

REACTIONS TO RINDERPEST IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

1896-97

by

C Van Onselen

Rinderpest, a highly contagious cattle disease which swept through Southern Africa in 1896-97, has attracted very little interest from historians. A more detailed consideration of it illuminates the social, political and economic forces operating in the area during the 1890s.

Rinderpest first made its appearance in Africa in 1889. It has been described as "a specific malignant and highly contagious fever characterised by acute inflammation of the mucous surfaces", affecting cattle, game, and, in a minor form, sheep. (1) From Somaliland, where it first took root, it moved rapidly south, infecting game and cattle. By 1890, it was in Uganda. (2) In the latter half of 1892, Lugard encountered it in Northern Rhodesia:

"I had no evidence that the disease had attacked the wild game until I arrived at the south end of Lake Mweru. Here enormous quantities died. At the time of my passing in October 1892, the plague was at its height, dead or dying beasts were all around." (3)

The Zambezi was possibly the most effective barrier which rinderpest encountered in its travels southwards, for it was not until 1896 that the disease made its appearance in Southern Rhodesia. (4) By then, it was in a region with a relatively well developed communications network, where transport centred on the extensive use of the ox-wagon. The disease now moved with a speed which more than compensated for its protracted stay in Northern Rhodesia. It spread into the Bechuanaland territories and was at Palapye by the 10th March 1896; a mere six days later it was at Tuli. As the Cape Colonial Veterinary Surgeon, Hutcheon, reported later:

"Within a period of 25 days [of the first reported occurrence in Rhodesia] therefore, rinderpest had travelled southwards at a rate of 20 miles a day, and had reached a point 16 miles north of the Colonial border on the 31st March." (5)

Despite the campaign waged against the disease in Southern Africa, rinderpest moved relentlessly southwards and by November of 1897 it was killing game on the Rhodes estate at Groot Schuur. (6)

Despite a warning issued as early as 1892, the Cape Government had taken few, if any, precautions against the spread of rinderpest. (7) But as the disease spread through the recently annexed Bechuanaland territory, the extent of the devastation of cattle herds must have quickly become apparent. (8) As it spread, rinderpest left a flurry of belated activity in its wake. Local and national Rinderpest Commissions were established to co-ordinate attempts to prevent the disease's spread. (9) Having scant respect for territorial integrity, rinderpest necessitated a series of inter-state conferences and even an "international" one. (10) With fencing at a cost of £90 per mile, and compensation to be paid to the owners of infected cattle that had to be shot, it eventually cost the Cape Government alone over a million pounds. Yet, despite the plethora of administrative actions, co-operation and lack of co-operation, the "politics of rinderpest" are to be found in places other than conference minutes. (11)

Some of the indirect political repercussions of the spread of rinderpest have long been known to historians of Southern Africa. Rinderpest certainly formed part of the political backdrop to the 1896-97 revolt in Southern Rhodesia, and has been pointed to as such. (12) More recently, Saker and Aldridge have drawn attention to the background of rinderpest activity in the Langeberg Rebellion, and the elements of "dynastic politics" involved. (13) Rinderpest, however, also created a series of opportunities for political entrepreneurs to mobilise Africans elsewhere in Southern Africa. By focussing on some of these activities, some of the processes and problems in Southern African society during the last decade of the 19th century are highlighted.

Basutoland and the adjacent territory of East Griqualand form one region which deserves closer examination. Basutoland, like other areas in Southern Africa, had been affected by the political tension which accompanied the Jameson Raid. (14) To the rumours which accompanied this event were added those connected with rinderpest. Africans in Basutoland were no exception in believing that rinderpest was the product of the white man's activities. (15)

It fell to Godfrey Lagden, later the Transvaal's first Secretary of Native Affairs under British rule, to organise measures which would keep rinderpest out of Basutoland. For five months, preliminary measures, such as restrictions on cattle movement, succeeded in keeping rinderpest out of the territory. These precautionary measures gave rise to a series of rumours which disturbed Basutos considerably. One report told of the government importing loads of ammunition, and a second of the conscription of men in Matatiele for the purpose of attacking Basutoland. The latter

rumour probably emerged from the recruitment of border-guards for rinderpest control. A third belief was that Basutoland was shortly to be opened for gold-prospecting - a prospect which would have aroused little enthusiasm. But amidst these rumours it was the actual erection of fencing on the border between Basutoland and the Cape which most aroused Basuto hostility and suspicion. Basutos were aware of the fact that, prior to the annexation of Pondoland, whites had fenced off the area. (16) With this precedent in mind they were understandably disturbed by the fencing activities on their border. (17)

One such disturbed Mosuto was Makhaola, a junior son of the Paramount Chief, Lerothodi. In December of 1896, Makhaola, supported by a large band of young, armed Basutos, took up a position on the East Griqualand border, where fencing operations were under way. From this position they proceeded to intimidate and eventually completely obstruct the work of the Cape Government. (18) This action naturally produced official concern in both Basutoland and Matatiele. When the Assistant Commissioner at Qacha's Nek, however, attempted to sort out the matter by contacting the Resident Magistrate at Matatiele, he was forcibly detained by Makhaola and his men. (19) In the Cape, too, colonial officials had been threatened by armed men while carrying out rinderpest duties. (20) What was disturbing to the official mind in this case, however, was the fact that the threats came from armed Africans. Stanford, Chief Magistrate in East Griqualand, felt the situation to be very grave, and ordered the Cape border guards to disarm and behave in a "quiet and responsible" manner. Lagden, after getting two deputies from the Paramount Chief, proceeded by forced marches to Qacha's Nek.

It is not clear exactly what transpired at Qacha's Nek. Presumably Lagden, with the aid of the Paramount's deputies, persuaded Makhaola and his followers to leave the border. The position was still serious enough to warrant the holding of a national pitso presided over by Lerothodi. During the proceedings it became evident that Lerothodi was unwilling to make an outright condemnation of his young son's activities. Makhaola and his own sons interpreted this as important, albeit passive, support for his actions, and left both Lagden and the pitso with a flourish (21):

"Pursuing a defiant course they then took up a warlike position near Mafeteng, with a band of turbulent followers, threatening violence to any messengers who approached them and resistance to all overtures. The danger of the situation was aggravated by further threats against European life and property at the village magistracies of Mafeteng and Mohale's Hoek." (22)

From this position Makhaola now attempted to elicit further support for the embryonic revolt, aiming at a complete overthrow of British rule. (23) It seems, however, that while he could gain the support of younger followers, he was unable to persuade the older chiefs of the wisdom of his objective. It is clear that Makhaola used the political tensions which accompanied rinderpest in an attempt to mobilize Basutos for a more ambitious political objective. It was rinderpest which provided the opportunity and Lagden was aware of this

when he later reported on the incidents:

"In all native tribes there are those who chafe under any kind of control and readily seize an opportunity to run riot, shake off the fetters, and influence the masses by some cause or prophetic alarm." (24)

Political tension, like rinderpest, showed little respect for colonial borders, and East Griqualand did not remain unaffected by either. As in the case of Makhaola in Basutoland, rinderpest provided a local inhabitant with the opportunity to mobilize Africans and Griquas for a larger political objective. In this case the leader was a Griqua, Andries le Fleur, who was descended from, and married to, Griqua notables. His father, Abraham le Fleur, claimed in 1884 to understand the legal complexities which troubled the dispossessed Griqua community. He created an air of expectancy amongst Griquas by claiming that they were to be paid compensation for land by the British Government. (25) He persisted with these "agitations" until blackmailed into silence by a missionary. (26) On his death, his son Andries renewed these "agitations" and gained a considerable following campaigning with the interesting but cumbersome slogan: "East Griqualand for the Griquas and the natives". (27)

Le Fleur utilized the political tension of the early weeks of 1897 by attempting to gain the support of Hlangweni, and possibly Baca tribesmen, for an armed revolt. The types of rumours that circulated in Basutoland were no doubt present here too, and contributed to the tension, until "The whole air was charged with electricity and it seemed as if the least spark would produce a conflagration". (28) The possibility of an armed uprising came to the notice of the isolated European community, who became most alarmed: "the unusual spectacle was witnessed of farmers hastily going into laager and taking other measures for mutual protection." (29)

This preventative action, coupled with a full-scale patrol by the East Griqualand Mounted Rifles, seems to have stifled the progress of an African initiative. For a few days the whites were in laager, but by the 27th January the possibility of a revolt seemed more remote, and an investigation into the conduct of Chiefs Pata (Hlangweni) and Singapansi (Baca) was instituted. (30) That most of the anticipated action was prevented is evident from the report of the Eastern Province Herald correspondent, who wrote:

"A widespread hostile agitation was undoubtedly got up by the Griqua agitator, Lefleur, but has, I think, been nipped in the bud by the prompt action of the Chief Magistrate and the patrol of the East Griqualand Mounted Rifles." (31)

Of Le Fleur there was no trace, and the enquiry showed that the Hlangweni and not the Baca were implicated, Chief Pata of the former tribe being fined 25 head of cattle. (32)

From about the middle of 1897 rinderpest started to take its toll of cattle throughout the area. Amidst widespread African belief that the disease was introduced by Europeans Le Fleur must have found an increasingly fertile field in which to propagate his ideas. Travelling throughout the area, he told Africans that land apportionment was "inequitable and iniquitous" and that the Europeans had gained possession of the land "by ways which would not bear the light of day". This, he apparently claimed, had come to the notice of the Queen, who had personally commanded that the lands be returned to the natives. As the Europeans refused to do this, he, Le Fleur, would visit the Queen to explain the situation. To this end he solicited funds with considerable success from the local population.

In November of 1897, however, Le Fleur was finally tracked down and arrested by detectives from the newly established Criminal Investigation Department. In the trial which followed, however, there was insufficient evidence for his successful prosecution. (33) Le Fleur's release may have contributed to his growing prestige; certainly he used it for his own ends, in claiming that the judge, on releasing him, had complimented him on his "patriotism".

While discontent over land issues simmered, and suspicions generated by rinderpest grew, Le Fleur, with his increased personal prestige, established himself at an African farm, "Drie Kop", where he planned an armed revolt. The comings and goings at the farm, however, aroused the suspicions of a neighbouring white farmer, who decided to get European assistance, and to investigate matters at "Drie Kop" personally. One of his African servants became aware of this and informed Le Fleur immediately. Le Fleur and his men were forced to take action before they had completed detailed planning or preparations. Prematurely, therefore, "A strong party, consisting partly of Griquas and partly of natives, was sent to make an attack on the farmer mentioned". (34) The farmer, however, resisted so fiercely that the party eventually disbanded and dispersed.

As in the case of Basutoland, and the Langeberg rebellion in the Cape, rinderpest had formed the backdrop of attempts by Africans to mobilize support for revolt against European Authority. (35) These events also hastened the establishment of a permanent Criminal Investigation Department in East Griqualand, earned Le Fleur a 15 year prison sentence, resulted in the dismissal of one headman in the Kokstad district, and caused a second to be fined £100. These circumstances did nothing to remove the tensions from the area. The Chief Magistrate for the district, writing his report on the events surrounding Le Fleur, a year later, was still in a position to state that: "... the prevailing opinion is that a general rising, to which Le Fleur's abortive attack was a prelude, is not far distant." (36)

Before turning attention from these more overtly "political responses" to rinderpest, two limitations of this account need to be stated. Firstly, besides the more dramatic activities already described, rinderpest, again indirectly, offered other, more marginal, opportunities for political expression. (37) Secondly, the political aspects have so far been portrayed in terms of "white-black" cleavages and politics.

This is only one dimension of the political effects of rinderpest. What is now needed is a detailed account of what occurred not between black and white communities, but within African political systems. We need to know the detailed infrastructure of what Saker and Aldridge term "dynastic politics". Why did Lerothodi provide Makhaola with only passive support? Why, in East Griqualand, were the Hlangweni, but not the Baca, willing to conspire with Le Fleur? Which Africans later supported Le Fleur, and what were their reasons? Until these aspects are systematically explored, we can have only a very crude idea of the political impact of rinderpest on African communities. This qualification is applicable to much of what follows, too.

From the political, we turn to a consideration of some of the social responses which rinderpest evoked in Southern Africa. In communities where every facet of life had a racial dimension, it is perhaps to be expected that rinderpest should reveal, and often place in sharp relief, the state of race relations.

It has been made clear that throughout central and southern Africa Africans believed that rinderpest was spread by whites. Similarly whites, some of them in official positions, believed that it was spread by Africans. (38) Du Plessis, an official delegate from the Transvaal to one of the rinderpest conferences, when asked to account for the spread of rinderpest into his country, replied:

"My opinion is that it is the Kaffirs. In the south they have had all their cattle destroyed by the pest and now they wish to do likewise by the cattle of the Boers, and so involve the whole country in ruin." (39)

In practice, this highly contagious disease was very frequently spread by white farmers, who were mobile, active in trade and apt to console their rinderpest-stricken neighbours with little regard for the risks of contagion this involved. (40) While the mistrust between black and white was mutual, the regulations to control the spread of the disease were applied with greater vigour to Africans.

The authorities resorted to widespread use of disinfectants, which were used on all travellers. (41) Only Africans, however, were required to undergo complete dipping, a procedure explained by the Transvaal Veterinary Surgeon thus:

"Every Kaffir from an infected area is dipped by us, and everything he wears is washed and the guards have strict orders to burn any milk, meat or cattle products found in his possession. After being washed he has to remain there until he is dry, when he gets a pass, and he may then go on his way." (42)

The dipping procedure naturally did not meet with unqualified African approval, as even the Cape Veterinary Surgeon had noted. A certain class of Africans, as Hutcheon reported, objected to being dipped "like raw Kaffirs"; but he was careful to point out that "... the ordinary policeman cannot be expected to exercise that fine discernment ...".(43) The enforcement of these regulations, coupled with the suspicions already present, must have strained race relations and it is not surprising that whites made observations such as "...the usual friendly politeness of the native was changed to an attitude of semi-contemptuous insolence". (44)

As in all communities, the religious systems in the region operated to explain, to their respective adherents, the origin and purpose of the disaster. In the midst of the fight against rinderpest in Bechuanaland, the Cape Colonial officials did not work on 15th October, since that day was "... set apart for Humiliation and Prayer, and was solemnly recognised in Vryburg". (45) The Hereros in South West Africa, devastated by the loss of their cattle, were placed at the mercy of the missionaries. Out of convenience or conviction, they went to mission stations and there "... were signs of a general movement towards conversion which the missionaries saw as a blessing concealed in the disaster". (46) Other areas also saw Africans moving to mission stations. (47)

The traditional religious organizations also deserve closer scrutiny. Through the work of Terence Ranger and others, we know of the religious mobilization in the 1896-97 Rhodesian revolt, but it would be interesting to know in greater detail how the Ndebele/Shona religious authorities confronted the substantial losses of cattle inflicted by war and rinderpest. Saker and Aldridge do not report an increase in traditional religious activity during the Langeberg rebellion but elsewhere there are clear indications of attempts by the traditional system to explain rinderpest.

Before the full impact of rinderpest made itself felt in the Transkei and Pondoland, the Chief Magistrate for the region reported a spate of wild rumours and prophecies: "Amongst the latter there were stories of persons, animals, birds and even stones prophesying evils and wonderful things to come."(48) The Magistrate, unfortunately, felt that these reports were "too wild" to warrant detailed investigation and documentation. The Mount Frere correspondent of the Cape Times, however, was able to recount some of these prophecies in greater detail, under the heading "Rinderpest and Superstition":

"There are mischief-makers in our midst who lose no opportunity for their own personal ends for spreading as much sedition as possible. The witchdoctors are busy, wonderful resurrection cases occurred recently ... A woman in the Umzimvubu died and rose again. During her brief sojourn in Heaven it was revealed to her that the white man had in his possession two boxes. The first contained rinderpest. This he had already opened. The second (to be unlocked shortly) contains locusts with horses teeth.

These are destined for the destruction of the native root and branch." (49)

If it is remembered that after their cattle had died many Africans were forced to plant crops which were vulnerable to locusts, it can be appreciated how disturbing this type of prophecy must have been. (50) In the same district of Pondoland it was reported that Africans were refusing to purchase groceries, and in particular sugar and salt. (51) It seems probable that this self-imposed and religiously-sanctioned boycott served to protect Africans from some of the profiteering which occurred in parts (see below).

Cattle farmers throughout Southern Africa, however, had too much at stake to rely solely on religious comforts or explanations. To white and black farmers alike it soon became apparent that the drastic "stamping out" policy was not staying the progress of rinderpest; Chief Molala in Bechuanaland probably spoke for most farmers when he pointedly asked Hutcheon: "They tell me that you are a doctor, and that you are a great doctor, but can you do nothing but kill?" (52) In the face of opposition to the "stamping out" policy, the Cape Government was forced to discontinue the practice. (53) "It is only natural, however", Hutcheon was to note later, "that men in distress will try something whether they have knowledge of its suitability or not, and a mysterious mixture has a charm which a known compound does not possess." (54) And whites from all walks of life were indeed offering "cures" for rinderpest. (55) Those publicised by officials, no more effective than any, eventually seriously jeopardized the success of the inoculation programme once a reasonably effective serum had been developed. (56) One such eminent creator of a homespun "cure" was to be the subject of complaints by Hutcheon in his official report:

"His Honour the President of the South African Republic gave his high authority to the efficiency of a somewhat complex mixture, consisting mainly of podophyllin, resin, tobacco, paraffin oil, and a decoction of an incense plant. The result of the publication of this remedy, I am credibly informed, was that the chemist's supply of podophyllin became exhausted." (57)

Experiments such as these were not confined to whites, and Africans, too, attempted to cope medicinally with the scourge of rinderpest.

In the Cape, the government, presumably with an eye on possible "native unrest", was anxious that Africans should be aware of the devastating nature of the disease. Before rinderpest reached them, Africans in the Cape and Basutoland were confident of their ability to deal with all sorts of cattle diseases. To prepare African opinion and to bring home to herbalists the magnitude of rinderpest, the Cape Government arranged for African representatives to visit Bechuanaland, see the devastation there, experiment with their own cures, and report back to specially convened meetings. (58) But this visit took place during the decline of rinderpest in Bechuanaland, and some of the



visiting Africans left with the impression that their experiments there might have helped cure cattle. (59) It was only later, when rinderpest actually broke out amongst their own cattle, that Africans finally appreciated how devastating it was. Reflecting the desperation which they must have felt, they called the disease zifozoneke - "every disease". (60) Elsewhere in the Cape, even more pointedly, the disease was called masilangane - "let us all be equal". (61)

In the absence of an effective treatment and with the continuing advance of rinderpest, a fatalistic attitude developed amongst all sections of the population, leading the Eastern Province Herald to complain that:

"There are not wanting signs that there is in this colony a number of people who have made up their minds that the rinderpest must come, that no efforts to stop it will avail and that therefore there is really no use in worrying over the matter. There is, in fact, a disposition in some quarters to surrender without a blow." (62)

Africans soon discovered that the meat left in the wake of rinderpest could be dried for biltong or eaten at once without ill effects. (63) Faced thus with an artificial surplus of meat, they engaged in "feasting" and protracted beer drinks. (64)

After the failure of the early "stamping out" policy and the disbanding of the national Rinderpest Commission, the Cape Government persisted in their efforts to find a cure. (65) Besides encouraging the work of Hutcheon and his assistants the government employed a German expert, Koch, who arrived in Cape Town on 1st December 1896. By the 5th December, Koch was already at work experimenting in a specially equipped laboratory in Kimberley, and receiving assistance from the De Beers' Company. (66) Eventually, Koch did succeed in producing a serum, but this by itself was no cause for optimism. Not only was the serum in short supply, but it produced erratic results, described as "... sometimes good, sometimes bad". (67) Because of the mixed results, the government did not make inoculation compulsory. (68) It later adopted another serum, developed by a Dr Edington, which was also in short supply. (69) The relative ineffectiveness, and unavailability, of serum, and the unavoidable move of rinderpest south, until by late November it was active in Cape Town (70), make the growth and spread of fatalism amongst white and, even more so, black cattle owners understandable.

The consequences of rinderpest, however, extended beyond "feasting", beer-drinking and fatalism. It would be somewhat myopic to agree with a Cape Inspector of Locations, who reported from one district that "The natives possessed some 4,500 head of cattle when rinderpest broke out here; they now have 467, but I cannot honestly report any great distress among them". (71) The number of cattle lost was the most obvious dimension with which to gauge the havoc wrought throughout the country:

"In the Transkei it was roughly estimated that 90 per cent of the cattle, which formed the real wealth of the people, were swept off by the disease. For the Cape Colony as a whole (including Bechuanaland but excluding the native territories and Pondoland) it was estimated that the cattle herds were reduced by 35 per cent from 1.64 to 1.06 million." (72)

African cattle losses, however, should be measured not simply in terms of numbers. For African peasants, cattle formed not only a source of wealth but the pivotal point of a complex and inter-woven social, political and economic system. (73) Certainly cattle constituted "the real wealth of the people", but the devastation of rinderpest also brought economic repercussions which stretched beyond that dimension.

With the transport system crippled by the loss of draught-oxen, prices soared. Transport drivers had to pay tremendous prices for "salted" cattle (i.e. animals that had recovered from the disease and were therefore immune), or mules. (74) Their financial outlays were recouped from the transport charges they made, which rose, in parts to ten times the normal rate. (75) For those with the necessary capital, transport must have become a lucrative business. (76) These price increases were passed on to store owners, and finally to consumers. Amongst whites the situation was serious enough to warrant sharp editorial comment from the Cape Times:

"The government, however, seems to be indulging in a vein of scientific curiosity, by gauging the exact amount of toleration of which an apathetic public is capable, but while the prices of milk and meat and every other article of food are rising at an alarming rate, the Government still preserves an unbroken silence."(77)

The necessary importation of meat from as far away as Madagascar meant prices in white urban centres increased. (78) But in isolated rural areas, where the bulk of the African population lived, there were also opportunities for profiteering. In Bechuanaland:

"Owing to failure of transport, following on the outbreak of rinderpest, the cost of living in the Northern Protectorate was enormously increased, and the natives who have been spending money with reckless extravagance must have been greatly impoverished. In the midst of the times of greatest want the natives would eagerly flock to the local stores to secure meal at £10 per bag of 200 lbs., sugar at 2s. and 2s.6d. per lb., and sweets, jams and other luxuries at exorbitant rates. It is as though the natives, having been at last compelled to open their purses, could not rest until their savings had been expended. The local merchants

have reaped a rich harvest, but the lavish expenditure by the natives of their cash must inevitably affect the trade of the district for some time to come." (79)

With merchants in some areas increasing "the prices for foodstuffs out of all proportion to the increase in transport rates", it is apparent why Africans in some districts refused to buy salt or sugar through "superstition". (80)

The shortage of salt or sugar, however, was not nearly as serious as the loss of meat and milk, once rinderpest had passed. The loss of their wealth and the rising prices must have put the purchase of meat or milk beyond the reach of most Africans. The European newspapers complained of the danger of meat becoming a "luxury" in the urban areas. For rural cattle-keepers the danger was even greater, for they were without items that amounted to staple foods, and health suffered accordingly. In South-West Africa, the Hereros, left without milk, were particularly vulnerable when malaria swept through the area after rinderpest. (81) The high incidence of scurvy was noted in the Barkly West district. Perhaps mistakenly, the Inspector of Native Locations attributed this to a lack of meat to supplement a monotonous diet of porridge. (82) What is clear is that the health of African children, who no longer benefited from milk, suffered considerably in some areas. (83)

These effects were not universal, but do partly reflect the impact of rinderpest, and the extent to which local resources were able to cope. Bechuanaland was impoverished virtually overnight, and there were numerous cases of starvation. (84) As government relief depended on local magisterial initiative, the hardship experienced in different communities varied considerably. In many areas stock-theft was resorted to. In Idutywa, the Resident Magistrate reported, somewhat dramatically, an "epidemic of theft". (85) While Idutywa might not be typical, a large number of areas in the Cape did report an increase in stock thefts. (86) The nature of this stock-thieving is perhaps revealed, as is the desperation of certain individuals, in the following report from Bechuanaland: "Most of these were thefts of one or two animals (among them two native females for stealing and eating a young donkey), mostly due to hunger." (87)

Faced with the loss of milk, meat, currency, wealth, food, fuel, fertilizer and animals to use for ploughing, Africans had to resort to hasty contingency planning until they had sufficient wealth to undertake restocking. The Herero were seen growing vegetables for the first time after rinderpest, and elsewhere, too, cattle-keepers had to grow crops. (88) Ploughing had to be done with anything that was available. In Basutoland they used their ponies. (89) In the Cape they used any animal available, or, in some cases, paid Europeans to plough for them. (90)

That this was possible is indicative of the fact that in certain areas Africans held cash reserves. In some areas there was

considerable surprise, in administrative circles, at the extent of these. (91) Despite rinderpest, hut tax was fully paid in some Cape districts. (92) Once the immediate problem of food production had been "solved", however, Africans were forced into the cash economy to obtain funds for restocking their herds. By 1898, the year after rinderpest had ended, Africans were already reinvesting in stock, despite the high ruling prices. (93) But for some in need of money, entry into the cash economy did not simply involve a casual migratory journey to earn funds for restocking; many were forced to make a more permanent adjustment, either by regular migratory journeys or a permanent move to the towns. (94)

Africans forced into the migratory labour system through rinderpest and other socio-economic forces, however, exercised considerable care in their choice and location of employment. The Hereros worked at railway construction, rather than for white farmers. (95) In Bechuanaland, too, the railway to Rhodesia was built, in part, by "rinderpest labour". (96) It was only with extreme reluctance that Africans from the Cape and elsewhere would proceed to the Transvaal goldfields. (97) The harshness of the conditions there was apparent to Africans and administrators alike; from the Cape it was reported that: "The large number of natives continually arriving at Indwe by rail on their return from the Transvaal in a destitute and infirm condition necessitated the establishment at that place of a Native Shelter, at which food and medical attendance has been provided." (98) Even in Bechuanaland, where the situation was desperate enough for women to go out and seek work and some of the villages presented "quite a deserted appearance", Africans were reluctant to go to the Transvaal. (99) Rinderpest undoubtedly provided an industrializing state with increased labour from people driven off the land by misfortune but even that, coupled with taxation and other restrictions, could not make supply meet demand. (100)

Masilangane - let us all be equal - no doubt applied in the tribal economy where the cattle of chief and peasant alike were attacked by rinderpest. "Khama himself, who is said to have had three or four hundred head of trained trek oxen, did not have a sufficient number of them to make up one span." (101) But South Africa did not possess a traditional economy. Rather, it was an industrializing state with a doctrine of "labour economics that skill and high wages were a privilege of the white race, while the heavy labour and menial tasks were the province of the black race". (102) In a system which depended on cheap black labour, rinderpest was not an unmitigated disaster. It did not matter if Transkei Africans were "incorrect" in their belief that "the government had introduced the disease for the purpose of impoverishing the people and thus forcing them to go out and work at the mines". (103) While the disease was obviously not spread by the government, and mining companies like De Beers assisted in the fight against the disease, the long-term results of rinderpest had beneficial aspects for both. It is probably true that rinderpest might have eased land pressure for a few African farmers; it is certain to have contributed to the proletarianization of Africans. In a system with a complex and inter-woven pattern of class and colour, it was not long before officials were stating the "beneficial" results of rinderpest:

"The ravages of rinderpest, although reducing the native to poverty, has not been without very beneficial results, and the native has now learnt

humility to those to whom he is subordinate, and also the lesson that by work only can he live, and having learnt to work he is now a happy and contented man instead of the discontented, indolent, lazy and besotten being he was when the numerous cattle he possessed provided his every want." (104)

Rinderpest did not produce any major structural changes in the emerging pattern of South African society; instead it revealed and often exaggerated those political, social and economic forces which were to play a central role in the industrialized South Africa of the 20th century.

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#### Notes

- (1) As defined by the Colonial Veterinary Surgeon. Cape of Good Hope, Special Report on Rinderpest in South Africa March 1896-February 1897 (hereafter Special Report), p. 32.
- (2) See J. Middleton, "Colonial Rule Among the Lugbara", in V. W. Turner (ed.), Colonialism in Africa 1870-1960, Vol. III (Cambridge, 1971), p. 13.
- (3) Special Report, p. 5.
- (4) A. J. Wills, The History of Central Africa (Oxford, 1967), p. 165, reports the disease as being present in Southern Rhodesia in 1895. The Directors Report of the British South Africa Company for the year ending 31st March 1897, reports the first outbreak as occurring in Matabeleland in February 1896. Special Report, p. 7, gives the date of the first outbreak as 3rd March 1896.
- (5) Special Report, p. 7.
- (6) Eastern Province Herald, 12th November 1897.
- (7) See M. Wilson and L. Thompson (eds.), The Oxford History of South Africa, Vol. II (Oxford, 1971), p. 116.
- (8) The Bechuanaland territories through which the Missionaries' Road passed had the misfortune to be the first area through which rinderpest spread particularly rapidly and in a very virulent form. Rinderpest killed "not less than 90 per cent - at a low estimate - of the enormous herds of cattle ..." and left in its wake "hundreds of wagons stranded along the roads". Bechuanaland Colonial Report No. 226 (hereafter Colonial Report No. 226), pp. 4, 9.

- (9) The Transvaal established local Rinderpest Commissions. In the Cape a national Rinderpest Commission was established by Government Proclamation No. 243 of 1896. The latter functioned for approximately 3 months before being disbanded in the face of public hostility to the "stamping out" policy. See Cape of Good Hope, Dept. of Agriculture, Report of the Colonial Veterinary Surgeon and the Assistant Veterinary Surgeons for the year 1896 (hereafter Report of the Colonial Veterinary Surgeon), pp. 25-26.
- (10) Two conferences were called on the initiative of the Cape Government. See Minutes of the Inter-State Conference held at Mafeking, 17th April 1896 (hereafter Mafeking Conference) and Minutes of Rinderpest Conference held at Vryburg, August 1896 (hereafter Vryburg Conference). Kruger was host to a rinderpest conference on his own farm: see Eastern Province Herald, 28th July 1897. Finally, an "International Rinderpest Conference" was held in late 1897: see Eastern Province Herald, 4th August 1897.
- (11) The failure to agree to the payment of costs involved, so the Colonial Veterinary Surgeon felt, seriously jeopardized the success of the campaign against rinderpest. See Special Report, pp. 11-12.
- (12) See, for example, E. A. Walker, A History of Southern Africa (London, 1965), p. 459, or T. O. Ranger, Revolt in Southern Rhodesia 1896-7 (London, 1967), p. 113.
- (13) H. Saker and J. Aldridge, "The Origins of the Langeberg Rebellion", Journal of African History, XII, 2 (1971), pp. 299-317.
- (14) In Basutoland: "Thousand of labourers returned in panic from Johannesburg and other parts, full of misleading reports that war was imminent between English and Dutch." Basutoland Colonial Report No. 186 (hereafter Colonial Report No. 186), p. 4. See also magisterial report for the Mafeking district, Cape of Good Hope, Blue Book on Native Affairs, 1897 (hereafter Blue Book 1897).
- (15) From the Congo to the Cape Africans believed that rinderpest was spread by the white man. For the Congo and Uganda, see J. Middleton, loc. cit. Bechuanaland: see Saker and Aldridge, op. cit., p. 311. Basutoland: see Basutoland Colonial Report No. 224 (hereafter Colonial Report No. 224), p. 8. In the Transkei, see W. C. Scully, Further Reminiscences of a South African Pioneer (London, 1913), p. 317.
- (16) Colonial Report No. 244, p. 6.
- (17) The number of rinderpest guards on the borders must have contributed to African suspicions. By the end of January 1897 Natal had 110 guards on duty. See Eastern Province Herald, 22nd January 1897.
- (18) Colonial Report No. 224, p. 5.
- (19) Ibid., p. 42.
- (20) During the early part of the campaign against rinderpest entire herds in which the disease manifested itself were shot. As no compensation was paid at an early stage, this "stamping out" policy

did not elicit much co-operation and perhaps even facilitated the spread of the disease: see Special Report, p. 8. While executing these duties Veterinary Surgeons were on occasion threatened by armed whites: see Report of the Colonial Veterinary Surgeon, pp. 22, 24-25, 137.

- (21) This action, coupled with the events which preceded and followed it, caused considerable political tension. For colonial administrators it was a bad year: "Foremost amongst the causes was the advent of rinderpest ... From a political point of view it wrought great havoc in the country ..." Colonial Report No. 224, p. 5. Whites, too, were affected by the tensions and there was an upsurge of "nervous complaints" reported by the Medical Officer: see ibid., pp. 47-48.
- (22) Ibid., pp. 6-7.
- (23) G. Y. Lagden, The Basutos, Vol. II (London, 1909), pp. 590-591.
- (24) Colonial Report No. 224, p. 5.
- (25) See J. Leeuwenburg, "The Griqua Reformation Movement in the 20th Century", unpublished paper presented to seminar on Southern Africa at the University of London, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, May 1971, p. 2.
- (26) W. Dower, The Early Annals of Kokstad and Griqualand East (Port Elizabeth, 1902), p. 122.
- (27) Cape of Good Hope, Blue Book on Native Affairs, 1898 (hereafter Blue Book 1898), p. 118. The use of this slogan forms the basis for some interesting speculation. The slogan seems to be the local adaptation of the more famous "Africa for the Africans" pioneered by the radical missionary Joseph Booth. Towards the end of 1896 Booth was, for some 3 months, active in the adjacent territory of Natal. See G. Shepperson and T. Price, Independent African (Edinburgh, 1958), pp. 69-70. At this time Booth attempted, unsuccessfully, to establish an "African Christian Union" which would follow a policy of "Africa for the Africans". It seems likely that Le Fleur heard of this slogan. In any event he put it to use and it gained for him considerable support: see Blue Book 1898, p. 118. There is little doubt that Booth's activities at this time aroused interest over a wide area. See, for example, a letter to the editor in the Eastern Province Herald, 18th January 1897.
- (28) Blue Book 1898, p. 118.
- (29) Ibid.
- (30) Eastern Province Herald, 27th January 1897.
- (31) Ibid.
- (32) Eastern Province Herald, 29th January 1897.
- (33) Blue Book 1898, p. 119.

- (34) Blue Book 1898, pp. 119-120.
- (35) Ibid., p. 120.
- (36) Blue Book 1892, p. 120. From late 1896 there seem to have been widespread fears of a "native uprising". Bulawayo Sketch, 19th December 1896. See also Departmental Records Colony of Natal, B.66.
- (37) Two examples should suffice. A coloured Veterinary Surgeon, J. F. Soga, sent to help in the fight against rinderpest in Bechuanaland, made use of his official report to complain of the lot of the Vaalpense: "These poor people, or, as I might term them, slaves, 'which they virtually are', among the Baralongs, caused us much anxiety. Moreover, it is a scandalous shame that slavery should exist in our midst." (Emphasis in the original.) Report of the Colonial Veterinary Surgeon, p. 135. In Basutoland, after the Makhaola disturbances, a commission with African and European members was established to determine exactly the Cape-Basutoland border. Colonial Report No. 224, p. 37. At least one Chief made use of this to renew an old land claim: see ibid.
- (38) The disease was spread unconsciously by Africans: see, for example, Special Report, p. 20. Officials were most concerned with the spread of the disease by Africans: see Vryburg Conference, pp. 14-15, or Notulen van die Tweeden Volksraad der Z.A. Republiek, 1896, p. 22. I have been able to trace only one case of the disease being spread maliciously: "Jacob Smith, a rinderpest guard, has been sentenced to five years and 100 lashes for spreading rinderpest by placing diseased meat on a farm": Eastern Province Herald, 22nd January 1897.
- (39) Vryburg Conference, p. 16.
- (40) See, for example, Report of the Colonial Veterinary Surgeon, p. 42, and Special Report, pp. 30 and 40.
- (41) In the Cape, authorized by Government Proclamation No. 409 of 1896. This also created a good market for "authorized" disinfectants: see Eastern Province Herald, 11th December 1896.
- (42) Vryburg Conference, p. 17.
- (43) Special Report, p. 43.
- (44) Colonial Report No. 224, p. 25. In a country with strong racial prejudices, dipping Africans in disinfectants was the logical outcome of some stereotypes. The Durban City Council dipped all newcomers in disinfectant until at least 1925. See S. W. Johns, "The Industrial and Commercial Workers Union of Africa", in R. I. Rotberg and A. A. Mazrui (eds.), Protest and Power in Black Africa (New York, 1970), p. 728.
- (45) Report of the Colonial Veterinary Surgeon, p. 28.
- (46) H. Bley, South-West Africa under German Rule (London, 1971), p. 123.



- (47) In the Uitenhage district, one village lost 132 of its 776 inhabitants to the Enon Mission station. Cape of Good Hope, Blue Book on Native Affairs, 1899 (hereafter Blue Book 1899), p. 49.
- (48) Blue Book 1897, p. 79.
- (49) Reported in the Eastern Province Herald, 29th September 1897.
- (50) The mid-1890s saw considerable destruction by locusts over a wide area of Southern Africa. See Basutoland Colonial Report No. 186, p. 3; also, E. A. Walker, History of Southern Africa, op. cit., p. 459.
- (51) Eastern Province Herald, 29th September 1897.
- (52) Special Report, p. 27.
- (53) Report of the Colonial Veterinary Surgeon, p. 27.
- (54) Special Report, p. 39. Farmers' attitudes are perhaps best expressed in a letter to the Eastern Province Herald, 11th December 1896.
- (55) See, for example, the "unfailing preventative" suggested by "Matabele" Thompson, Eastern Province Herald, 24th November 1897.
- (56) Special Report, pp. 23-24.
- (57) Ibid., p. 24. The luxury of experimenting with "concoctions" in the Transvaal did not extend to Africans. Officials there were wary of "Kaffir doctors", as a delegate to the Vryburg Conference explained: "We are stricter with them than with the ordinary kaffir." Vryburg Conference, p. 22.
- (58) Cape of Good Hope, Rinderpest - Report of Visit of Native Representatives to Bechuanaland.
- (59) See, for example, the evidence of John Manyi, ibid., p. 11.
- (60) Ibid.
- (61) Blue Book 1898, p. 109.
- (62) Eastern Province Herald, 7th August 1896. See also, Report of the Colonial Veterinary Surgeon, p. 138.
- (63) Colonial Report No. 226, p. 5.
- (64) See Departmental Records, Colony of Natal 1897, B. 22 and F. 46; also Blue Book 1898, pp. 122, 127.
- (65) National Rinderpest Commission disbanded 1st October 1896, Report of the Colonial Veterinary Surgeon, p. 25.
- (66) Ibid., pp. 40-41.
- (67) Eastern Province Herald, 12th July 1897. See also, Fort Beaufort Rinderpest Enquiry, November 1898.

- (68) Eastern Province Herald, 26th July 1897.
- (69) Ibid., 30th July 1897.
- (70) Ibid., 24th November 1897.
- (71) Blue Book 1899, p. 27.
- (72) I. Thompson and W. Wilson (eds.), The Oxford History of South Africa, loc. cit. It seems likely that African cattle losses were substantially higher for a number of reasons: a) communal grazing would increase the possibilities of infection; b) African suspicions would have militated against widespread inoculation; and c) with serum in short supply Africans with cattle are unlikely to have received any priority. In at least one area, Barotseland, African cattle were not badly affected by rinderpest, if at all. See I. H. Gann, Birth of a Plural Society (Manchester, 1958), p. 152.
- (73) Not all administrators were unaware of this: see, Colonial Report No. 226, p. 4. For a brief discussion of the wider aspects involved, see C. S. Belshaw, Traditional Exchange and Modern Markets (New Jersey, 1965), pp. 29-34.
- (74) In Rhodesia: "Draught animals of all kinds are selling at extremely high figures. On Saturday's market one donkey realized £30. Very inferior oxen, with two months guarantee against rinderpest, fetched £30 each." Eastern Province Herald, 1st September 1897. See also, Eastern Province Herald, 23rd July 1897.
- (75) Colonial Report No. 226, p. 14.
- (76) See, for example, the diversification of Riddel and Goosen, auctioneers, into a transport forwarding agency. Bulawayo Sketch, 19th September 1896.
- (77) Reported in the Eastern Province Herald, 24th November 1897.
- (78) Ibid., 8th September 1897.
- (79) Colonial Report No. 226, p. 5.
- (80) Eastern Province Herald, 1st September 1897.
- (81) H. Bley, South-West Africa under German Rule, op. cit., p. 125.
- (82) Blue Book 1899, p. 11.
- (83) See especially reports from the magisterial districts of Bizana and King William's Town, Blue Book 1899. Rinderpest contributed to what was already an inadequate diet: see, C. W. De Kiewiet, A History of South Africa (Oxford, 1957), p. 81.
- (84) Blue Book 1899, pp. 19-20.
- (85) Ibid., p. 73.
- (86) Ibid., pp. 63, 65, 72, 73 and 108.

- (87) Ibid., p. 63.
- (88) Ibid., pp. 78, 109. From Butterworth it was reported that:  
"This season also a great deal of land has been turned over and in spite of the absence of draught oxen, owing to the ravages of rinderpest, it is difficult to find a piece of arable land uncultivated ..." (Ibid., p. 74)
- (89) Colonial Report No. 224, p. 9.
- (90) See Blue Book 1899, pp. 16, 74.
- (91) Colonial Report No. 226, p. 5.
- (92) Blue Book 1899, pp. 40, 50, 114.
- (93) The Chief Magistrate of the Transkei reported: "It is surprising (notwithstanding the high price of cattle in the Colony) how many cattle, principally young animals, are being purchased from colonial farmers with money earned on the mines and public works, and brought into the territories." Ibid., p. 71.
- (94) For permanent movement off the land, see H. Bley, South-West Africa under German Rule, op. cit., p. 75, or L. Thompson and M. Wilson (eds.) The Oxford History of South Africa, op. cit., p. 127. Also Blue Book 1899, p. 49.
- (95) H. Bley, op. cit., p. 125.
- (96) A. J. Wills, The History of Central Africa, op. cit., p. 159.
- (97) Blue Book 1899, pp. 71, 77.
- (98) Ibid., pp. 51-52.
- (99) Ibid., p. 65.
- (100) Ibid., pp. 31, 53.
- (101) Colonial Report No. 226, p. 13.
- (102) C. W. De Kiewiet, A History of South Africa, op. cit., p. 95.
- (103) W. C. Scully, Further Reminiscences, op. cit., p. 317.
- (104) Blue Book 1899, pp. 81, 82.