding years (title varies); Z/AZ/2/1 (Natural Resources Commission, 1938–9; Evidence: Oral), (2), 340, evidence of E. Alvord, 7 Nov. 1938.

[42] N/9/1/22 [1919], N. C. Salisbury, Annual Report; S235/508 [District Annual Reports, 1930], N. C. Bikita, Annual Report.

unmistakable signs of imbalance in herd composition: by 1948, working oxen were reported to have comprised 30 per cent of all cattle in some Reserves.[43]

From a very early stage in the colonial period African cultivators used draught animals to move surplus grain to market. The sleigh, a platform of branches dragged behind the oxen and perforce of very limited capacity, was the simplest of the conveyances employed; despite official condemnation of its part in causing erosion,[44] the sleigh persisted until quite recently. One reason for this was the high cost of wagons and scotch-carts, which put them beyond the reach of the average cultivator. The price of a scotch-cart in 1937 is reported to have been £45.[45] An attempt at local manufacture was made during the Second World War, but the resulting product was considered to be of poor quality and unjustifiably expensive. Nevertheless, ownership of scotch-carts and wagons steadily increased from 1914 onwards and facilitated the emergence by the outbreak of the Second World War of a limited number of 'middle' peasants in Reserves and Purchase Areas reasonably close to urban areas and railway lines. As was noted earlier, owners often hired out vehicles, but the very high charges made (another characteristic feature of peasant entrepreneurship[46]) must have deterred many would-be users.

The utilization of cattle for dairying was more developed in Ndebele areas; milk seems to have figured less in the diet of highveld Shona groups like the Zezuru.[47] African dairymen around Plumtree and Shabani were supplying milk in commercial quantities to their respective urban centres by the 1920s. This soon led to protests by European milk-producers and an expression of anxiety about hygiene from the Government Health Department. Legislation providing for the registration of dairymen and conferring upon the Minister concerned extensive powers to refuse certificates was eventually introduced in 1937.[48] Although it did not explicitly discriminate against African milk-producers, the Dairy Act in practice virtually extinguished their share of the commercial market outside the Reserves.

With the implementation of the Alvord agricultural demonstration scheme and the complementary system of arable land centralization from the late 1920s onwards, a new premium was placed on the use of manure to maintain soil fertility. Some initial resistance was shown by cultivators who complained that it accelerated weed growth.[49] A further delaying factor was the lack of labour and

[43] Southern Rhodesia, *Report of the Secretary for Native Affairs, Chief Native Commissioner, and Director of Native Development for the Year 1948* (Sess. Paps, C. S. R. 27, 1949), 102.

[44] e.g., *Annual Report of the Natural Resources Board for the Year Ended 31st December 1946* (Sess. Paps, C. S. R. 36, 1947), 3.

[45] Z/BJ/1/2 [Written], (1), C. D. Dryden, memorandum, 1944.

[46] See D. Warriner's similar comment about the pre-war Bulgarian peasantry in her *Economics of Peasant Farming* (London, Cass [reprint of 1939 original], 1964), 122.

[47] Z/BJ/1/2, (2), A. N. C. Bindura, memorandum, 1944.

[48] Dairy Act (No. 28 of 1937). For the effects of the Act on African dairyists, see S235/516 [District Annual Reports, 1938], N. C. Belingwe, Annual Report.

[49] On the question of cost benefit relationships in peasant agriculture, see E. Boserup, *The Conditions of Agricultural Growth* (London, G. Allen and Unwin, 1965), 66, and P. F. M. McLoughlin (ed.), *African Food Production Systems* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), esp. 3–39.

transport to collect and spread it out on arable land. Nevertheless, the employment of kraal manure in agriculture had won a fair measure of support by the start of the Second World War,[50] especially among 'advanced' farmers with relatively easy access to markets. Alvord's native agriculture section operated on the basic assumption that a mature ox produced sufficient manure to treat one arable acre of land, an estimate that has been accepted by several recent agro-economists like Floyd.[51] However, Native Department statistics reveal that prior to 1927, and after 1938, the ratio between total cattle and cultivated acreage was smaller than the Alvord formula, and that it did not rise above 1.18 beasts per acre at any stage.[52] As calves and low-quality animals producing correspondingly less manure represented a sizeable fraction of the total, and as cattle were not evenly distributed between districts and owners, it is apparent that even had manuring become a universal practice, there would not have been sufficient to go round.

Another major impediment was the shortage of land for African use, both for commercial ranching[53] and for mixed-farming operations, in areas reasonably close to towns and the line of rail. This topic has been covered in detail elsewhere,[54] but in the present context it is interesting to see how the Native Department turned the issue around by harping on the prevalence of 'overstocking', especially in the smaller Reserves. On that basis, the Department engaged in a lengthy campaign to induce Africans to cull their herds. However, it is significant that of the 20 Reserves estimated by Alvord in 1946 to be more than 50 per cent overstocked, 17 were also more than 50 per cent over-populated.[55] In other words, Africans in congested Reserves had too little land, rather than too many cattle.

The principal impression conveyed by this data is that Africans had insufficient stock (as well as insufficient land in many areas) to realize the full potential of the mixed-farming system envisaged by the Alvord agricultural scheme.[56] A comparison between what was deemed to meet economic requirements and actual holdings offers further quantitative evidence. Various official estimates of the former are available, giving a generally low range of 6 to 12 cattle per family: *lobola*

[50] Southern Rhodesia, *Report of the Secretary for Native Affairs and Chief Native Commissioner, for the Year 1939* (Sess. Paps, C. S. R. 9, 1940), 24.

[51] B. N. Floyd, *Changing Patterns of African Land Use in Southern Rhodesia* (Lusaka, Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, 3 vols, 1959), I, 127.

[52] This calculation is based on the figures given in the General Statistical Returns attached to the *Report of the Chief Native Commissioner for the Year 1918* (Sess. Paps, A.4, 1919), and succeeding years to 1945 (title varies).

[53] Purchase Area farms ranged in size from about 100 to 2,000 acres. The larger units were in very arid areas where the carrying capacity of the land was low (15–20 acres per head); also, most of these farms were dry.

[54] Most notably in R. H. Palmer, *Land and Racial Domination in Rhodesia* (London, Heinemann, 1977).

[55] 'Annual Report of the Director of Native Agriculture for the Year 1946' in Southern Rhodesia, *Report of the Chief Native Commissioner, Secretary for Native Affairs, and the Director of Native Development for the Year 1946* (Sess. Paps. C. S. R. 48, 1947), 49–52, Charts VIII and IX.

[56] For further details, see M. C. Steele, 'The Foundation of a "Native" Policy: Southern Rhodesia, 1923–1953' (Simon Fraser Univ., unpubl. Ph.D. thesis, 1972), 359–93.

cattle are customarily excluded on the grounds that they were not a fixed part of the herd.[57] The national average per married tax-paying male increased from 6.6 head in 1920 to a peak of 11.9 in 1932, then fell steadily to 8.8 in 1938 as a result of the continuing rise in the human population set against stagnation in the number of African-owned cattle.

At first blush, these ratios appear reasonable, except for the downard trend of the later 1930s, but the average is skewed by two factors in the distribution: first, the inclusion of predominantly pastoral districts like Matobo with corresponding ratios of 23.9 (1920), 20.4 (1932) and 12.4 (1938), and, secondly, the wide range in the size of herds.[58] A Native Department cattle census conducted in Shangani Reserve during 1933 showed that although the average holding was about 40 head, 175 owners had 14,569 cattle (a mean of 83 head) and the remaining 1,125 owned in total only 28,431 head (a mean of 25).[59] Some Africans, especially in the small, densely populated Reserves where grazing was severely limited, owned no cattle at all: the Native Agricultural Department in evidence to the Godlonton Commission (1944–5) put their number as high as 35 per cent of the total.[60] Although the absence of comprehensive statistics for each Reserve does not permit a categorical opinion, it seems likely that by the late 1930s, more than half of the African mixed farmers did not possess economic herds.

SALES OF CATTLE TO THE EUROPEAN SECTOR

Statistics covering the sale of cattle to Europeans were maintained systematcally only from 1926 onwards, although reference to Native Commissioners' Annual Reports enables one to derive a reasonably complete set of figures for a few districts from the end of the First World War (See Table III). The War itself was a distinctly favourable period for African cattle sales, with the stimulation of demand resulting from the East African Campaign and the opening up of the Rand market to

[57] It is significant that the Native Department took a serious view of the matter only in the Second World War. For estimates, see Z/BJ/1/1, (1), 1311, 1319, evidence of A. St J. Harvey and A. F. Durham, [July 1944], in which the witnesses gave a range of 8 to 12 per family, excluding *lobola,* and commented that only 10 to 12 Africans in the Fort Victoria Reserves had herds of more than 25 cattle. Alvord's estimate of 6 per family (as against the actual average of 4.6 in 1944) appears in *Report of the Native Production and Trade Commission, 1944* (Sess. Paps. C. S. R. 2, 1945), 31. Compare these official estimates with that of an African teacher quoted by R. McGregor, 'Native Segregation in Southern Rhodesia: A Study of Social Policy' (Univ. of London, unpubl. Ph.D. thesis, 1940), 164, viz., 15–20 per family: 4–6 ploughing, 3 milk, 11 *lobola.* Fielder gives a similarly high figure (20 household needs, and 10 herded out) for the Ila in Zambia, 'The role of cattle in the Ila economy', 338.

[58] Based on the figures given in the General Statistical Returns attached to the *Report of the Chief Native Commissioner for the Year 1918,* and succeeding years (title varies). A fairly large margin of error is present in this calculation, as the ratio of married men varies substantially from district to district, and even in the same district at different times; also, elderly men were usually exempted from the payment of tax and would not be included in the register. If single male taxpayers are counted in, the ratios become substantially lower, but as boys over the apparent age of 14 (who would not normally own herds anyway) were liable to tax, it was decided to exclude them from the calculation.

[59] S1542/N2, 62, Assistant N. C. Shangani Reserve to N. C. Bubi, 16 May 1933; one herdsman depastured nearly 2,000 head of cattle on the Shangani Reserve.

[60] *Report of the Native Production and Trade Commission, 1944,* 27.

Table III

SALES OF CATTLE TO EUROPEANS: NATIONAL AND SELECTED DISTRICT ESTIMATES, 1918–1945

Year	*National*	*Selected Districts*		
		Mtoko	*Chibi*	*Ndanga*
1918		1 500	2 600	5 000
1919		1 319	1 500	3 500
1920		765	1 600*	1 600
1921		217	1 400	200
1922		500		200
1923		106		100
1924		106		50
1925		537	1 123	
1926	27 144	615	2 355	
1927	22 360	620		630
1928	32 000		3 000	
1929	59 214		5 000	
1930	79 248			1 300
1931	41 156			
1932	31 642	707	None †	3 900
1933	81 081			3 512
1934	71 985	675	10 074	2 926
1935	62 601	750		1 226 †
1936	94 580	1 675	10 953	2 815
1937	105 357	2 486	7 988	2 464
1938	156 851	1 229	12 077	4 302
1939	87 518	857	7 906	2 997
1940	93 893	1 000	8 135	3 043
1941	92 939	1 469	5 992	3 282
1942	113 446	1 854	9 625	3 420
1943	106 256	3 648	5 984 ‡	2 323
1944	95 067	3 955	8 109 ‡	2 389
1945	141 445	1 018	4 337 ‡	2 624

* Includes unspecified number sold to other Africans.

† Affected by foot-and-mouth outbreaks.

‡ Includes figures for Nuanetsi (separated from Chibi District in 1943) to facilitate comparison with earlier figures.

Note: Estimates of 'disposals' in Native Commissioners' Reports are excluded, as they include slaughters for own use and deaths.

Source: Statistical Returns in the *Report of the Chief Native Commissioner . . . 1918*, and succeeding years (title varies); N/9/1/21–5 (1918–22); S235/501–11, 513 and 517 (District Annual Reports, 1923–33, 1935, and 1939); S1563 for 1934, 1936–8, and 1940–5.

Rhodesian cattle in 1916. Demand continued to rise after the Armistice, reaching a peak in 1920, but in the following year the market collapsed in response to the post-war trade depression. The trend of cattle prices corresponded with the changing level of demand, as Table IV shows:

Table IV

AFRICAN CATTLE PRICES, NDANGA AND BULALIMA–MANGWE, 1917–1923[61]

Price in Shillings

Year	*Ndanga*	*Bulalima-Mangwe*
1917	40–50 (good quality cows)	
1918		120–240 (all cattle)
1919		180 (oxen)
1920	80–100 (good quality cows)	
1921	50 (good quality cows)	60 (oxen)
1922		35 (all cattle)
1923		20 (all cattle)

Source: N/9/1/20–5 (1917–22); and S235/501.

Unfortunately for African herdsmen, the trough of the depression (1922–3) coincided with the worst famine since the Occupation, following the virtual failure of the preceding rains. Cattle had become so unsaleable as a result of the market collapse that many district officials refused to accept them as payment for relief grain.[62] In 1924, South Africa imposed a protective embargo on the importation of Rhodesian cattle weighing under 1,050 lb.—a measure that hit low-weight African producers and curbed the price recovery. At no time in the later 1920s and 1930s did prices regain their war-time peak. The most favourable year was 1929, when cattle in Bulalima–Mangwe District were changing hands for an average of £5 per head.[63] Some degree of correlation between the upward price trend and the volume of sales in the later 1920s may be discerned; on the other hand, a proportion of the disposals were made reluctantly to meet tax demands and dip fees (regarded as cattle 'tax' throughout the period by most Africans), or to buy food in years of low rainfall. That a war-time valuation continued to be placed on cattle is evident in the various amounts, ranging from £5 upwards (depending on district) demanded from traders.[64] Native Department officials usually countered what they considered

[61] Price statistics are extremely fragmentary; Ndanga and Bulalima–Mangwe have been selected because their figures are the most complete of any district. On the whole, cattle from the 'sweet veld' districts of Southern Matabeleland and Mashonaland were of better than average quality, and these figures are somewhat higher than the national mean.

[62] For the famine, see N/3/11/7–8 (Native Dep.: Correspondence: Food Supplies and Famine Relief: 11 Mar. 1922–4 May 1923).

[63] S235/507 (District Annual Reports 1929), N. C. Bulalima–Mangwe, Annual Report.

[64] See, for example, S1561/10 (Native Dep., C. N. C. Correspondence, General, 1909–54: Chiefs and Headmen, 1915–34), VIII, N. C. Mzingwane to the Superintendent of Natives, Bulawayo, 6 Jan. 1926.

to be an illogical attitude by drawing the attention of stock-owners to the existence of 'market forces'. Few stock-owners seem to have been convinced as there is evidence that even before the post-war depression they knew only too well that European cattle fetched higher prices in the towns.[65]

The 1930s constituted a decade of almost continuous crisis for African cattle-owners. Prices collapsed in the wake of the inter-war trade depression, a sequence of natural disasters beset African herdsmen and recovery was further hindered by a number of statutory measures designed to assist European producers. Nevertheless, the volume of disposals maintained an upward trend over the decade as a whole. This may seem surprising, in view of the persistent price disincentive,[66] but the operation of the 'push factor' in inducing sales, disguised to some extent by the comparative prosperity of the later 1920s, now becomes unmistakable.[67] The substantial figure of 81,081 cattle sold in 1933 is explicable in terms of the poor 1932–3 growing season, which obliged cultivators to dispose of stock for food and tax money at a time when alternative sources of income such as employment had been curtailed by the economic depression. At such times, the question of price became subordinate to the stark necessity of survival,[68] though this is not to say that owners demanded any less when haggling with traders.

The post-depression recovery of the African stock industry received a severe setback as a result of Government measures such as the Beef Bounty and Cattle Levy Act (No. 28 of 1935), the purpose of which was to subsidize the export of predominantly European-produced high-quality chilled and frozen beef; the export bounty was to be financed from a 10s. per head slaughter levy, payable by butchers who slaughtered more than five cattle for local consumption.[69] To forestall possible criticism, the Government publicly maintained that local consumers, not producers, would ultimately pay the slaughter levy, and added that the export of large numbers of prime cattle could improve the local market for African stock.[70] In practice, the levy was passed back to the African producer, depressing his level of

[65] N/9/1/23 (1920), N. C. Hartley, Annual Report for 1920. Also, Africans complained about the size of local butchers' profit margins on their cattle; see S 1542/N2, minutes of the Shangani Board meeting held on 7 May 1932.

[66] See, for example, the prices (in shillings) for Ndanga District: 15–25 (all cattle) in 1932, S 235/510 (District Annual Reports, 1932); 20 (all cattle) in 1933, S 235/511 (District Annual Reports, 1933): 40–55 (large oxen) in 1934, S 1563; 15–25 (cows) in 1935, S 235/514 (District Annual Reports, 1935); and 15–30 (cows) in 1936, S 1563.

[67] Particularly the effect of 'Native Tax', which remained at the figure of £1 set in 1904 throughout the period, despite the hardships of the depression years; and the imposition of dip fees (usually 1*s.* to 2*s.* per head per year) from the First World War onwards. For evidence of the correlation between these obligations and cattle sales, see S 1542/N2, minutes of the Native Board meeting held at Plumtree, 21 Nov. 1933.

[68] In 1933–4, 13,000 head were sold in Chibi District for tax, dip levies and food, S 1542/S9 (Store Sites, 1933–43), N. C. Chibi to Superintendent of Natives, Victoria, 14 May 1934. This evidence substantiates the rural impoverishment thesis of G. Arrighi, *The Political Economy of Rhodesia* (The Hague, Mouton, 1967), 28–35.

[69] Section 4 of the Act.

[70] See the Minister of Agriculture's statement in the Assembly, *Debates 1936*, XVI, 234, 24 Mar.

return even further.[71] The second argument was disingenuous, as the Minister for Agriculture had already admitted in private that the size of the planned levy would 'prevent butchers from buying native cattle for slaughter and drive them into buying the better-class stock from European famers'.[72]

The 1935 Act thus played a material part in slowing down the recovery of African sales in the later 1930s. The benefits of a firmer local market seem to have accrued to the European, rather than the African, cattle-owner, and in any case they do not seem to have offset the scaling down of prices offered by traders which resulted from the slaughter levy.[73] Another factor of importance at the time was the foot-and-mouth epidemic in the south-eastern part of the Colony which started in April 1931 and tied up large numbers of cattle intermittently for the next six years, leading to serious overstocking in the Reserves of Fort Victoria and Gutu Districts. The sharp increase in the volume of sales which took place in 1938 corresponds with the culling operations conducted in these and adjacent districts when an element of official compulsion was brought to bear on herdsmen.[74] From the end of the Second World War, sales to the European sector rose steadily in response to the official de-stocking campaign introduced in 1945.

THE PRICE INCENTIVE

At this point, the question arises as to whether Africans would have sold more, or fewer, cattle if prices had been higher in the later 1920s and 1930s. The traditional interpretation bears some resemblance to the 'target theory' of African labour: stock-owners had a specific sum of money in mind, and sold only the requisite number of cattle. Higher prices would merely have resulted in fewer beasts being offered for sale.[75] Yet even during the 1930s, several Native Commissioners dissented from the popular view. Thus the Native Commissioner for Mrewa noted in his Annual Report for 1937 that local Africans were 'eager to sell' more animals than usual because of the improved prices offered.[76]

A study of the rather sketchy statistics available reveals no consistent pattern: sometimes higher prices correspond with larger volumes of trade, sometimes not.

[71] It was reported that local traders in Mtoko had admitted this; S1542/N2, N. C. Mtoko to C. N. C., 25 June 1935.

[72] Historical Manuscripts Collection, CR1/4/2 (Papers of Lionel Cripps: Diaries: 28 May 1896–3 May 1937), entry for 15 Dec. 1934; cf. the statement of D. M. Somerville, a leading rancher, in the Assembly earlier that year, *Debates 1934*, XIV. 1266, 8 May.

[73] The implications of the Act are discussed in detail in C. F. Keyter '"Underdevelopment" in Southern Rhodesia, 1923–1953' (Univ. of York, Centre of Southern African Studies, Seminar Paper, 28 April 1977), 7–10.

[74] This is the subject of my companion study, 'The Victoria and Gutu cattle-culling sales of 1938', in R. S. Roberts (ed.), *Cattle in Zimbabwe* (Gwelo, Mambo, in press).

[75] S235/517, N. C. Chibi, Annual Report; for a recent re-statement of this view, see J. Swift, 'Pastoral nomadism as a form of land-use: The Twareg of the Adrar n Ifora's', in T. Monod (ed.), *Pastoralism in Tropical Africa* (London, Oxford Univ. Press, 1975), 449–51. The counter view is expressed succinctly in W. O. Jones's now classic article, 'Economic Man in Africa', *Food Research Institute Studies* (1960), I, 107–34.

[76] S1563.

Advocates and opponents of the 'target theory' seemingly can prove their respective cases by selecting the most appropriate sets of figures. On the other hand, as this article has already indicated, it would be surprising if a correlation could be established between the two indices, given the various economic functions of cattle in the African economy. Even if the situation is studied purely from the standpoint of the exchange function, it can be seen that short-term commercial considerations often militated against immediate sales in a rising market. In contrast to Mrewa, Hartley experienced a fall-off in sales to Europeans in 1937, despite firmer ruling prices, because Africans, like stock-exchange speculators, wanted to see how far the market would go before they committed large amounts of stock.[77] That they were fully alive to market trends is further demonstrated by their reluctance to sell in the early months of the Second World War because they expected livestock prices would regain their earlier war-time peak in the near future.[78]

In times when cattle prices rose, a further trade factor affected the volume of sales: the relative cost of consumer goods. While the declining level of cattle sales between 1918 and 1920[79] might be taken as *prima facie* evidence of the 'target theory' in the light of the fact that stock prices remained firm, the sharper rise in the cost of ploughs and consumer goods in Reserves stores discouraged stock-owners from parting with their cattle. A similar reaction occurred during the Second World War, when trade goods were scarce, expensive and often of poor quality.[80] One officially organized sale collapsed when an African advised the assembled owners that they should demand more for their cattle because storekeepers had raised their own prices.[81]

Three points arise from this discussion. First, a simple correlation of volume and price will not provide an accurate picture of African response to market incentives and disincentives. Secondly, despite beliefs to the contrary, Black stock-owners were quite capable of reaching rational economic decisions, taking into account the various factors governing price trends. Thirdly, as was noted earlier, sale to Europeans was only one of several equally 'economic' choices which might be available to the cattle-owner, and unless he had a pressing need to obtain cash, he might prefer to use his cattle for ploughing, or for *lobola,* or as a form of investment if the European market did not offer what he considered to be a representative price for his stock. It is true that Africans often sold cattle to meet pressing financial obligations but this does not validate the 'target theory' in the sense in which it was understood by the administrators and anthropologists in this

[77] Ibid.

[78] S1542/F2 (Farms, 1933–9), A. N. C. Gwaai Reserve to Staff Officer (Intelligence), 27 July 1940.

[79] See above, Table IV.

[80] Southern Rhodesia, *Reports of the Secretary for Native Affairs and Chief Native Commissioner for the Years 1941, 1942, 1943, 1944 and 1945* (Sess. Paps, C. S. R. 10, 1947), 116.

[81] Z/BJ/1/1, (1), 2–3, evidence of the C. N. C., H. H. D. Simmonds, 30 May 1944.

period. African cattle-ownership was not basically 'uneconomic', becoming 'economic' only when stock was traded with Europeans, and nor were African requirements as fixed as the term 'target' implies. From an early stage, cattle were being sold to finance an increasing number of wants, as well as obligations, especially in years of prosperity, and this trend continued despite the economic difficulties of the inter-war period. Thus the 'target theory' is valid only in the sense that the 'target' was steadily increasing in size: wants were being progressively stimulated by the impact of Western economic, technological and cultural influences, even though the capacity to satisfy these wants was progressively eroded over most of the period under discussion.

CONCLUSION

The range of evidence presented in this article suggests that neither the traditional 'cattle complex' philosophy nor the more recent formalist interpretation successfully captures the intricate nature of African pastoralism. The first view, based on the assumption that African society did not respond to economic incentives as it was resistant to change unduly emphasizes the religious and social functions of cattle, while the second concentrates on the exchange aspect to the detriment of the other, often more significant economic functions. A final analysis of the economic role of cattle must therefore incorporate all the elements outlined above.

To take the currency function of cattle first, it seems likely that in pre-colonial society horned stock were seen primarily as stores of value, conferring economic and social status on their owners. At this stage, their productive capacity was of smaller account than their reproductive utility. Despite the introduction of a money economy after the Occupation, the role of cattle as general purpose currency persisted because of their clear superiority over paper money and Post Office savings as a form of investment. However, problems arose once the ravages of the rinderpest epidemic and European seizures of the 1890s had been repaired. Grazing areas were limited by the crowding of Africans into Reserves; the population rapidly increased; and the environment was progressively threatened, although not to the extent claimed by conservation interests. These factors in time tended to make cattle (in their purely monetary role) a wasting asset, and in combination with other factors, induced their conversion into other assets, such as Purchase Area farms, consumer goods, and services such as education for the herdsman's children; or in a negative sense, into cash for the payment of tax and other obligations. On the other hand, this was a long-term development which still had an extensive course to run at the outbreak of the Second World War.

The productive utility of cattle gained steadily in importance, especially in the 1920s, and from the later 1930s onwards, as a result of technological inputs such as ploughs and the use of manure in farming operations. To an extent, the other economic functions of cattle came into conflict with this process. Some individuals accumulated herds far in excess of their arable needs, either to gain prestige, or to pay bridewealth for additional wives, or for social security, thereby reducing the amount of grazing available for less fortunate herdsmen. The necessity to find money for tax or the purchase of grain in bad years often obliged owners with marginal or sub-marginal herds to sell productive animals, creating a vicious circle of impoverishment. A further limitation on the development of a commercial mixed-farming system was imposed by the progressive curtailment up to 1924 of the areas allocated to Africans, which created the impression that many Reserves were overstocked. In total, these factors prevented a substantial proportion of farmers in medium- and high-rainfall areas from achieving anything like the potential of the mixed-farming economy outlined in the Alvord scheme, while shortage of land inhibited the development of commercial ranching in the low rainfall areas.

The exchange function included sales to other Africans and *lobola* transactions, as well as disposals to Europeans. While quantification of all but the last is not feasible in the present state of research, the first outlet was certainly, and the second, probably, numerically more significant than sales to Europeans. The willingness of Africans to sell stock to Europeans was undoubtedly influenced by the existence of these alternative types of exchange, as well as by a comparative estimation of the margin which could be obtained from investment and productive utility. On the other hand, it is likely that as a result of mounting rural poverty in the 1930s, inter-African trade declined, forcing more and more cattle onto the European market. The part played by *lobola* in decreasing the potential volume of purely commercial sales is difficult to judge in the absence of surveys even on a local basis. If *lobola* is interpreted as a purely social institution, some attempt at quantification is essential so that the proportion of 'non-economic' to 'economic' livestock can be ascertained. If the view of this article that *lobola* was primarily an economic institution with important social ramifications is adopted, the exercise becomes less vital, as all cattle were in a sense 'economic'. While it is likely that Native Department officials exaggerated the scope and intensity of the deterrent effect of *lobola* on sales of cattle, the possibility that a substantial proportion of stock was reserved for this purpose cannot be entirely ruled out.

A common thread may be discerned in this concluding analysis: the dynamic response of African pastoralists to the incentives and disincentives of the new economic order, initiated before the start of the colonial era and gaining considerable momentum by the Second World War. This picture differs substantially from the one presented by contemporary European observers, who all too readily fell back on the convenient rationalization of the 'Bantu cattle complex' because they believed that Reserve Africans as a whole were incapable of adjusting to European economic concepts of cattle management, as illustrated by their reluctance to sell stock to outsiders. However, as this article has attempted to show, the slow pace of advance in the commercialization of cattle in the inter-war period is attributable more to the unfavourable economic position of the African sector than to an inherent conservatism.