# IN TIME OF PLAGUE:
# THE BASOTHO AND THE RINDERPEST, 1896-8

THESIS

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PULE PHOOFOLO

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# ABSTRACT

Rinderpest, the most dreaded bovine plague, struck the cattle of the BaSotho in British Basutoland early in 1897. By December the murrain had spent itself, having reduced the cattle population by half. As it did so, the rinderpest claimed the primary historical significance of an epidemic. By sharpening behaviour and illuminating latent or developing tendencies, the rinderpest helped to reveal the nooks and crannies of contemporary historical processes that would have otherwise eluded historical visibility.

This thesis brings out the complexities and ambiguities surrounding the epidemic. It uses the crisis occasioned by the panzootic in its multifaceted manifestations as a prism through which we might view the complex aspects of contemporary historical processes. It goes beyond the narrow limits of the crisis itself to discerning the broader and wider historical patterns that the rinderpest helped to highlight.

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## ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE FOOTNOTES

| | |
|---|---|
| B.B.N.A. | Blue Book for Native Affairs |
| B.P.P. | British Parliamentary Papers |
| C.A.R. | Colonial Annual Reports |
| C.M.T. | Archives of the Chief Magistrate of the Transkei |
| C.O. | Colonial Office Records |
| L.M.S. | Archives of the London Missionary Society |
| L.N.A. | Lesotho National Archives |
| U.S.P.G. | Archives of the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel |

# GLOSSARY OF SESOTHO TERMS

| | |
|---|---|
| Bohali | Cattle exchanged in marriage transactions. |
| Khotla | Chief's court place where court is held and a public place for men. |
| Mabele | Sorghum. |
| Mafisa | a system of stock trusteeship |
| Pitso | Public meeting |

# PREFACE

This study has been a long time in gestation. Consequently, I have, in the interim, accumulated innumerable debt. My supervisor, Professor Paul Maylam, stood firmly by every bit of my effort, dispensing invaluable advice. I owe him special gratitude for refusing to abandon me to my fate even when I began exhibiting the classical symptoms of rinderpest. Professor John Rowe, of the History Department at Northwestern University in the United States where the topic was first conceived, was my academic advisor and helped guide my first paces as a researcher.

Archivists at many research centres in Lesotho. South Africa and overseas helped to guide me through the maze of extensive research material in their holdings. Some, gave me special favours, allowing me to continue my research even after closing hours.

Various funding bodies provided the wherewithal for the research. Worthy of special mention are the African-American Institute, New York, which provided the wherewithal for my post-graduate study at Northwestern University, and the British Council which assisted financially during a brief research stay in London.

A glance at the footnotes reveals that little structured oral tradition is used for reasons that will become apparent in the discussion on the sources. Notwithstanding, numerous informal conversations were conducted with BaSotho people in almost every district of the country during the field research. I appreciative highly the time they so generously gave me.

# INTRODUCTION

Early in 1896 the BaSotho in the British Protectorate of Basutoland heard that a dreaded bovine plague known was approaching their country from the north. The chilling news received immediate and dramatic attention. A mood of tense apprehension pervaded the proceedings of the BaSotho annual gathering (the pitso) which discussed the impending doom in October. All speakers rose to anticipate the scale of the looming tragedy. By November 1896, the cautious optimism of the earlier months had given way to ominous forebodings when the murrain disease appeared temporarily in the northern districts of the country. There was tension matched only by the return of the panzootic in April 1897. The latter sealed the fate of the country. By December 1898, the panzootic had spent itself, having reduced the cattle population of Basutoland by half.

This thesis explores the history of this panzootic in Basutoland. It studies its trajectory, eavesdropping on the popular interpretations of its origins and spread. It investigates the varied social responses and reactions to the disease, exploring the historical setting in which the disease occurred. The thesis also investigates the social context of the epidemic. It examines how the disease influenced the way the society viewed itself and its wider world, and, in turn, shaped the way the society defined and interpreted it. Further, it illuminates the complex changes that were impinging on BaSotho society during this period and how they affected the impact of the disease and the ability to survive it.

Besides being about the history of the rinderpest, the thesis is also about historical methodology. It builds on and reflects a set of premises that underlie a growing body of literature on the social history of disease. This literature views epidemics as one of the key contingencies of history. Epidemics are historically specific. They have characteristics of the period in which they occur, undergo a complex dialectical

interaction with that period, affecting, and being influenced by, the human history of which they are a part. Epidemics often are magnifying glasses that uniquely reflect and expose underlying social forces, ongoing but subterranean tensions and conflicts, complex, and at times, paradoxical social processes. An epidemic provides a convenient point of entry that assists us to understand more deeply the society in which it occurs[1]

The history of disease and epidemics has emerged as an important theme in African history. Historians studying local economies and their relationship to regional and long-distance trade, population densities and movements, ecological environments and the impact of colonialism and industrialisation, have acknowledged these as significant epidemiological factors.[2] Barring a few notable exceptions,[3] historians of South Africa have neglected this important theme. This is despite earlier ethnographers and anthropologists identifying disease as a most profound effect of the process of industrialisation and consequent rural impoverishment in South Africa.[4]

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[1]The literature on the social history of disease, famine, and epidemics is too vast to list it here. See bibliography, especially, Alexander, Barber, Brandt, Calvi, Carmichael, Carpenter, Cartwright, Chevalier, Cipola, Clatts, Crosby, Deaux, Dirks, Durey, Evans, Gallant, Kiple, Langer, Luckin, Lyons, McGrew, McNeil, Miller, Mishler, Morris, Rosebury, Rosenberg, Seale, Slack, Spitzer, Sussman, Ziegler.

[2]For the expanding literature on the history of disease in Africa, see bibliography: Aidoo, Caldwell, Curtin, Dawson, Dias, Dùmmet, Feirman, Hartwig, Hartwig & Patterson, Kjekshus, Lyons, Miller, Patterson, Prins, Tsey & Short, Vail.

[3]F.F. Collins, "The History of South Africa's First Tuberculosis Epidemic", South African Medical Journal, 62 (1982); J. Crush, A. Jeeves, D. Yudelman, South Africa's Labour Empire: A History of Black Migrancy to the Gold Mines (Cape Town, 1991); S. Marks & N. Andersson, "Typhus and Social Control in South Africa, 1917-1950", in R. McLeod & M. Lewis, Disease, Medicine and Empire: Perspectives on Western Medicine and the Experience of European Expansion (London, 1988), 257-283; R. Packard, White Plague, Black Labour: Tuberculosis and the Political Economy of Health and Disease in South Africa (Los Angeles, 1989); H. Phillips, "Black October: The Impact of the Spanish Influenza Epidemic of 1918 on South Africa", Unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Cape Town, 1984; M.W. Swanson, "The Sanitation Syndrome: Bubonic Plague and Urban Native Policy in the Cape Colony, 1900-1909", Journal of African History, 18 (1977), 387-412.

[4]H. Kuper, Uniform of Colour (Johannesburg, 1947); I. Schapera, Migrant Labour and

Apartheid has been acknowledged as a system replete with state violence. Yet its more silent violence - socially generated disease - has not yet received systematic analysis by social scientists.[5]

That there is no systematic study of the history of stock diseases in Southern Africa is even more perplexing.[6] Systematic medical research in South Africa owes its inception to the ravages of stock disease. The first Bacteriological Institute in South Africa was established in 1891 in Grahamstown, to investigate stock diseases.[7] With a few notable exceptions,[8] the rinderpest panzootic of 1896-8, especially, has suffered from a lack of sustained historical analysis. While reference to it in historical accounts is almost pervasive, it is invariably cursory. Van Onselen's work, though pioneering, is exploratory. Only a little-known unpublished thesis has attempted anything like a systematic study of the social history of this catastrophic panzootic.[9] However, it

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Tribal Life (London, 1947)

[5]For an admirable beginning, see C. De Beer, The South African Disease: Apartheid, Health and Health Services (London, 1986); S. Marks & N. Andersson, "Diseases of Apartheid", in J. Lonsdale (ed), South Africa in Question (London, 1988); S. Marks & N. Andersson, "The Epidemiology and Culture of Violence", in N. Manganyi & A. du Toit (eds.), Political Violence and the Struggle in South Africa (Halfway House,1990), 26-69

[6]Notable exceptions include G. Campbell, "Disease, Cattle and Slaves: The Development of Trade Between Natal and Madagascar, 1875-1904", African Economic History, 19 (1990-91), 105-134; P.F. Cranfield, Science and Empire: East Coast Fever in Rhodesia and Transvaal (Cambridge, 1991); M.W. Henning, Animal Diseases in South Africa (Pretoria, 1956); Giblin, J.L., "East Coast Fever in Socio-historical Context: A Case Study from Tanzania", International Journal of African Historical Studies, 23, 3 (1990), 401-421; For a recent major attempt to fill this lacuna, see J.A.W. Coetzer, G.R. Thomson, R.C. Tustin (eds), Infectious Diseases of Livestock with Special Reference to Southern Africa (Oxford, 1994).

[7]Anon, "Alexander Eddington", Journal of the Medical Association of South Africa, 2 (1928); E. Burrows, A History of Medicine in South Africa (1958).

[8]R. Mack, "The Great African Cattle Plague Epidemic of the 1890s", Tropical Animal Health and Production, 2 (1970), 210-219; T.P. Ofcansky, "The 1889-97 Rinderpest Epidemic and the Rise of British and German Colonialism in Eastern and Southern Africa", Journal of African Studies, 8 (1981), 31-38; C. Van Onselen, "Reactions to Rinderpest in Southern Africa, 1896-7", Journal of African History, 13, 3 (1972), 387-412

[9]J.P. Kotze, "Die Runderpes in die Transvaal en die Omniddellike Gevolge Daarvan 1896-

confines itself to the impact of the murrain among Transvaal Afrikaner farmers. The study focuses exclusively on the impact of the epidemic without relating the disease to the wider historical question of society's response to epidemics. A study of ecological disasters in Natal also emphasises the role of the rinderpest during the decline of the African peasantry.[10] It, too, falls short of setting the epizootic within its social, economic and political context.

This lacuna is perplexing considering the crucial role cattle played in the lives of African societies. The decimation of cattle in a dramatic and sweeping epizootic struck at the very fabric of these societies. Economically the rinderpest was tantamount to the "Great Wall Street Crash"; it threatened to wipe out the only capital of the people and to restrict future capital accumulation. The epidemic spelt the virtual collapse of the entire transport system of African societies throughout Southern Africa. By destroying the means of agricultural production in its decimation of the plough-drawing oxen, the rinderpest threatened subsistence and especially the export of grain on which many African societies had come to depend. For societies where economic, social and political standing was measured in cattle, the rinderpest threatened social and political stability.

The dearth of historical studies on livestock is not peculiar to Southern African historiography. Despite their ubiquity and their role in the lives of agro-pastoralists, cattle remain an under researched topic.[11] Historians of the western world, with

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99", (Magister in die Lettere en Wysbegeerte in Geskiendenis, Randse Afrikaanse Universiteit, Johannesburg, 1974).

[10]C. Ballard, "The Repercussions of Rinderpest: Plague and Peasant Decline in Colonial Natal", International Journal of African Historical Studies, 19, 3 (1986),

[11]For some isolated systematic studies of pastoralist social formations, mainly on nomadic peoples, see, Equippe Ecologie et Anthropologie des Societes Pastorales (eds), Pastoral Production and Society (Cambridge, 1979); H. Hedlund, "Contradictions in the Peripheralization of a Pastoral Society: The Maasai", Review of African Political Economy, 15/16 (1979), 15-34; G. Kilman, The Barabang: East African Cattle Herdsmen (New York, 1970); P. Rigby, Persistent Pastoralists: Nomadic Societies in Transition (London, 1985); I.V.

abundant sources to permit reconstructing economic changes at the national and local levels, have also complained of a similar benign neglect.[12] Cattle diseases, especially, have not been subjected to serious study, prompting the complaint that they are the "great neglected diseases of mankind".[13] This thesis is a contribution toward filling this lacuna.

Primary sources on the rinderpest in Basutoland are extensive. The rinderpest crisis attracted universal attention as it impinged upon every aspect of society. It stimulated colonial officials, local European traders and missionaries, BaSotho chiefs and officials, newspaper reporters and private individuals to pour out a vast mass of writing on the subject. The thesis, therefore, depends largely on archival collections. These include official papers and missionary and personal collections.

The thesis also relies a great deal on published contemporary sources, especially Annual Reports, Blue Books, Select Committee Reports and Parliamentary Papers. All contemporary South African newspapers, including missionary periodicals, devoted pages to the rinderpest crisis. Their editorials and readers' submissions provide invaluable information especially on public responses to the crisis.

Oral research was conducted after the completion of the archival phase of the project. It soon dawned that oral evidence, defined here as oral evidence recounting events before the adult life of the informant, seldom contradicted written evidence. No one

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Cassanelli, The Shaping of Somali Society: Reconstructing the History of a Pastoral People, 1600-1900 (Philadelphia, 1982); I. Lewis, A Pastoral Democracy: A Study of Pastoralism and Politics among the Northern Somali of the Horn of Africa (Oxford, 1961); T. Monod, Pastoralism in Tropical Africa (Oxford, 1975).

[12]For a recent explicit statement, see M. Overton & B.M. Campbell, "Norfork Livestock Farming, 1250-1740: A Comparative Study of Manorial Accounts and Probate Inventories", Journal of Historical Geography, 18, 4 (1992), 377-396.

[13]J. Pino, "The Neglected Diseases of Livestock", in M. Ristic & J. Kreier (eds), Babesiosis (New York, 1981), 454-554.

could be found who was alive during the 1897 outbreak and who could recount personally remembered events. Experience in the field also confirmed many of the limitations of oral history that have been noted by other researchers. These included repetition of published evidence, unreliability of memory, outright ignorance, over-simplification, lack of perspective, and the influence of hindsight.[14]

Despite their abundance, the sources are disappointing in quality, especially on the long-term impact of the epidemic. Part of the reason is that any focus on the epidemic was overshadowed by the South African War that began close on the heels of the rinderpest in September 1899. The epidemiological pattern of the rinderpest further limited the quality of the source material. The rinderpest imposed a serious challenge to people's explanatory faculties. It was a new disease with unknown causes. Its outbreak was sudden and dramatic, its trajectory sweeping. Its devastating mortality gave people little chance for deliberation. When it passed, it disappeared as mysteriously as it had come.

The absence of knowledge of pre-rinderpest cattle epizootics also distorted contemporary evaluations of the impact of the rinderpest. Those who observed the effects of the rinderpest lacked a comparative standard against which to measure the impact of the epizootic. Thus, their evaluations of the 1896-8 rinderpest may be misleading without knowledge of the effects of pre-rinderpest outbreaks..

Their elitist character also restricts the sources. Colonial administrators who generated most of the sources used in this thesis were in contact more with the local ruling elite than with the ordinary villagers scattered across the landscape. The imperial administration had made only feeble attempts to concern itself with the lot of the ordinary populace. The very structure of imperial administration could not put civil society firmly on its agenda. Its resources, in personnel and finance, were meagre. It

[14]See e.g. A. Seldom & J. Pappworth, By Word of Mouth: 'Elite' Oral History (London, 1983); P. Thompson, The Voice of the Past: Oral History (Oxford, 1978).

depended entirely on a reconstituted chiefly hierarchy. Its future was also transitory, its objectives limited merely to maintaining law-and-order. The sources generated by the colonial and local elite therefore tell us little about the experience of the ordinary BaSotho who were outside official lines of communication.

This study takes heed of Marc Bloch's counsel that "the deeper the research, the more the light of evidence must converge from sources of many different kinds".[15] It thus uses a variety of, at times intractable, source materials to weave together the story of society's response to a devastating epidemic. The thesis also benefits from the proven methodological value of illuminating "a whole social system and a set of values by the searchlight of recording in elaborate detail a single event".[16]

[15]M. Bloch, The Historian's Craft (Manchester, 1954), 67.

[16]E. Le Roy Ladurie, The Mind and Method of the Historian, tr. B. and S. Reynolds (London, 1982), 2.

# CHAPTER 1

## THE RINDERPEST IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Early in 1896, transport riders leading their wagon oxen south from Bulawayo watched with shock as their oxen suddenly dropped dead in their yokes. Panic-stricken, they abandoned their wagons, driving the remaining oxen southwards through the bush. Rev. Coillard, the missionary to Lewanika, later travelling south along this well-trodden "Missionary Road", found "hundreds of carcasses [lying] here and there, on the roadside or piled up in the fields." He also saw close to a thousand ox-wagons still laden with merchandise, but without their teams of oxen. "Never within the memory of men", he affirmed, "had such a thing been seen."[1]

The panzootic that was devouring transport oxen was the same rinderpest murrain that had been ravaging northern Zambesia in the preceding decade. The first description of its symptoms appeared in a telegram the acting Secretary of the British South Africa Company in Bulawayo sent to the Imperial Secretary in Cape Town:

> Running at eyes and nose, small paunch very hard and dry, intestines full of blood, mucus bloody, discharge of mucus from anus, slight congestion of lungs, gall slightly inflated and enlarged. It has been satisfactorily proved that it can be in system for 14 days before it can be detected. When symptoms once appear death follows rapidly. No cases of recovery yet recorded.[2]

Thus, a cattle owner would happily see his apparently healthy herd of cattle off to pasture at sunrise. Upon returning home with the herd in the afternoon, his herd-boy

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[1]Coillard, F., On the Threshold of Central Africa (London, 1897), 626.

[2]British Parliamentary Papers (B.P.P.), C.-8141: Correspondence Relating to the Outbreak of Rinderpest in South Africa in March 1896, J.A. Stevens, Bulawayo, to the Imperial Secretary, Cape Town, 9 March 1896, enclosure 1 in No. 2, in Hercules Robinson (high commissioner, Cape Town) to Joseph Chamberlain (secretary of state for Colonies, London), 11 March 1896.

would report that a certain heifer appeared sick and listless. The owner would greet the news without much apprehension. He knew from experience that seldom in a large herd of cattle did one of them escape the infection of one or other of the prevalent bovine diseases.

At sunrise, however, he would hurry to the kraal where he would behold the sick heifer. It was breathing heavily and groaning at intervals, evidently in great pain. A mass of thick, unclean, mucous discharge oozed from its nostrils. It was watering in the eyes and salivating from the mouth. Its ears drooped backwards. When he called its name, the heifer would turn an appealing eye towards him, revealing its agony. The visible mucous membranes of the eyes, nostrils and mouth had become red and inflamed.

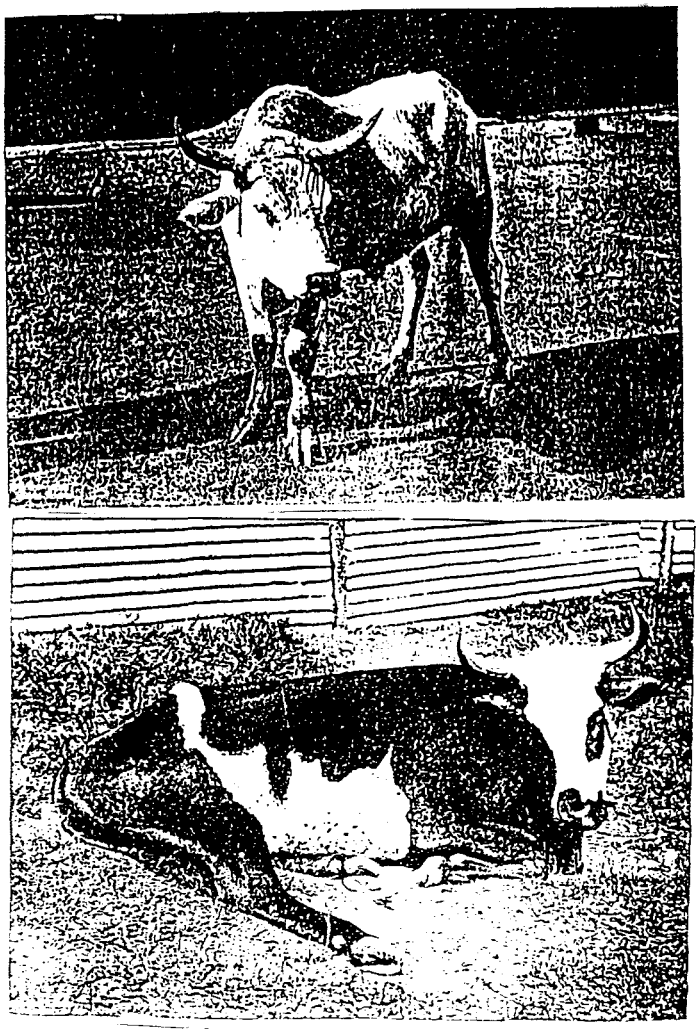
These symptoms appeared about six days after the first stage of infection. During the incubation phase of infection, there were no outward symptoms. During the next stage, the prodromal phase, the animal's temperature rose, setting in an acute fever. The purexia phase followed, during which the symptoms worsened, with a total loss of appetite. The second day after the appearance of these visible symptoms, profuse diarrhoea occurred and mouth lesions developed. The infected animal then went into the stage of an apparent convalescence. During this phase, the fever subsided and the mouth lesions healed. By this time, however, it had become too dehydrated and emaciated from the loss of fluids, the avoidance of drinking water and the total loss of appetite. Death often followed within six to twelve days.

Later veterinary research was to identify the disease as a highly virulent infection by a minute virus of the paramyxoviridae family that lodges in the membranes of the respiratory and digestive tracts. Once in the body, it spreads throughout the blood system to all tissues. The infective agent of the disease is highly fragile and easily loses its infective power when exposed to heat, light or putrefaction. It thus survives for only a short time outside the animal's body.

The virus's most effective transmission is through nasal swabbing, secondarily through inspiration of infected droplets. Once it has penetrated a mucous membrane, it enters the body via the tonsils and the respiratory tracts, and then goes to the bronchial lymph nodes. Here it spills into the blood stream. It then spreads through all tissues of the body targeting especially the epithelial cells of the alimentary, respiratory and urogenital tracts. The sequel is stomatitis, extensive gastro-enteritis and an acute fever. The virus also targets circulating lymphocytes, suppressing the victim's normal immunity system, thus exposing the host to other latent infections.

**1.1: Typical appearance of a sick animal**

**(Courtesy of the Onderstepoort Veterinary Library)**



**1.2: The last stages of rinderpest**

**(Courtesy of the Onderstepoort Veterinary Library)**

The virus affects only species of even-toed ungulates, the most susceptible hosts being water buffalo, cattle, eland, giraffe, hippopotamus, impala, kudu and wilde beeste. It also occurs in a less virulent form in sheep, goats and pigs. It is transmitted upon a susceptible animal coming into contact with the virus in the breath, secretions and excretions of a sick animal. The virus is more virulent and spreads more rapidly among hosts that have never been exposed to infection, with an inevitable high mortality rate often exceeding 90 per cent.[3]

Conflicting European travellers' accounts and the fact that the panzootic was only diagnosed when it reached Bulawayo in 1896 render any historical reconstruction of the trajectory of the panzootic throughout Africa a difficult task. For Africa north of the Zambesi, we depend for our evidence on the conflicting, impressionistic and imprecise observations of European travellers. These travellers lacked veterinary knowledge and could not diagnose the disease precisely. English travellers thus described the disease as "a great cattle plague", while their French counterparts referred to it generally as ***peste bovine***. The term "rinderpest" is itself imprecise - it being a general German word for "cattle plague".

Local sources on outbreaks of cattle disease, and on rinderpest specifically, are also imprecise. The main impediment to knowing whether different local people were referring to the same panzootic is the multiplicity of terms each used to refer to the same disease. Naming a disease by the place of its immediate origin, as the BaTswana did,

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[3] Agricultural Journal of the Cape of Good Hope, 16 September, 1897, p 277-284; On the aetiology, pathogenesis, clinical signs and pathology of the disease, see, D.C. Blood, "Rinderpest", in D.C. Blood and O.M. Radostis, Veterinary Medicine: A Textbook of the Diseases of Cattle, Sheep, Pigs, Goats and Horses, 7th ed. (London, 1989), 937-38; J.A. Idnani, "Transmission of Rinderpest by Expired Air", Indian Journal of Veterinary Science, 14 (1944), 220; P.B.Rossiter, "Rinderpest", in Coetzer, Thomson, Tustin (eds.), Infectious Diseases of Livestock, ii, chapter 7, 738-748; G.R. Scott, "Rinderpest", in J.W. Davis, L.H. Karstad, D.O. Trainer (eds.), Infectious Diseases of Wild Mammals, 2nd edn. (Ames, 1981), 18-30; Agricultural Journal, 16 September, 1897, 277-284; K. Yamanouchi, "Comparative Aspects of Pathogenicity of Measles, Canine Distemper and Rinderpest Virus", Japanese Journal of Medical Science and Biology, 33 (1980), 53-54.

exacerbates the problem. The following list of terms used for the rinderpest typifies the problem of nomenclature, and therefore of precise identification:

1.3: Names for Rinderpest

| ETHNIC GROUP OR LANGUAGE | TERM FOR RINDERPEST |
|---|---|
| Bashi | Kuyirha (the killing of cows) |
| Buhaya | Omobyamo ya ngonde (same) |
| Ila/Mukoni | Ka-nkolomwena |
| Karamajong | Lopit |
| Lango | Geng or edeke |
| Lonyoro | Kisotoka |
| Maasai | Ollodua |
| Nandi | Kiptaitet |
| Ndebele | Ulenkanyama (to destroy meat) |
| Plateau Tonga | Moolomoka |
| Shona | Muringanyama (to destroy meat) |
| Southern Sotho | Renepese or Lefu la Likhomo (cattle plague or a disease of cattle) |
| Tswana | Bolowane (a disease from Bulawayo) |
| Turkana | Lukio |
| Wakonde | Kinbumpa |
| Zulu | Isiqimu or Umaqimulana |

The origin of the rinderpest, however, was undoubtedly Central Asia, more especially India, where it had been endemic for a long time. Panzootics of rinderpest had swept Europe in the eighteenth century, leaving close on two hundred million head of cattle dead in their wake. The most recent outbreak in Europe before the African panzootic of 1884-98 was the incursion into Great Britain between 1865 and 1867.[4]

Contemporary studies apportioned the blame for the introduction of rinderpest to Africa between Italy, Britain and Germany. Italy and Britain used cattle as draft and pack animals, imported from India or Arabia and probably infected with rinderpest, in their military expeditions in Africa around this period. The British did so in the Gordon relief expedition at Khartoum in 1884-5, the Italians in their Somaliland campaigns in 1887, 1888 and 1889.[5] The case against Germany also has some foundation. Late in 1889, a German legion, with pack and draft oxen acquired from Aden and Bombay, was quartered on the East African Coast.[6] These animals were most likely infected with rinderpest. Around the same time, Masai warriors raided the coast for cattle, bringing what could have been infected herds into the interior. Within months between 90-95 per cent of Masai herds were wiped out.[7]

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[4]R.H. Dunlop and D.J. Williams, Veterinary Medicine: An Illustrated History (St. Louis, 1996), 277-81; S. Hall, "The Great Cattle Plague of 1865", British Veterinary Journal, 122 (1966), 259-66; C.S. Orwin and E.H. Whetham, History of British Agriculture, 1846-1914 (London, 1964), 200-2.

[5]Percival, R.B., A Game Ranger's Notebook (London, 1924); idem, in Cumming, E.D. (Ed.), A Game Ranger on Safari (London, 1928); Mettam, R.W.V., "A Short History of Rinderpest with Special Reference to Africa", Uganda Journal, v (1937), p 22-26; Thome, M., Peste Bovine: Historique Rapport Annual, 1964, Ministers de l agriculture et la production animals, Republic de Tchad: Direction d'elevage, Fasc. 7, Fort Lamy; Henning, M.W., Animal Diseases in South Africa (Pretoria, 1956) ii, 829-30.

[6]Great Britain War Office, Intelligence Division, Handbook of British East Africa, Including Zanzibar, Uganda and the Territory of the British East African Company, hmso, 1893.

[7]O. Bauman, Durch Massailand Zur Neilquelle (Berlin, 1894), in H. Kjekshus, Ecology Control and Economic Development in East African History: The Case of Tanganyika, 1850-1950 (London, 1977), 129; J. Ford, The Role of the Trypanosomiases in African Ecology: A Study of the Tsetse Fly Problem (Oxford, 1971), W. Littlewood, "Cattle Plague in Egypt in 1903-04-05", Journal of Comparative Pathology, 18 (1905), 312-321; T.P. Ofcansky, "The

The complicated trajectory of the rinderpest once it appeared on the continent should not concern us here.[8] On its southward journey, it appears to have been checked for some time by the Zambesi River. Here, it was known as "Zambesi cattle fever", an endemic local affliction. Its belated crossing of the river was probably due to the lack of an intensive network of cattle communication across the river. Another factor was probably the difficulty of cattle passing through a tsetse-infected zone.[9] Once it had crossed that boundary, early in 1896, the extensive ox-wagon transport system between Bulawayo and southern entrepots accelerated its relentless and swift spread, helped by wild game.

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1889-97 Rinderpest Epidemic and the Rise of British and German Colonialism in Eastern and Southern Africa", Journal of African Studies, 8 (1981), 32; A.B. Percival, "Game and Disease", Journal of the East Africa and Uganda Natural History Society, 13 (1918), 310; 131.

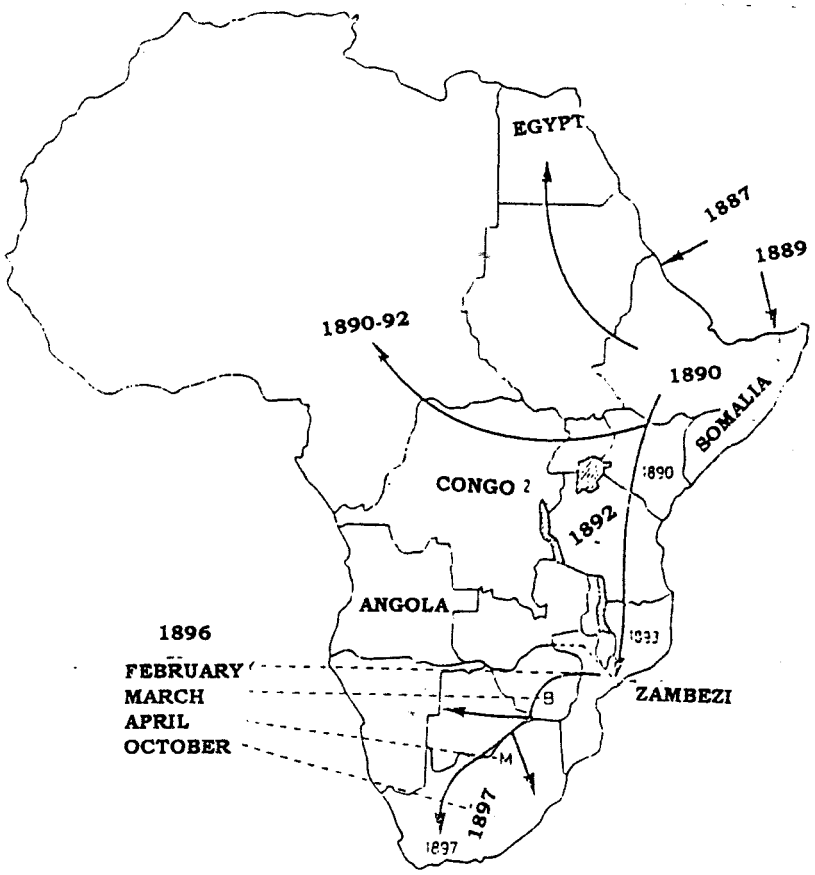
[8]For some contemporary accounts of the ravages of the rinderpest throughout the continent, see, W.A. Chanlers, Through Jungle and Desert: Travels in East Africa (London, 1896); L. Decle, Three Years in Savage Africa (London, 1898), 565-572; E. Gedge, "A Recent Exploration, Under Captain F.G. Dundas, R.W., up the River Tana to Mt. Kenya", Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, xiv, 8 (1892), 513-533; J.J. Harrison, "A Journey from Zeila to Lake Rudolph", Geographical Journal, 18 (1901), 258-275; L. Parfait, De Saint-Louis a Tripoli Par le Lac Tchad (Paris, 1894), 151-176; C. Peters, New Light on Dark Africa (London, 1891); F.D. Lugard, "Travels from the East Coast to Uganda, Lake Albert Edward, and Lake Albert", Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, 14 (1892), 818-834; A. Sharpe, "A Journey from the Shire River to Lake Mareru and the Upper Luapula", Geographical Journal, I (1893), 529-530; For later studies on the trajectory and ravages of the disease, see, J.H. Driberg, The Lango, a Nilotic Tribe of Uganda (London, 1923), 91; Kjekshus, Ecology, Control and Economic Development; W. Langheld, Zwanzig Jahre in deutschen Kolonien (Berlin, 1909); Mack, R., "The Great African Cattle Plague Epidemic of the 1890s", Tropical Animal Health and Production, 2 (1970), 21-219; J.W. Macaulay, "Kenya 1900-1953", in D.H.L. Rollinson and J.F.F. Callear (eds.), A History of the Overseas Veterinary Services, Part Two (London), 1973; 141; R. Pankhurst, "The Great Ethiopian Famine of 1886-1892: A New Assessemnt", Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Science, 21 (1966), 95-124. 271-294; Pankhurst, Economic History of Ethiopia, 1800-1935 (Addis Ababa, 1968), 217ff; D. Robinson,"Rinderpest in Kenya and Uganda, 1889-1900: Enquiries into its Origins and Spread" (seminar paper, Department of History, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, April 1977); J. Rowe,., "A Decade of Destruction: The Great Rinderpest Panzootic of East and Central Africa, 1887-1897" (Paper Presented to the Symposium on Diseases and History in Africa, Duke University, April, 1975); C. Van Onselen, "Reactions to Rinderpest in Southern Africa, 1896-7", Journal of African History, xiii (1972), 473-88.

[9]George Fleming, former principal veterinary surgeon of the British army, to The Times, quoted in Agricultural Journal, ix, no., 17, 20 August 1896.

Within twenty-five days, it spread throughout the Bechuanaland Protectorate. At this rate, it had travelled five hundred miles at the astonishing speed of 20 miles a day.[10]

## 1.4: Probable trajectory of the rinderpest

(Source: R. Mack, "The Great African Cattle Plague Epidemic")




[10] B.P.P., C.-8141: Correspondence, Robinson to Chamberlain, 26 March 1896, 1; Cape Parliamentary Papers (C.P.P.), G. 33-'97: Special Report on Rinderpest in South Africa by the Colonial Veterinary Surgeon, from March 1896, to February, 1897, p 6-11; D. Hutcheon, "Rinderpest in South Africa: A Short Description of its History, General Characters and Methods of Treatment" (Cape Town, 1902), p 5-6.

Authorities in South African territories reacted belatedly to the advancing catastrophe. The alarm was raised only when the murrain appeared in Bulawayo, thus directly threatening the herds of the British South Africa Company and those of Europeans in South Africa. After receiving a description of the symptoms of the disease and confirming that it was indeed the dreaded rinderpest, the Cape government's chief veterinary surgeon, Duncan Hutcheon, urged the under-secretary for agriculture to take "prompt and decisive action". "Nothing short of the absolute destruction of everything capable of conveying the infection", he advised, "will prevent the spread of such a scourge".[11]

Meanwhile, Hutcheon hastily sent one of his senior veterinarians, Otto Henning, to Rhodesia to diagnose the disease. When Henning reached Palapye in the Bechuanaland Protectorate, he investigated the disease, confirming that it was indeed the rinderpest. He tried to halt the disease at Palapye by arranging for the slaughter of all sick animals, including those suspected to be infected. He also recommended regulations to control the southward-bound movement of cattle. Besides traffic and quarantine regulations, he advised that all transport oxen from the north and within the Protectorate should be killed immediately and owners compensated.[12] The British resident commissioner of the Protectorate, Newton, urged the Colonial Office to make funds available for compensating owners of slaughtered animals. "It is better to begin spending even as much as 50,000 pounds at once", he argued, "than to suffer an annual loss to be incurred to the whole of South Africa, of more than double that sum."[13]

With a skeletal police force at its disposal, however, the Protectorate's administration was unequal to the task of enforcing these regulations. Moreover, on advice from the

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[11]C.P.P., G.33-'97, Special Report, 7.

[12]Ibid., 7-8

[13]B.P.P., C.-8141, Correspondence, Newton to Robinson, in Robinson to Chamberlain, 5 April, 1896.

high commissioner in Cape Town, the British government eschewed the plan of wholesale slaughter and refused funds for compensating owners of slaughtered animals. "It seems to me unjust", Robinson counselled, "to ask British tax payers to compensate cattle owners...for destruction of cattle, which, if not slaughtered, are bound to die".[14]

Meanwhile, when Henning found that the disease had spread as far south as Gaborone, he proposed leaving the "natives to fight their own battle and to confine our efforts to protect European and neighbouring states".[15] In a similar state of panic, the Transvaal government sent its underemployed veterinarian, Doctor Arnold Theiler, to Salisbury to diagnose the disease. En route he witnessed the carnage, observing "bodies of [stinking] trek oxen [lying] in the river beds", and scores of derelict ox-wagons. The misery of the wagon owners was "heartbreaking" as "their wagons and oxen were all they possessed".[16] When he returned, he called upon President Kruger to take immediate action.[17] The Transvaal immediately forbade all ox-wagon transport across its borders with Rhodesia and Bechuanaland Protectorate, ordering stock to be withdrawn three miles from the Limpopo River[18].

By the end of March, however, the disease had already crossed the Molopo River into former British Bechuanaland, reaching Mafeking early in April. Delegates from all South African states hurriedly convened in the town for "a friendly discussion as to the best means to adopt to prevent the spread of the disease".[19] The interstate conference, the

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[14]Ibid., Robinson to Chamberlain, 5 Apri, 1896.

[15]Ibid., Resident Commissioner, Mafeking, 18 March 1896

[16]Johannesburg Public Library, S Store 920, Letters by Arnold Theiler, Theiler to parents, 18 May 1896.

[17]Ibid.,

[18]Minutes of Rinderpest Conference held at Mafeking, 16 April 1896, speech of A. Theiler, Transvaal delegate, 4.

[19]C.P.P., G.64-'97: Report of Colonial veterinary surgeon, 1897, 9.

first of three, urged the delegates to recommend three methods of restricting the spread of the disease to their respective governments: fencing along respective borders, immediate destruction of all infected animals and disinfection of all persons and articles that contacted infected or dead cattle.

On other issues requiring co-operation between governments, however, there was more bickering than consensus, robbing the conference of an early opportunity to arrest the further spread of the disease. The delegates also lacked mandates to bind their respective governments, thus rendering the resolutions of the conference impotent.[20] In particular, lack of co-operation between the Cape and the Transvaal governments ensured that the disease would break out simultaneously along the western and northern borders of British Bechuanaland and the Transvaal. Already by early April, it had appeared in the Zeerust area of the boer republic.[21]

Jolted by the disaster, various authorities in South Africa sent delegates to Vryburg for a second "international" conference to formulate a concerted plan of action. Besides the previous delegation comprising the Cape Colony, the Transvaal, Orange Free State, Bechuanaland Protectorate and Natal colony, delegates now also came from Basutoland and German South West Africa. The conference, running for two days on 31 August and 1 September, abandoned the "stamping-out" strategy and re-emphasised fencing as the most effective method of restricting the spread of the disease. Believing that Africans carried the disease in their clothes, delegates recommended imposing stricter pass laws "to have the movements of the natives under complete control". They included subjecting African travellers to fumigation. The conference also adopted measures to disinfect hides and skins. Finally, it called for urgent research on a cure for the disease.[22]

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[20]Ibid., 10.

[21]Letters by Sir Arnold Theiler, Theiler to Parents, 3 April, 1896; Minutes of Rinderpest Conference of 16 April, 1896, speech of A. Theiler, 4.

[22]C.P.P., G.82-'96: Minutes, 3-4

Soon after the Vryburg conference, the rinderpest defiantly appeared in many districts of the Cape Colony and Transvaal. It appeared simultaneously in the Herbert, Hay and Barkly West districts early in September, and arrived in Kimberley in October.[23] These latest outbreaks confirmed that the disease was now out of control. The last resort was now to concentrate all efforts at the Orange River to combat its further spread. There were disagreements among various authorities on the value of this last ditch strategy;[24] these were played out in the daily press,[25] leading to the dissolution of the Rinderpest Commission, a consultative body that oversaw the fight against the spread of the disease.[26]

Eventually, the Cape government carried out the proposal to make a last ditch line of defence at the Orange River. This natural barrier ran across the whole country from the Atlantic Ocean to the Drakensberg Mountains. At a cost of a million pounds, the Cape government embarked on the erection of a barbed wire fence 1,000 yards on the southern side of the River. It started from the southwest boundary of the Bechuanaland Protectorate and ran along the border of the Cape and Free State as far as the Basutoland border. From here, the fence continued along the boundary of Basutoland and the Cape as far as the Natal border. It then continued along the Natal and Cape border to the coast. Armed police cordons guarded the fence for a distance of about a thousand miles. They carefully regulated all communication between the infected and uninfected areas.[27]

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[23]Assistance for the reconstruction of the trajectory of the rinderpest through the Cape colony comes from C.P.P., G.72a-'98: Runderpest Statistiek, Voor de Kolonie de Kaap De Goede Hoop, 1896-7-8.

[24]C.P.P., G.64-'97: Reports, 21.

[25]Cape Times, 10 September 1896.

[26]C.P.P., G.64-'97, Reports, p 21, and 25-26.

[27]Agricultural Journal, September 1897, 275.

This strategy did keep the disease at bay for about four months. In late March 1897, however, the panzootic leapt through the strictly imposed cordons, breaking through south of the Orange River. The sequel was that it blazed a relentless trail through the Cape Colony and completed its flanking movement towards the Free State and Basutoland. Despairing at the disease's defiance of natural and artificial restraints, the authorities abandoned centralised strategies and concerted action. They now left the task of containing the spread of the disease to the less efficient local district committees.

From now on, it would be almost impossible to predict where and when the disease might next appear, and from what source. Indeed its appearance in neighbouring Basutoland early in March occurred before the officially recognised date of its crossing the Orange River in late April.[28] In May, it was spreading through the neighbouring Cape colonial districts of Aliwal North, Barkly East, Albert, Hay and Hope Town. In June it was raging in the southern Orange Free State and beginning its devastation of the Transkeian territories.[29] Natal followed in July. In August, it had reached Swaziland.

Governments now turned their attention to the discovery of an efficacious prophylactic. On the eve of the outbreak of the rinderpest, the state of veterinary knowledge in South Africa was very poor. The Cape Colony did have a rudimentary veterinary service, apparently the best and only one in sub-Saharan Africa. A well-qualified veterinarian, Duncan Hutcheon, headed the veterinary department. He was perhaps the most experienced veterinarian in Southern Africa. A member of the prestigious Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons after graduating from the renowned Royal (Dick) Veterinary College in Edinburgh in 1871,[30] Hutcheon had been the second Chief Veterinary

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[28]Lesotho National Archives (L.N.A.), Maseru, S3/1/5/8/6, rinderpest outbreak at Sephapo's in Mafeteng, assistant commissioner (Mafeteng), to resedent commissioner, 6 March 1897.

[29]Cape Archives (C.A.), Prime Minister's Office (P.M.O) 249, reports on the outbreak and progress of the rinderpest in the Transkeian Territories, September 1897.

[30]For the history of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, see E. Cotchin, The Royal Veterinary College, London: A Bicentenary History (London, 1990); For the history of the

Surgeon to the government of the Cape Colony from 1880.[31] The "Nestor of Veterinary Science"[32] in a country beset by various animal diseases, Hutcheon admitted his own lack of laboratory experience. He justified it by complaining that the "amount of the correspondence in [his] office" deprived him of the requisite time to undertake research.[33] Although often ravaged by endemic foot and mouth disease, pleuro-pneumonia, anthrax, redwater and glanders, Natal only established a rudimentary veterinary service when the rinderpest alarm was sounded in 1896. A chief veterinary surgeon, Herbert Watkins-Pitchford,[34] was appointed in July 1896, and the veterinary section was placed under an Agricultural Department that only secured cabinet status in 1897. The Department lacked adequate veterinary facilities. Watkins-Pitchford's outfit consisted of "one room, 15 x 20 (in which his clerk has also to work), a damaged microscope, a few dilapidated instruments, and some dozen bottles containing drugs".[35]

The state of veterinary services in the Free State and Transvaal was even worse. The government of the Free State had no qualified veterinarian in its employ and the only veterinary expertise that did exist derived from local lore of farmers. The Transvaal

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Royal (Dick) Veterinary College, see The Royal (Dick) School of veterinary Studies, "A Brief History of the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies", <http://www.vet.ed.ac.uk/history.htp; also I. Pattison, The British Veterinary Profession: 1785-1948 (London, 1984).

[31]P.J. Posthumus, An Index of Veterinarians in South Africa, 4th edition (Pietermaritzburg), vol. 1, 101-103.

[32]R.A. Alexander, "The Onderstepoort Veterinary Research Laboratory, 1908-1958", The Onderstepoort Journal of Veterinary Research, 28, 4, (1961), 571.

[33] C..P.P., G.1-'92, Cape of Good Hope Select Committee on the Agricultural Department, 1892, Q. 222, 38.

[34]For biographical details on Watkins-Pitchford, see Anonymous, "The Past Work of Lieut. Col. H. Watkins-Pitchford C.M.G., F.R.C.V.S., F.R.S.E. Being Extracts from Various Official and Press Sources" (n.d), photocopy from the library of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, London; Posthumus, Index of Veterinarians, ii, 227-229.

[35]Colony of Natal, Departmental Reports, Report of Commissioner of Agriculture, 1896, H 143.

government also did not employ a veterinarian though one lived in the state. He was Arnold Theiler, a Swiss immigrant who had arrived in the Transvaal in 1891. His career typifies the poor status of the veterinary profession in South Africa and Europe on the eve of rinderpest. Theiler had obtained a veterinary diploma at Zurich in 1889. Unable to secure employment in his home country, he set sail for Cape Town in 1891, armed with his few books, microscope and surgical instruments. Here he found no employment and was forced to survive by working on a large farm supervising cattle and forage. Disaster struck when he lost his left hand in a chaff cutter. Now disabled, he set up an unsuccessful practice in Pretoria where he ended up advertising a phoney cure for horse-sickness. Ambitious and determined, he succeeded in securing a job as consulting veterinary surgeon to the Johannesburg Sanitary Board when smallpox broke out in the city in 1893. This appointment lasted only five months, after which Theiler went back to private practice.

Meanwhile, Theiler had been studying bacteriology privately. He had also been learning to speak both Dutch and the local colloquial form of Dutch - Taal. He succeeded in securing a government appointment by establishing cordial relations with important officials. When the Transvaal government learnt of the arrival of the rinderpest in Bulawayo, the authorities sent him to investigate. Soon afterwards, he was officially sworn in as State Veterinarian of the Transvaal.[36]

More telling was the archaic state of epidemiological knowledge in South Africa. Many, including those who should have known better, continued to view the disease as the visitation of God and a form of retribution exacted for the sins of society. "It seemed," as an irate correspondent quipped, "that sanitary science [was] still enveloped in gloom as

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[36]This summary of Theiler's career is based on H. Curson, "Theiler and the Rinderpest Epidemic of 1896-1903", Journal of the South African Veterinary Medical Association, 7 (1936), 187-203; P.J. Du Toit & C. Jackson, "The Life and Work of Sir Arnold Theiler, ibid., 7 (1936), 135-186; T. Gutsche, There Was a Man: The Life and Times of Arnold Theiler (Cape Town, 1979); G. Theiler, Arnold Theiler 1867-1936: His Life and Times (Pretoria, 1971).

ever it was a generation since".[37] Governments in the various territories proclaimed days of prayer, calling upon the populace to attend sessions of humiliation and prayer to propitiate the wrath of the Most High.[38]

Authorities also lacked experience in the administration of an epidemic. In these circumstances, and confronted by an unknown and incurable disease, they had no alternative but to slaughter all infected cattle including those merely exposed to infection.[39] The other method was to create cordons to restrict cattle from moving from infected areas. The former method was universally unpopular for it achieved the opposite of what its originators had intended. Without adequate compensation for cattle thus slaughtered, it contributed to bovine mortality and encouraged the spread of disease. This was because cattle owners concealed outbreaks to avoid the wholesale slaughter of their stock. Most cattle-owners also preferred to kill their animals themselves, before infection. It enabled them to preserve the meat for the meagre months ahead, rather than wait to have their cattle slaughtered and buried by the authorities.

Grave errors, with serious consequences, could also occur when deciding to slaughter cattle suspected to be infected. This was mainly because some symptoms of the disease were similar to those of other bovine diseases including anthrax and lung sickness. What the prophylactic measure of shooting infected cattle did achieve was to spawn many rinderpest titbits that were reported in local newspapers. One example told the story of a "nervous man in the capital city of the Boer Republic of the Free State who thought he was suffering from the rinderpest and went to a doctor":

> He insisted so strongly upon his symptoms that at last the doctor gave him a prescription and sent him to a chemist. The dispenser asked him to

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[37]South Africa, xxxii, no. 423 (1896), 269.

[38]C.P.P., G.64-'97, Reports, 28.

[39]L.N.A., BGB 1/21, "Memorandum on Measures to be adopted for Suppression of the Disease known as Rinderpest or Zambesi Fever in Cattle", enc. In Under-Secretary for Agriculture, London, to the Department of Agriculture, Cape of Good Hope, 19 March 1896.

> come into the back yard. "What for"? inquired the victim of the cattle plague. "Oh", replied the chemist, "the prescription reads: "Bearer has the rinderpest, take him in the back yard and shoot him, that being the only cure".[40]

Attempts to set up cordons were only temporarily effectual - soon the rinderpest was leaping one cordon after another. In this precarious situation, cattle-owners tried futile, even detrimental, immunisation methods. The only prophylactic method known in South Africa by 1896 was the Wetterberg or Gobbler method. It consisted of inoculating an animal with a mixture of blood, gall and the watery substance from the abdominal cavity of a donor. The blend was let to stand from one to three days. Afterwards woollen wads were dipped into it and placed under the hide of an animal. Sometimes, all cattle thus treated died ten to twenty days after they were treated. In others, the animal remained apparently healthy, therefore eluding immunisation.

Some dosed their cattle with raw linseed oil and deprived the already dehydrated animal of water. Others fed the animal with a strong solution of copper sulphate or permanganate of potash. This method was so popular that potassium permanganate soon became scarce or expensive when available. Still, others tried snake venom, placing the unfortunate animal, already infected with the rinderpest virus, between the devil and the deep blue sea. While some remaining assortments of cures were plainly innocuous, others could be deleterious. One of these included inserting a clove of garlic through a hole made in the animal's throat. Others made their cattle drink soup from the boiled meat of an animal that had died of rinderpest. The result was that either the method proved impotent if the soup had boiled enough, thus destroying the virus at high temperatures, or the virus would infect a healthy animal if it survived the boiling.

Others skinned an animal that had died of the disease. They then wrapped under the skin a hundred kilograms of salt and heated it under low temperature for twenty-four hours.

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[40]Ibid., xxxvii, 1898, 164.

After recovering the salt, they fed it to a healthy animal, covering its nostrils with a cloth moistened in carbolic acid. The most popular prophylactic among the boer farmers was the bile cure. They made a mixture consisting of the liquid from an infected animal's stomach, its bile, and scrapings from its duodenum. They then injected this mixture into the animal. The injection consisted of making an incision in the tail of a healthy animal, inserting woollen buds soaked in this mixture.[41]

The Cape colonial government did not hesitate to draw upon African medical and diagnostic expertise. When the threat to the colony became obvious, the government devised a scheme to send a delegation of African doctors to where the disease was raging in Bechuanaland. The purported intention was to give the best African medical experts an opportunity to test their remedies and apprise them directly of the ravages of the disease.[42]

Other Africans tried novel prophylactics. Convinced that the rinderpest was "the white man's Nongqause" (a reference to African suspicion of European motives in the earlier cattle-killing disaster of 1856-7), the Gcaleka in the Transkeian territories drove their cattle to the coast, there to immerse them in sea water and sea scum. This emanated from a curious perception of the principle of Similia Similibus Curatur (similar cures another similar). They believed that the scum (Umlungu) of the seas would expunge the toxin that they suspected the Umlungu (white man or scum of the sea) had introduced into their cattle.[43]

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[41]Various methods of inoculation discussed here were gleaned from numerous reports appearing in the various newspapers of the period, see list of newspapers in Bibliography; most helpful was The Agricultural Journal of the Cape of Good Hope, especially vol. xii, 1897, from no. 1, January, onwards.

[42]C.P.P., G.78-'97: Rinderpest: Report of Visit of Native Representatives to Bechuanaland, 1897; G.42-'98, report of the chief magistrate for 1897, 75.

[43]Ibid., report for Willowvale, 88-89.

The upshot of all these "cures" was a staggering death toll. By the end of 1896, all methods tried to stop the spread of the disease had failed. Various South African governments now scrambled for a cure. In the typical discord that characterised inter-state relations during this period, governments eschewed co-ordinating research efforts. The Transvaal and Natal governments did initially co-operate, though the initiative soon failed. In September 1896 their respective chief veterinary surgeons, Theiler and Watkins-Pitchford, commenced experimenting on the immunising potential of serum blood extracted from "salted" cattle, or cattle which had recovered from the rinderpest disease They, however, received meagre support from their governments. It consisted of a small grant of £550 and a miserable outfit of a corrugated iron shed, some tents and a mule wagon.[44]

Just when the joint research seemed to promise some success, the Transvaal government recalled Theiler and his staff early in 1897, leaving Watkins-Pitchford stranded. The fragile co-operation between Theiler and Watkins-Pitchford did not last long either. In a bout of professional jealousy, they soon began attacking each other. Their quarrel seems to have arisen from a wrangle over proprietary rights to the million-rouble prize that the Russian government offered to the first person to invent a cure for the rinderpest. A dispute also ensued over patent rights to their prophylactic and therapy.[45]

The Free State government, in turn, simply ignored the Natal government's request to co-operate in the research to perfect the immunisation method.[46] Dr. Alexander Eddington, head of the Colonial Bacteriological Institute in Grahamstown,[47] had also

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[44]Letters of Sir Arnold Theiler, Theiler to Emma, 21 February 1897.

[45]H. Watkins-Pitchford, "Report on Rinderpest Investigations in the Transvaal", Veterinarian, 70 (1897), 530-35.

[46]Colony of Natal, Departmental Reports, 1897: Annual Report of Commissioner of Agriculture, 1897, H. 161

[47]For biographical details on Eddington, see, Anon, "Alexander Eddington", Journal of the Medical Association of South Africa, 2 (1928).

established an independent research station at Taung's railway station in the Cape Colony. By December 1896, he had announced that he had discovered the bacillus of rinderpest.

While local research continued, the Transvaal and Cape governments solicited external talent. The Transvaal government imported two French scientists, Drs. Jean Danysz and Jules Bordet, from the renowned Pasteur Institute in Paris. It also recalled Theiler from his joint project with Watkins-Pitchford and placed him under the supervision of the French scientists.[48] The Cape government, in turn, turned to Britain for assistance. The Royal Society proposed sending an "eminently qualified English pathologist" to South Africa to study the disease at an estimated cost of twenty-one thousand pounds. The Cape government, however, rejected the proposed plan, while the government of Natal could contribute only £500 towards the cost, thus aborting the scheme.[49] Eventually, the Colonial Office contracted the services of Professor Robert Koch, the famous German bacteriologist who had discovered the cholera vibrio in 1883. Born in 1843, Koch was perhaps the world's greatest bacteriologist in the nineteenth century.[50]

The French scientists arrived at the end of January 1897. Barely two weeks later they had announced that they had discovered a prophylactic against the rinderpest. It consisted of inoculating healthy cattle with the blood of "salted" cattle. This immunisation method was based on the principle of serotherapeutics, according to which injecting an animal with blood extracted from a "salted" donor would protect the recipient against infection. Theiler and Watkins-Pitchford had already discovered the principle during their joint project the previous year. Theiler had also been working with

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[48]Letters of Sir Arnold Theiler, Emma Theiler to parents, 31 January 1897.

[49]Library of the Royal Society, Burlington House, London, Royal Society, Council Minutes, vol. 7, meeting of October 29 October 1896, minute 25, 317; On the contributions of the Royal Society to the development of science in the nineteenth century, see M. Hall, All Scientists Now: The Royal Society in the 19th Century (Cambridge, 1984).

[50]C.E. Dolman, Dictionary of Scientific Biography (New York, 1973), vol. vii, 420-435.

these French scientists from their arrival. Therefore, they must have merely confirmed Theiler and Watkins-Pitchford's discovery, as Theiler was to rage after its announcement.[51]

Professor Koch, in his turn, arrived early in December 1896. He immediately established his research station in Kimberley. His main mission was two-fold: to identify the rinderpest microbe and to discover a method of immunisation. The experiments to identify the active agent of the organism infecting animals followed the now famous Koch Postulates: isolate the suspected agent from an infected victim; grow the agent in pure culture; inject a healthy host and show that the organism produces the classical clinical disease; isolate the same organism from the new victim.

1.5: Professor Koch with staff at his Kimberley experimental station

(Courtesy of the Onderstepoort Veterinary Library)

[51]Letters of Sir Arnorld Theiler, Theiler to parents, 7 October 1897.

The most careful and advanced microscopic and bacteriological methods of examining the blood and tissues of infected animals, however, failed entirely to identify the microbe. Koch could at least rule out the likelihood of it being some bacteria or parasite. This discovery suggested that the active agent of the disease could be a more fragile microorganism that could be permanently destroyed through exposure or putrefaction. Further experiment did confirm that drying or putrefying material infested with the rinderpest poison destroyed the active agent. Thus normal commercial traffic in animal produce, especially hides and skins, could recommence, on condition of drying the material. Pastures could soon be re-grazed and anxiety over the future risk of buried carcasses could be eased.

Koch's experiments also confirmed that a rise in temperature occurred well before an infected animal manifested symptoms that rendered it a disease carrier. Thus once a diagnosis could be made before the animal could spread the disease, the propagation of the disease could at least be restricted. This discovery also enabled researchers to monitor the successive stages of the development of the infection.

A mood of cautious optimism, however, awaited Koch's announcement of an effective prophylactic. Suddenly, in a ***coup de theatre,*** he announced that he had discovered two treatments, the serum and bile treatments. The serum treatment involved injecting a healthy animal with the watery portion of blood (serum) extracted from a "salted" animal or an animal that had recovered from rinderpest infection. This treatment proved to offer only temporary immunity. Serum, however, seemed to acquire a more lasting immunising effect when mixed with blood contaminated with the rinderpest virus. Its added advantage was that one required only 20 ccm of the mixture to immunise one animal, making a litre sufficient to immunise fifty head of cattle.

The bile treatment involved injecting a healthy animal with bile extracted from one that had died of rinderpest. Its advantages outweighed those of the serum treatment. With the serum treatment, the donor had to be alive after recovering from the infection; with the

bile treatment, every dying animal became the saviour of those still alive. Only 10 ccm of bile was sufficient to immunise a head, a litre thus doubling the number of animals that an equal volume of serum could immunise. It was also easy to decide whether the immunity had taken effect, for an animal thus successfully injected with bile developed a hard swelling the size of a man's fist.[52]

Thus when the rinderpest crossed the Orange River late in March 1897, two potentially effective prophylactics existed: Watkins-Theiler-(Danysz-Bordet)"salted" serum and Koch's bile treatments. Convincing cattle owners of the efficacy of these treatments was difficult, however. Each had various disadvantages.

With the "salted" serum treatment, determining the condition of the donor at the time of extracting blood was difficult. Sometimes, it conveyed the disease to an otherwise healthy animal. In others, it infected a healthy animal with another bovine disease if the blood was obtained from a donor suffering from a disease other than the rinderpest. The blood might become septic before it was injected, thus leading to blood poisoning. It might also be putrid due to decomposing fibrin matter in it. Moreover "salted" animals were rare and far between amid a sweeping murrain. When first introduced, the method was mistakenly thought to be a preventive, and was thus used on healthy cattle, or those assumed to be. Consequently, when the treated cattle died, it was unclear whether the treated animals died of lack of immunity or from the prophylactic.[53]

The bile treatment had been announced prematurely, before it was tested under various conditions. Its assumed efficacy was based on ideal laboratory conditions and was

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[52]C.P.P., G.70-'97, Reports by Professor R. Koch Upon His Investigation into Rinderpest at Kimberley, 1897; "Dr. Koch's Reports on Experiments Conducted at Kimberley for Discovery of a Cure for Rinderpest", Agricultural Journal, 14 January 1897 & 18 February 1897.

[53]Agricultural Journal, xii, I (January 1898); Report on The International Rinderpest Congress Held at Pretoria from 2nd to 13 August, 1897 (South African Republic, Pretoria, 1898).

severely tested under imperfect epizootic conditions. It later turned out that the method conferred only a doubtful and transient immunity.

Inoculation was also a knotty problem within the context of late nineteenth century Southern Africa. In this racially divided society, the rinderpest epizootic immediately assumed a racial identification as blacks and whites counter-blamed each other for spreading the disease. The International Rinderpest Conference held at Vryburg in August 1896 resolved thus:

> The natives undoubtedly carry the infection in their clothes from place to place and the conference strongly recommends that in all infected or proclaimed areas a strict pass law should be enforced, so as to have the movement of the natives under complete control and that no native should be allowed to leave an infected area without being properly cleansed and disinfected, or be allowed to carry anything with him that is liable to convey the infection.[54]

The case against Africans was based on a variety of curious and resourcesful theories. They ranged from suspected malicious and sinister designs, through their perceived natural unhygienic conditions, to their ignorance of scientific principles of epidemiology.[55] Africans, in turn, also blamed their European counterparts for bringing and spreading the epizootic. Behind the various explanations of the origins of the rinderpest lurks a shared belief by Africans generally in Southern Africa that the colonial administration and whites generally, were in some way responsible. Many Africans supposed that the purported intention was to reduce Africans to poverty, thus forcing them to work for white men. "A bitter feeling sprung up against the "Umlungu" (white man)" reported the magistrate of the Transkeian district of Willowvale, "who, in order to reduce them to poverty with the view of enslaving them to the western province farmers

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[54]G.82-'96, Rinderpest Conference, 8

[55]Ibid., Speeches of T.J. Krogh (under-secretary of the South African Republic), 7, D. du Plessis (member of the South African Republic Rinderpest Commission), 16, A. Theiler (chief veterinary surgeon, Transvaal), 17, D. Hutcheon (chief veterianary surgeon, Cape Colony), 14; also Agricultural Journal of the Cape of Good Hope, ix, 14 May 1896, 254.

and depriving them of their country, had struck at the root of their life by destroying their idolised cattle".[56]

The anti-rinderpest strategies of colonial administrations and white officials seemed to confirm these suspicions. Slaughtering infected cattle, including those suspected to be infected, convinced many bewildered Africans that the measure was merely an excuse for depriving them of their wealth. This seemed apparent because in their long encounter with Africans, Europeans had professed a superior knowledge of science and medicine, including their ability to cure and control diseases. Why, now, instead of helping to cure what seemed like a common disease, were the Europeans killing African-owned cattle? "They tell me you are a doctor", quipped one MoTswana chief defiantly in conversation with a white veterinarian who was advising the slaughter of his people's infected cattle, "but can you do nothing but kill"?[57] The fact that the very people that cattle-owners suspected of introducing the plague did the shooting intensified suspicions.

Just as inoculation in England was viewed as a vehicle for the transmission of syphilis in the 1880s,[58] it was similarly suspected in South Africa in the 1890s. It brought further suspicions of deliberate poisoning. Popular confidence in the newly discovered prophylactic was low. This was thanks to the initial disasters with inoculation, especially Eddington's virulent blood treatment. Widespread suspicion of the intentions of colonial officials who spearheaded the inoculation campaign also existed.

Many Africans were thus averse to inoculation. The magistrate of the Transkeian district of Willowvale reported a typical example. Africans there believed that "inoculation was

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[56]G.42-'98, report for Willowvale, 1898, 88.

[57]Quoted in H. Saker and J. Aldridge, "The Origins of the Langeberg Rebellion", Journal of African History, xii (1971), 164.

[58]D. and R. Porter, "The Politics of Prevention: Anti-vaccinationism and Public Health in Nineteenth Century England", Medieval History, 32 (1988), 231-52.

merely a device for its [the rinderpest's] more rapid propagation".[59] Even the former allies of the colonial administration, the Mfengu, were apprehensive. Colonial officials reported that the Mfengu suspected that their cattle were being treated with bad bile, whereas European cattle were being inoculated with good bile. The purported intention was to save European-owned cattle to sell them later at enhanced prices to Africans once their cattle were all dead.[60] The magistrate of Kentani dramatically revealed the anti-inoculation rumour current among the Mfengu:

> The government being jealous of the rising strength of the Fingo had decided to introduce rinderpest and then, under the plea of helping the people, to inoculate. The first inoculation was to be done well with good bile in order to encourage the mass to agree to inoculation and then, when they had all agreed, the cattle were to be poisoned and in this way, the government was to weaken the native tribes by reducing them to an abject state of poverty, making it necessary for them to work for the white man at the low price of 6d. a day.[61]

This response contributed to the massive toll of the disease. From across the Zambesi River the disease swept south like a hurricane, leaving nothing but bleaching skeletons to mark its track. Contemporaries graphically painted the same picture of its impact, as those who had witnessed its carnage in its early trajectory north of the river had done earlier. "Never before the memory of man, or by the voice of tradition, have the cattle died in such vast numbers", Frederick Lugard, the arch British imperialist, had remarked after travelling through Masailand to Uganda in 1890, "never before has the wild game suffered. Nearly all the buffalo and eland are gone".[62] He was to describe the same impression when he witnessed the carnage in the Bechuanaland Protectorate in May 1896:

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[59]G.42-'98, report of resident magistrate of Willowvale, 1898, 88.

[60]Ibid., report of resident magistrate of Nqamakwe, 1898. 76.

[61]C.A., C.M.T.3/106, report of resident magistrate of Kentani, 22 September 1897.

[62]F. Lugard,, The Rise of Our East African Empire, i, (London, 1896), 514.

> The results of the rinderpest are here terribly in evidence. Near villages, literally hundreds and thousands of dead carcasses lie about; they are found under almost every bush, and the stench is indescribable.[63]

We gain a similar impression of almost wholesale devastation as we follow the murrain down south. Contemporaries who witnessed the carnage described it graphically. Marching northwards with the Matabeleland Relief Force early in 1896, F. Sykes described the depressing scene:

> Again wagons were met with - derelicts of the veld - laden with timber, furniture, and cases of all kinds of merchandise, drawn up in the bush just off the road and left to look after themselves. All the trek oxen had succumbed to the plague and the transport riders had no alternative left them but to abandon their loads.[64]

Major Frederick Russell Burnham, chief scout under Lord Roberts, travelled along the same route and confirmed this picture:

> Whole spans of big, strong Dutch oxen dropped dead in the yokes, and their precious loads were left to be looted by hostiles(sic). More than 8,000 animals died in three weeks along our only line of supply, the road to rail head at Mafeking...[65]

Given the absence of any known cure, and the fact that in such circumstances the disease ran its course until it killed off every host, the impressions of contemporary observers are tolerably admissible. In the Bechuanaland Protectorate, they paint a picture of utter devastation. In the BamaNgwato territory, it created havoc. Chief Khama, "said to have owned three or four hundred head of trained trek oxen", failed to "save a sufficient number of them to make up one span". As early as April 1896, missionaries in the BamaNgwato capital, Palapye, doubted whether "one member of our church has a span of trek oxen left". They also suspected that "neither Khama nor Sekgoma possesses a

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[63] Agricultural Journal, ix, 5 August, 1896, 16.

[64] F.W. Sykes, With Plumer in Matabeleland (Baal, 1972), 71-72.

[65] F.R. Burnham, Scouting on Two Continents (London, 1928), 242.

single trek ox".[66] By late 1896, they reported that only two or three head of cattle remained alive in every hundred that had existed at the beginning of the year.[67]

The panzootic struck the cattle of the BaKwena under Chief Sebele equally hard. In mid-May, many still hoped that they would save their cattle in the cattle-posts in the desert. By June, however, their last hope had vanished. The disease had spread to the desert posts. At the end of July 1896, only seventy cattle had been spared from the ten thousand held by Chief Sebele.[68] At one mission of the London Missionary Society the entire village could muster only eleven head of cattle. The 5,000 villagers of Kolobeng were left with only thirty cattle, and forty at Gaborone.[69]

The same severity accompanied the panzootic when it struck the BaTswana in former British Bechuanaland, recently annexed to the Cape Colony. It almost annihilated the entire herds of the Barolong under chief Montshiwa.[70] At the beginning of 1897, the civil commissioner of native reserves in the division of Mafeking reported that

> This time last year the natives were without doubt wealthy, their riches consisting chiefly in large and many droves of cattle; today they are almost reduced to poverty, possessing an occasional salted ox here and there.[71]

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[66]School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, London Missionary Society Archives (L.M.S), In-letters, Box 53, Rev. W.C. Willoughby to R.W. Thompson, Foreign Secretary of the L.M.S. in London, 21 April 11896; Annual report of assistant commissioner, Palapye, 1897, in Colonial Annual Reports, The Bechuanaland Protectorate, 1897, 13.

[67]L.M.S., In-letters, B.53, Wookey to Thompson, 20 June 1896.

[68]Ibid., H. Williams to Thompson, 15 May, and 5 June 1896.

[69]Christian Express, xxvi, 316, 1 October 1896.

[70]S.M. Molema, Montshiwa, 1815-1896: Barolong Chief and Patriot (Cape Town, 1966)

[71]B.B.N.A: G.19-'97: report for Mafeking, 72.

In Taung, of the estimated 12,000 cattle before the arrival of the rinderpest, a mere 500 remained after the devastation of the disease.[72]

The murrain repeated this pattern of devastation as it advanced south. Reports of civil commissioners and inspectors of "native" locations in those areas through which the disease passed in 1896 paint a chilling picture. Here government policy to slaughter infected cattle, including those suspected to be infected, and substantially increased the already high losses from the rinderpest.

Every success claimed by the inspectors of locations for "stamping out" the disease most probably implied that there was hardly a head of cattle left. Strict regulation of the movement of cattle also added to the toll, as cattle died of starvation and thirst. These regulations enforced the kraaling of cattle at night, and prohibited watering cattle in the rivers. As many of these areas had experienced successive seasons of drought, almost the only place where some grass could be found was on the riverbanks. In Barkly West, for example, Africans lost almost all their herds through both the strict regulations and the disease. In the Machorogan location, "all the cattle [had] been swept off either by the rifle or the disease".[73] The table below shows the number of cattle thus destroyed in the Cape Colony by the end of 1896:[74]

| DISTRICT | NUMBER SHOT | NUMBER DEAD FROM DISEASE | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|
| MAFEKING | | | 80,000 |
| VRYBURG | | | 60,000 |
| BARKLY WEST | 12,000 | 800 | 12,800 |
| HAY | 129 | — | 129 |
| KIMBERLEY | 3,022 | 200 | 3,222 |
| HERBERT | 60 | 2,149 | 2,209 |
| | | **TOTAL..** | **158,360** |

[72] Ibid., report for Taung, 77.

[73] Ibid., report for Barkly West, 9.

[74] Agricultural Journal, x, iv, February 1897, 223.

Despite the disease appearing in the Cape territories after preventive measures had been discovered, the death toll remained high. An estimate for the Cape Colony puts the general loss at 35 per cent. However, it specifically excluded mortality among African cattle scattered over European farms, on locations and crown lands throughout the colony. It also excluded mortality statistics for herds in the extensive African reserves of the Transkeian territories.[75] Reports of civil commissioners and inspectors of "native" locations in the various divisions of the Cape Colony proper corroborate the estimate of more than 95 per cent mortality rates. This was undoubtedly a massive calamity[76]

Estimates of mortality rates from the Transkeian territories paint a picture of massive devastation. Faced with hostile and suspicious black communities, and apprehensive of a "native" uprising, the colonial government eschewed the policy of shooting infected cattle. This however, contributed to the sweep of the disease and its massive mortality. Even a magistrate of a friendly district inhabited predominantly by the Mfengu warned that "should the disease once enter the territories, allowing it to take its course will be best".[77] In newly annexed Pondoland, the resident magistrate resolutely warned: "should the disease once enter Pondoland, all attempts to check it within that country will be absolutely useless and will only lead to a great waste of money and probably to the stirring up of a great deal of ill-feeling".[78] The result was runaway mortality, ranging from 50 to 95 per cent.[79]

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[75]C.P.P., G.72A-'98: Cape of Good Hope, Runderpest Statistiek; also A. Mabin & B. Conradie (eds.), The Confidence of the Whole Country: Standard Bank Reports on Economic Conditions in Southern Africa, 1865-1902 (Johannesburg, 1987) 447.

[76]G.19-'97 and G.42-'98, 1897 and 1898, annual reports.

[77]C.A., C.M.T. 3/59, resident magistrate, Butterworth, 28 May 1896.

[78]Ibid. 3/53, resident magistrate, Bizana, to chief magistrate of the Transkeian territories, 16 September 1896.

[79]For various district reports, see G.42-'98 annual reports for 1898, 75-140.; also C.A., P.M.0 249, rinderpest reports and C.A., C.M.T. 3, reports of resident magistrates.

Griqualand East, for its turn, took early and tight precautions to isolate the territory. The Cape government built a fence all along the border with Basutoland, placing guards along its entire length. It also divided the territory into two sections, sealing both with fencing. When the pest broke out in mid-June, however, it spread in its characteristic sweep, with mortality estimates between 70 and 90 per cent.[80] Here, too, initial inoculation experiments with virulent blood proved disastrous and increased the reluctance of cattle-owners to inoculate their herds.[81]

Corroborative evidence of the massive mortality comes from Natal and Zululand. The colony had inaugurated perhaps the most efficient anti-rinderpest campaign in the entire country. By the end of May 1897, the government had completed isolating the colony from the Free State and the Transvaal by a double fence. On the Basutoland border, the government destroyed and blocked all passes in the Drakensberg and fenced off what loopholes existed.

It had also divided the colony into two parts with a fence. The cordon started from the junction of the Buffalo and Tugela Rivers and ended in the Drakensberg mountains. Moreover, the government divided the colony itself into smaller enclosures through internal fencing. The only gap in the programme was the southern border with the Cape Colony. The Cape government had commenced fencing this border, but had abandoned the effort when the disease appeared in the colony in March 1897. Nevertheless, the boundary had been closed for stock traffic early April with guards stationed along it to prevent traffic with the Cape colony.

Between mid-July and the end of the month, however, the disease sneaked around Natal, springing up simultaneously over two-thirds of the territory in an inexplicably haphazard

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[80]G.42-'98, 121.

[81]C.A., P.M.O. 249, "Inquiry re: Inoculation Qumbu District", chief magistrate, Kokstad, to secretary to the prime minister, Cape Town, 15 October 1897.

pattern.[82] Mortality was staggering. Some districts lost almost their entire herds; among these were Krantzkop, New Hanover, Umlazi, Lower Tugela, Ixopo and Klip River.[83] All other reports from magistrates for 1897 and 1898 consistently refer to heavy losses among "native" cattle. Colonial magistrates estimated the mortality among Africans in the districts of Msinga and of the Mvoti at 98 and 90 per cent respectively.[84] In all other districts they specifically observed that losses for Africans were much higher than for Europeans, due, again, to the reluctance of Africans to have their herds inoculated. A missionary working at the Ipolela mission, for example, reported that the kraals he passed on a trip to the mission "looked desolate, not a beast to be seen".[85] As late as 1906, the number of African-owned cattle in Natal and Zululand had not yet reached the level they had been before the rinderpest. Whereas they were estimated to number 494,402 in 1896, and the disease had left 75,842 head alive in 1898, they had recovered to 343,159 in 1904.[86]

Estimates of cattle losses in the Transvaal and the Orange Free State are difficult to secure. In both Boer republics Africans were scattered on reserves, or squatted on white farms, thus making it difficult to estimate their losses compared with those of whites. In the Free State, for example, the daily newspaper reported almost exclusively on the fate of white farmers, utterly ignoring that of Africans.[87] Most Africans living in the boer

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[82]Colony of Natal, Departmental Reports, H159-H160.

[83]Ibid., annual reports for districts of Kranzkop, New Hanover, Umlazi, Lower Tugela, Ixopo and Klip River, B19, B22, B31, B37, B42, B86; impression confirmed in Natal Agricultural Journal, I, 2, 1898.

[84]Ibid., annual reports for the districts of Umsinga and Umvoti, p B24 and B26.

[85]Library of the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (U.S.P.G.), London, Reports from Missionaries in the fields, E Mss., report of Rev. B. Markham, mission of Ipolela, Natal, 30 June 1897, vol. B.

[86]Natal Departmental Reports, Annual report of the Department of Agriculture, 1902, 12-15; Natal Census, 931; see also S. Marks, Reluctant Rebellion: The 1906-08 Disturbances in Natal (Oxford, 1970), 185.

[87]See e.g. the editorial of the Friend, "The State of the Country", 20 July 1897.

republics no longer had effective traditional authority and administration. Consequently, they now depended entirely on the favour of white settler governments to salvage their cattle. They received little assistance. Instead, they were left to draw what comfort they could from mounting government regulations enacted to control them and their movement.

The stark phrases of contemporary observers convey the deep sense of hopelessness and depression that settled on the pastoral communities throughout, as the murrain unleashed unprecedented devastation in its tracks.[88] The destruction of a pillar of the rural economy had major repercussions on rural life. It resembled the 1929 Great Wall Street Crash as the only storable wealth of the people perished so suddenly.

In the Bechuanaland Protectorate, observers offered an absolute figure of 800,000 dead cattle among the BaNgwaketse alone. This was a loss approximating two-and-a half million pounds at the average price of £3 per head.[89] Of the total £2,241,437 lost by the entire Cape Colony proper, the predominantly African districts lost £945,005 in dead cattle, or just over 42 per cent of the total loss. Capital losses ranged from £10,700 in the district of Uitenhage to approximately £250,000 in the most devastated district, King Williamstown. The next two districts that lost the most were Herschel and Glen Grey, almost entirely occupied by Africans.[90]

No aggregate mortality statistics exist for the Transkeian Districts. Estimates of mortality for the richest district in the territories, however, were made. In Nqamakwe, where the disease first broke out early in June 1897, 70,000 head of cattle were dead six months later, representing a capital loss of £210,000, at £3 per head, in one district alone.

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[88]For East Africa, see Lugard, The Rise of our East African Empire, 525-6; O. Bauman, Durch Massailand Zur Neilquelle (Berlin, 1894), quoted in Kjekshus, Ecology Control, 129

[89]F. Coillard, On the Threshold, p 626-7, also Christian Express, xxvii, 328. 1 October 1896..

[90]C.P.P., G.72-'98, Rinderpest Statistics.

Aggregate estimates, however, mask the extent of individual losses. Individuals were totally ruined. Khama's personal losses were said to have soared to 750,000 head, representing a capital loss of two-and-a-quarter million pound.[91] Among the BaRolong of Montshiwa, men who were formerly wealthy were "left with only a sack of hides, the luckiest being left with but a handful of cattle". Chief Montshiwa, said to have been the largest cattle owner among the BaRolong, died a beggar in 1896.[92]

In Pondoland, many men who were wealthy before the outbreak of the disease found themselves with "next to nothing left".[93] From Tembuland a missionary reported that a local headman who had possessed 300 head of cattle some few weeks earlier "had not ten" left. He observed that his fate was "typical of many".[94] Chief Zibi of the aMaHlubi in Mount Fletcher also lost his entire herd.[95] While contemporary observers identified some wealthy owners, they ignored those lower down the scale. These, however, would have suffered the most, as they lost even the few herds they possessed. In East Griqualand Archdeacon Chamberlain remarked that "some poor people have lost everything".[96]

The decimation of cattle precipitated a food crisis, for the rinderpest arrived amid an unrelenting cycle of other climatic and ecological disasters. The main villains were droughts that recurred and annual visitations of locusts. 1896 was especially calamitous all round. Early in the year the general manager of the Standard Bank was already

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[91]Annual Reports by the assistant commissioner, Palapye, Bechuanaland Protectorate, 1896-7, 13.

[92]Molema, Montshiwa, 197.

[93]C.M.T. 3/53, report for Bizana, 1897.

[94]Mission Chronicle of the Scottish Episcopal Church, no. v, January 1898, report from St. Alban's by Rev. S.J. Wallis, 147.

[95]G.42-'98, report for Mt. Fletcher, 125.

[96]Archdeacon Chamberlain, in Mission Chronicle, I, vi, April 1898.

reporting on "a severe and protracted drought [which had] prevailed, affecting Namaqualand, portions of the Transvaal, the Free State, and nearly the whole of the Cape Colony".[97] It was also the year of the locust "over almost the entire country".[98] The drought, described as "the worst known for a generation",[99] unleashed more havoc. The drought of 1897, the year the rinderpest consolidated its hold on the entire region, was reckoned to be even worse than that of 1896 in many parts of the country. If the report from the division of Wodehouse is anything to go by, only 15.11 inches of rain fell in 1897. This was less than 13 inches than that for 1896. It compared "very unfavorably with the rainfall during any of the previous ten years."[100]

Thus everywhere other climatic and pestilential disasters preceded and followed the rinderpest. They compounded the effects of the pest, or claimed the devil's due from any who might have escaped the ravages of the panzootic. Drought, when accompanying the rinderpest, both withered growing crops and made it difficult to turn over the soil when draft oxen were scarce. By drying up the pastures, it killed small stock to which farmers turned after their cattle were dead. Stock also died of hunger owing to anti-rinderpest regulations. These kept all stock away from water sources, almost the only places at which any grass was to be found during a drought. Locusts, in turn, devoured the few crops planted with so much difficulty without draft animals.

This combined onslaught of drought, locusts and rinderpest precipitated a famine in some areas and dire shortages of food in others.[101] Communities, like the BaTswana,

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[97]Mabin and Conradie, The Confidence, 390; also the unanimous annual reports of colonial officials for 1896, in G.5-'96,

[98]G.5-'96., 390, 396

[99]ibid., 431

[100]G.42-'98, report for Wodehouse, 55.

[101]for reports of near starvation in the Bechuanaland Protectorate, see C.-8141, Correspondence, reports from Geberone and Palapye, April, 1896, in resident commissioner, Mafeking to high commissioner, 30 April, 1896, 5051; L.M.S., in-letters, B.55, H. Williams to

which would normally have migrated to cattle posts during a drought, found that the decimation of their cattle ruled this option out. Those which harvested fair crops in the year following the outbreak of the rinderpest faced a new problem - they could not store their surpluses in storage pits in their cattle kraals as the stored grain soon rotted because there were no stampeding cattle to seal storage pits.

Moreover, the peasants immediately felt the loss of cattle when they had to commence replanting their fields in the 1897-ploughing season. The absence of draft oxen meant that people would have to limit acreage, as they had to resort to the hoe. The two years following the rinderpest did not come with any promise of relief. The same pattern of drought, locusts, and poor harvests recurred throughout the region. In the years following the rinderpest, therefore, there was a serious scarcity of food. Peasants could only purchase food by selling their surviving herds to traders at enhanced prices. Those who had lost all their herds, and thus had no security to obtain credit from local traders, had to survive on edible weeds and the locusts.[102]

Dislocation of the transport system compounded the prevailing subsistence crisis. The death of oxen directly destroyed the mainstay of the transport system, with a catastrophic impact on the transport sector. Although the railways were beginning to take over long distance transport by the turn of the century,[103] the ox-wagon continued to be the main form of land transport until the motor vehicle edged it out after the First World War. Without branch lines, ox-wagons provided the only transport linking outlying

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Thompson, 27 June, 1898; For the wide-spread starvation among the Southern Tswana in the former Crown Colony of British Bechuanaland, recently transferred to the Cape government, see, G.42-'98, summary of reports from British Bechuanaland, 5; Ibid. G.31-99, 1899, reports for Vryburg, 59, 61, 63, Taung, 65, 67, Mafeking, 69; For serious shortages in the Cape and the Transkeian territories, see Ibid., G.5-'96, 6.

[102]G.42.98 and G.31-'99; also running commentary in successive numbers of Agricultural Journal, xii, 1898; see also successive numbers of Natal Agricultural Journal, 1898 and 1899.

[103]D. Tennant, "The Railway System of South Africa", Paper delivered to the Royal Colonial Institute, 2 November 1897, Report of Proceedings of the Royal Colonial Institute (London, 1898), 3-30.

agricultural areas and industries.[104] The ox-wagon was critical to the entire South African economy, as it was essential for transporting essential goods from the coast.[105]

The rinderpest ruined white and African transport riders. They either abandoned their wagons, which remained "to remind them of their altered conditions",[106] or sold them at greatly reduced prices. Whereas a wagon cost £80 at the coast at the beginning of 1896, its price had plummeted to £2.3s by May. Otherwise, you could just take an abandoned one, "and trust to luck not to meet the former owner later on".[107]

As the ox-wagon transport system collapsed, traders and transport-riding enterprises could only rely on "salted cattle" that had recovered from infection. Their value, however, soared from an average of £3 to £60, totaling close to more than a thousand pounds per span.[108] Others resorted to mules for tractive power. The price of these animals, however, also escalated from the normal price of 15/- to the inflated rates of £15-20 per head.[109] Transport costs, therefore, rose dramatically. In January 1896, the cost of transporting goods on the South to North road was 14/- per cwt. In July of the same year, it had rocketed to £6 per cwt.[110] In southern Rhodesia, some of those affected by the turn of their fortunes complained that whereas the cost of transport at the beginning of 1896 was 11 to 20/-, it had risen to £10 early in 1897.[111]

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[104]G.H. Pirie, "Slaughter by Steam: Railway Subjugation of Ox wagon Transport in the Eastern Cape and Transkei, 1886-1910, International Journal of African Historical Studies, 26, 2 (1993), 319-343.

[105]Mabin and Conradie, The Confidence, 423.

[106]G.42-'98, report for Barkly West, 15-16

[107]S.S.P. Hyatt, The Old Transport Road (Baal, 1969), 13.

[108]Idem; cf. Agricultural Journal, xi, 6, 16 September 1897, 274.

[109]Sykes, With Plumer, 64.

[110]Agricultural Journal, xi, 6, 16 September 1897, 274.

[111]Mabin and Conradie, The Confidence, 418.

Prices of goods, including food, rose correspondingly: "I see little prospect of any serious decline in prices for a long time", wrote J.C. Molteno to his son, "especially in view of the enormous destruction of cattle on account of rinderpest".[112] Slaughter cattle themselves rose in value, obtainable for between £9 and £15 in Johannesburg by October 1897.[113] The pattern of the dramatic escalation of prices in the Bechuanaland Protectorate might serve as an example of what was occurring elsewhere. In March 1896, the price of mealies went up to 50/- per 200-lb. bag, to 100/- by April, and to 170/- by October. The price of mealie flour rose to 200/- per 200-lb. bag in August 1896 and to 400/- by October.[114]

Every industry was affected. As the meat industry, especially in the mushrooming urban and industrial centres, turned to depend on other stock, especially slaughter sheep and fowls, these animals became scarcer and scarcer, with a consequent escalation in price.[115] Even the wool industry would not escape the ripple effects of the devastating cattle disease. With cattle dead, the demand for mutton put a high premium on slaughter sheep. To reap the advantages of the high prices paid for these animals, farmers rushed to cross thoroughbred merino ewes with woolless slaughter rams. Nine to ten months later, they could sell the progeny at the enhanced price of upwards of 20/- each.[116] The price of fowls rocketed from 1s.6d to 8s.6d "over night".[117]

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[112]V. Solomon (ed.), Selections from the Correspondence of Percy Alport Molteno, 1892-1914 (Cape Town, 1981), J.C. Molten to Percy Molteno, 8 June, 1896, 31.

[113]Star, 7 October 1897, 6.

[114]L.M.S., in-letters, Willoughby to Thompson, 30 March, 21 April 1896; Wookey to Thompson, 24 August, 18 September 1896; Lloyd to Thompson, 15 September 1896; Willoughby to Thompson, 12 October, 1896; Wookey to Thompson, 14 October 1896; Willoughby to Thompson, 8 January 1897.

[115]e.g. Friend, 21 October 1898.

[116]Mabin and Conradie, The Confidence, 43.

[117]Cape Times, 24 September 1896.

Many poorer people took to subsisting on irregular foods. These included dried meat from infected cattle, edible grasses, roots, even non-foods.[118] The northern Transvaal suffered the most. Here, the poor wandered around digging and chopping at roots, gathering ants, caterpillars, vermin, even old hides, and eating them. Women were picking up the grains of maize that fell from the mouths of post mules, while mothers were selling their young daughters, even themselves, for food. Others drowned their children, or abandoned them to die, because they had nothing to feed them. Many deserted their villages in search of food.[119] Two-thirds of chief Motjatje's people were reported to have died of starvation and other related diseases.[120]

Besides its economic and social ramifications, the rinderpest also revealed contemporary political strains and pointed to their causes. It generated intense suspicions, insidious rumours and red herrings everywhere. Foremost among these was the ubiquitous suspicion that the rinderpest was the deliberate poisoning of African cattle by the whites. The purported intention was to reduce Africans to poverty, thus forcing them to work for white men. Contemporary pronouncements and activities of labour agents seemed to confirm this suspicion. Recurring complaints about the perennially acute shortage of African labour at the major labour centres peaked in the 1890s. Indeed, the dramatic words of an observer in 1873 held true now more than they did then: "labourers here, labourers there, labourers everywhere, and not a man to work."[121].

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[118]L.M.S., Box 55, Rev. J.T. Brown (Kuruman) to L.M.S., 1898; also L.M.S., Box 53, Rev. Willoughby to L.M.S., 12 October 1896; also G.31-'99, report from Kuruman, 63.

[119]Standard and Diggers' News, 15 February 1897; The Christian Express, xxvii, 323, 1 May 1897, 71; P. Rossel, "Valdezia La Famine", Bulletin de la Mission Romande, 11, 127, 1896, 98-99.

[120]Beuster, "Die Hungersnot in Nordtransvaal", Die Evangelischen Missionen, 3, 1997, 118-9.; Kahl, "Die Fieberepidemic in Transvaal", Ibid., 237-39; P. Rosset, "Valdezia la Famine", Bulletin de la Mission Suisse Romande, 11, 127, 1896, 98-99; H. Berthoud Kuebgne abd E. Creux, "La Destresse au Transvaal", Ibid., 11, 132, 1897, 230-34; E. Creux, "La Detresse au Transvaal", Ibid., 11, 131, 1897, 304-5.

[121]Friend, 13 February 1873, quoted in Kimble, "Labour Migration in Basutoland", 121.

The rinderpest crisis was to be a rare occasion during this period when various sections of divided white South Africa came together. Many predicted that the rinderpest would drive Africans to labour centres, thus solving, at one stroke, the perennial labour shortage. Colonial officials and many employers were quick to see this advantage, as various reports indicated:

> Never would a scheme such as opening up railways come at a more opportune time, for I feel, in their present state of mind, if something by which they could enrich themselves were to present it to them, it would be a great boom...
>
> The loss of their [Mpondo] cattle from rinderpest may bring about a change and force them out of their locations to seek employment. I hope it will do so.
>
> These circumstances need not necessarily be regarded as an unmixed evil. It will probably have the effect of compelling hundreds of able-bodied young men.... to go out and earn an honest livelihood by hard work.
>
> It is hoped that the losses sustained by the natives will ultimately awaken the men to the necessity there exists for developing habits of industry.
>
> The ravages of the rinderpest although reducing the natives to poverty have not been without 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 besotted being he was when the numerous cattle he possessed provided his every want.
>
> The sole counterbalancing good is that the rinderpest will compel the natives to work on the railway, which will become a famine relief.[122]

Missionaries throughout the field voiced similar sentiments. "God never made a lazier set than the Bechuana", proclaimed Rev. Willoughby of the LMS in the Bechuanaland Protectorate, "and if this hard year will compel some of them to work, it will be

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[122]G. 42-98, report from Elliotdale, 96, Umsikaba, 111, Griqualand East, 122, Willowvale, 82, Agricultural Journal of the Cape of Good Hope, ix, 1896, respectively; also Natal Departmental Reports, 1897, B22.

good".[123] Later, he would strongly object to his Society's relief scheme for the BaTswana, especially the "indiscriminate" distribution of the food. Humanitarianism, he argued, would militate against the timely lesson that God had dispatched the rinderpest to administer. "The able-bodied should work or starve", he admonished.[124]

Other missionaries made similar predictions. The secretary-general of the LMS welcomed the rinderpest among the BaTswana for it would "drive the natives into the labour market".[125] Elsewhere, in the Transkeian and Ciskeian territories, the missionaries unanimously saw the rinderpest as the "ill wind which after all brings some good".[126] They went so far as to regard even the hapless Africans in the Transvaal as potential labourers. This was because the sheer need for survival amid the rinderpest devastation would compel them to seek employment.[127]

Agitation to reduce the wages of mine workers and to increase their working hours mounted on the eve of the rinderpest. The time appeared propitious, considering the widespread drought of the year, the devastation of crops by locusts, and the raging rinderpest epizootic. Urging the immediate reduction of wages, the manager of the Ferreira Gold Mining Company and president of the Mine Managers' Association, J.H.. Johns, cheered: "At the present moment, natives have to work because they cannot obtain food otherwise, and therefore I think we have a splendid opportunity to bring this change into operation".[128]

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[123]L.M.S., in-letters, Box 53, Willoughby to Cousins, 29 June 1896.

[124]Ibid., Willoughby to Cousins, 9 June 1897.

[125]African Review, ix, 19 Dec. 1896, 555.

[126] U.S.P.G., E.Mss, Rev. Charles Teberer, Keiskamahoek, 31 Dec. 1898.

[127] Christian Express, xxvii, 323, 1 May 1897, 71.

[128]Star, 1 July, 1896.

Africans were to confirm their fears and suspicions when the mining management acted upon this rhetoric. In September 1896, with the rinderpest ravaging through the country, they reduced drastically the wages by 30 per cent while also lengthening working hours.[129] They also deployed an unprecedented army of recruiters and touts in the countryside to gather the expected fruits of the rinderpest, desperate migrants.[130]

These suspicions generated an explosive atmosphere. Colonial officials and whites from various occupations reported a universal anti-colonial and anti-white phobia. From the Transkeian territories all the magistrates reported that Africans were seeking revenge and recompense for their enormous cattle losses. "The maintenance of peace hung of a hair", reported the magistrate of the normally tranquil Nqamakwe district of Transkei. "One injudicious act on my part", he continued, "one brawl, a quarrel between two rival factions, might have kindled the flame of a terrible war".[131]

The theme of the "restless native" is, of course, elusive for the historian of this volatile period. A thin line always divided the actual existence of covert rebellious action and its reflection in the paranoiac minds of those who believed its existence. These European fears and suspicions however only helped to fuel distrust and a disturbed state of mind among Africans. Ever receptive to conspiracy theories, many colonial officials and white people embraced these rumours of "restive natives", took precautionary measures or made the necessary preparations for war. So similar were these responses that a few random selections should represent all.

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[129]Report of the Chamber of Mines, South African Mining Journal, 7 November. 1896.

[130]A. Jeeves, "Control of Migratory Labour on the South African Gold Mines in the Age of Kruger and Milner", Journal of Southern African Studies, 2 (1975), 3-29; Jeeves, "Over-reach: The South African Gold Mines and the Struggle for the Labour of Zambesia, 1890-1920", Canadian Journal of African Studies, 17 (1983), 391-412.

[131]G.42-'98, report for Nqamakwe, 76

No sooner had the disease appeared in the Bechuanaland Protectorate than the Colonial Office became "anxious about state of affairs [there] in consequence of the rinderpest, &c.". The staff of the Colonial Office went further to probe if something could not be done to "strengthen our position there by sending from Cape Town British troops or by other means".[132] Further south, in the former Crown Colony of British Bechuanaland, Cape forces precipitated a rebellion of the Southern Tswana. The immediate spur to the rebellion was BaTswana disaffection with the government shooting their infected herds, including those suspected to be infected.[133] The ensuing rebellion scared the staff of the Colonial Office who felt that it was "causing restlessness among the BaKwena in neighbouring Bechuanaland Protectorate" whose herds the rinderpest was decimating. They also suspected that Chief Sebele of the BaKwena, "who is always ready to carry on intrigue against the government", was in league with the rebels.[134]

The rumours of a looming African rebellion so alarmed the magistrate of the Nqamakwe district of the Transkei that he ordered a store of rifles and ammunition after sending his family to safety. [135] In East Griqualand the unrelenting rumours of a looming rebellion by Africans who exploited the rinderpest crisis to express old grievances led to the arrest of a suspected agitator, Andreas Le Fleur, and his committal to trial for sedition.[136]

From the Natal border district of Ixopo, there were persistent reports of an imminent African rising. There now came a *cri de coeur* for troop reinforcements. The Cape government responded by sending in a hundred and fifty Cape Mounted Rifles to join the force of one hundred men already stationed at the Griqualand East capital,

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[132]C.-8141, Correspondence, Chamberlain to Robinson, 14 April 1896, 22.

[133]Saker and Aldridge, "The Origins of the Langeberg Rebellion".

[134]C.O. 179/200, xiv, minute by Penny to Lord Selborne, 2 October 1897.

[135]Ibid.

[136]G.42-98, report for Griqualand East, 1898, 119.

Kokstad.[137] The Colonial Office in London was anxious over the "serious news". Officials kept their fingers crossed that the Natal administration would learn from the blunders of the Cape government that had precipitated the Langeberg rebellion.[138] By then, however, Natal authorities had completed arming white residents living in African districts in anticipation of an African rebellion.[139] Volatile Zululand was aflame with rumours of "restlessness". This fluid atmosphere, amid alarming rumours of an imminent Zulu uprising, persuaded colonial officials to postpone the decision to allow the exiled Zulu King Dinuzulu to return from exile. They felt that the presence of this veteran anti-colonial figure would provide the necessary inspiration for the rumoured imminent uprising.[140]

Only Swaziland seems to have been spared the wild rumours of a disease suspected to be the white man's weapon to destroy the wealth of Africans.[141] This added credence to the view of imperial officials that it was the Transvaal boers who had poisoned the minds of Africans. The former, it was believed, were responsible for the rumour that "Mr. Rhodes had introduced the rinderpest as a policy to Matabeleland, the Transvaal, Orange Free State and Basutoland". "The same propaganda could not be spread in Swaziland," the firm disciple of this theory, Godfrey Lagden, opined, "as the new political masters in Swaziland were the Transvaal Boers themselves".[142]

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[137]Ibid., minute by Just, 20 July, in encl, from governor of Natal to secretary of state for the colonies, 19 July, 1897; E.A. Mackay, "Reminiscences of the Cape Mounted Rifles: 1896-98", Territorial News, 8, 15 and 22 October, 1959.

[138]C.O., 179/200, viv, minute by Penny to Lord Selborne, 2 October 1897.

[139]Standard and Diggers' News, 15 December 1896.

[140]C.O. 427/25, governor to secretary of state, 9 October 1896, enclosing conference minute no. 58, minute to governor, 7 October 1896.

[141]Colonial Office Confidential Print, C.0. 879/515 on the rinderpest in South Africa has very little to say about the disease in swaziland.

[142]Rhodes House, MSS. Afr. S. 210 (1), Lagden Papers, Lagden to Rosmead, 16 January 1897.

Nevertheless, this territory was not isolated from the general scare of an African uprising sweeping through the entire region during the rinderpest devastation. Suspicion was rife during the whole rinderpest period.[143] Typically, the Transvaal government, which jointly ruled Swaziland with Britain, took advantage of the rinderpest disaster to enforce the payment of a new onerous hut-tax.

Rumours of active Swazi preparations for an uprising against the newly introduced tax were rife. Sensing looming trouble, the British consul in Swaziland postponed his leave "in view of the unsettlement among the natives that is likely to be produced by the rinderpest".[144] Reports were astir that the Swazi were smuggling arms via Mozambique. The relocation of the Swazi king's residence on a hill fortress seemed ominous. In anticipation, boers living in the eastern districts of the Transvaal, were reported to be amassing guns and ammunition.[145]

This prevalent social restlessness, insidious rumours, suspicions and the political undertones accompanying the rinderpest extended even to "placid" Basutoland. On the eve of the outbreak of the disease, relations between the BaSotho and the imperial administration seemed most tranquil. So reassuring were they that the Colonial Office was confident that the BaSotho would be spared the political alarms the disease generated among their neighbours.[146] Yet behind this facade, tension and restlessness

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[143]F. Mashasha, "The Road to Colonialism: Concessions and the Collapse of Swazi Independence: 1875-1926", unpublished Ph.D thesis, Oxford University (1977).

[144]C.O. 417/221, Chamberlain to Millner, 25 September 1897.

[145]Bodlean Library, Oxford, Milner MSS 4, vol 11, Sir Alfred Milner Papers, Green to Milner (private and secret), 13 August, 1897; ibid., Sir Walter Hely-Hutchinson to Milner, 14 August, 1897; Milner MSS 6 (a), Milner to Green, 6 August, 1897.

[146]C.O., 417/186, Minute by Meade (undated), on Rosmead to Chamberlain, 30 October 1896.

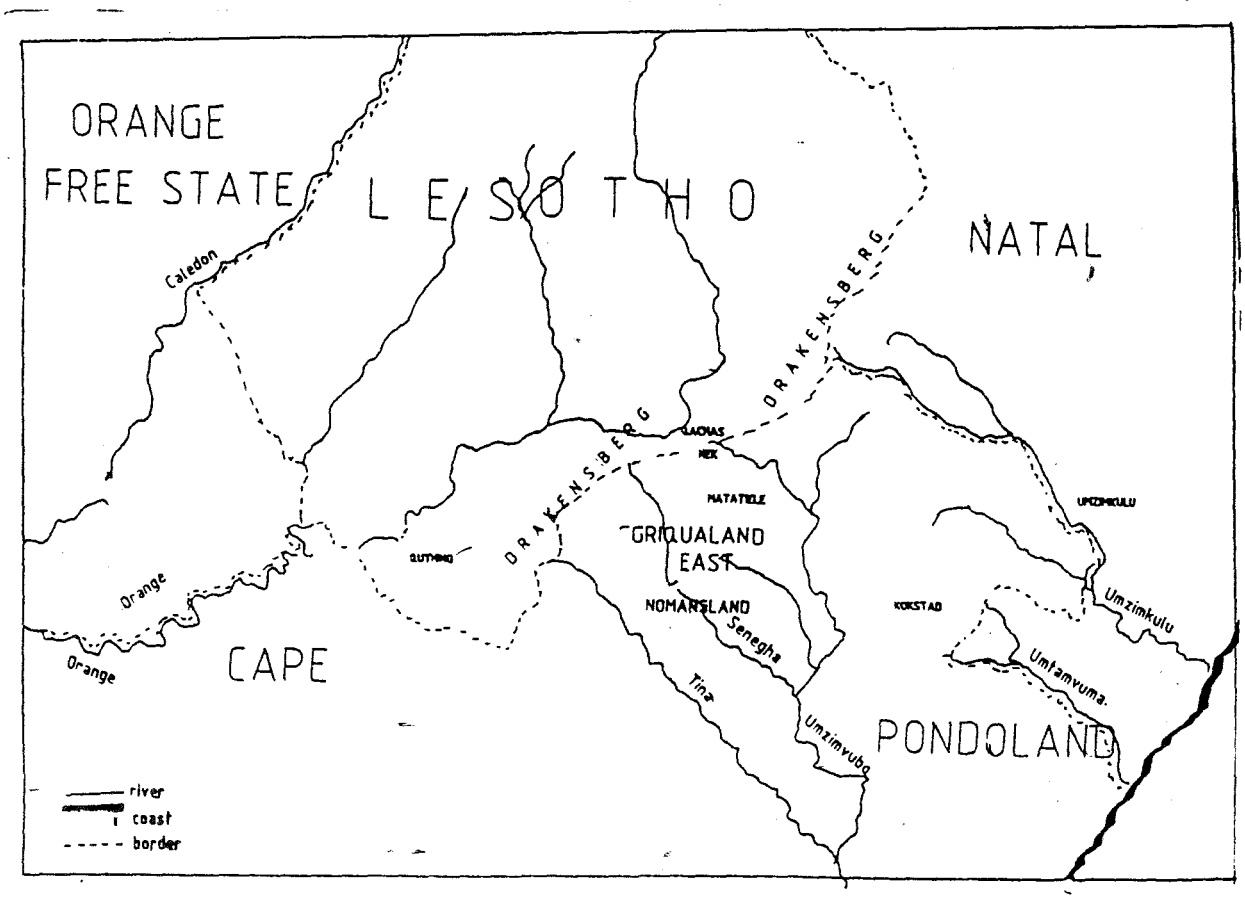
gathered. The ominous news of the approaching catastrophe, including colonial efforts to keep the panzootic at bay, brought these underlying tensions to the surface.

# CHAPTER 2

## BASUTOLAND AND THE BASOTHO ON THE EVE OF THE RINDERPEST

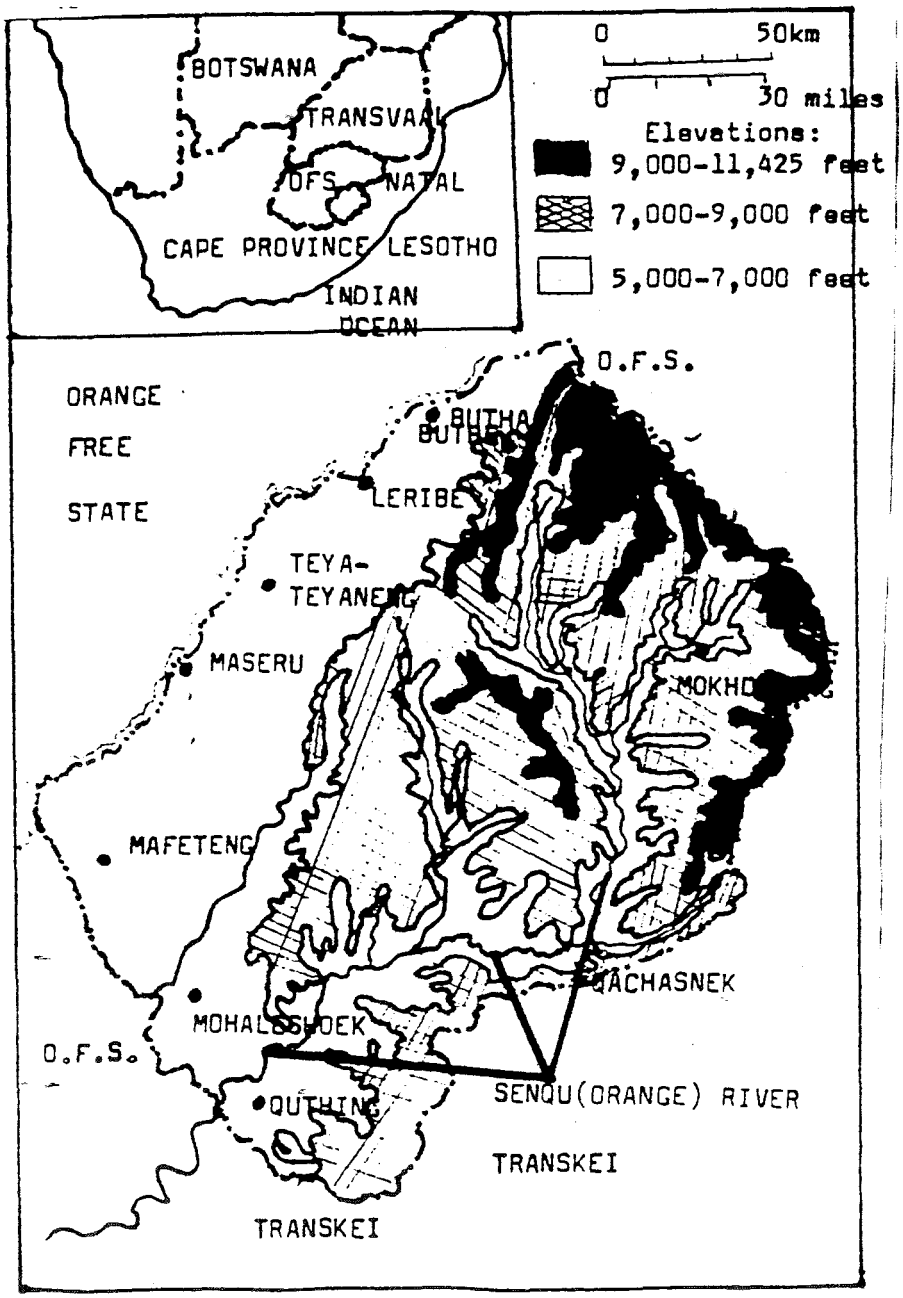
Basutoland lay in the south-east corner of the South African High Veld. It was enclosed on all sides by territories under European settler governments. Separating it from the boer republic of the Free State on its northern and western border was the Caledon River and a treaty line. On its eastern border, separated in part by the Drakensberg escarpment, lay the European settler colony of Natal and the Griqualand East section of the Cape Colony. The Orange River and its tributaries marked the remainder of its boundary with the Cape in the South.

### 2.1: Basutoland (Lesotho) in relation to surrounding territories



The land lies generally 4,000 and 11,000 feet above sea level. It comprises three distinctive regions: the western lowlands, the intermediate foothills and the eastern mountains. On the western side of the Caledon River relief is low, rising eastwards from 4,000 - 6,000 feet where it merges into the more high-lying region. The foothills stretch eastwards, rising to high altitudes into the mountain region. Both lowlands and foothills possess a topographical formation characterised by flat ground intercepted at many points by hills most of which form extensive plateaux. The upper reaches of the mountain region, rising to an altitude of 11,000 feet, possess steep topography, and thin soil depth. Plains and valleys, however, also intercept the mountains, enabling cultivation to occur.

**2.2: Relief Map of Lesotho**



The best agricultural and pastoral land is found in the lowlands, followed by the foothills. There one finds fertile soils, abundant water fed by many running springs and rivers, snow melt, high rainfall, and lush pastures. The pattern of rainfall - its amount, effectiveness, length, how it falls, its degree of certainty varied throughout the nineteenth century.[1] Its amount, however, was adequate in normal years to sustain the expanding agro-pastoral economy. The highest amount, more than 70 per cent, normally comes when BaSotho farmers need it most, during the growing season between October and March. Slow evaporation and snow-melt compensate for low precipitation in years of scanty rains.

On the eve of the rinderpest, the country was inhabited predominantly by Sotho-speaking people. They, with some incorporated Nguni clusters, were then, as now, known as the BaSotho. This BaSotho nation state dated from the demographic, political and social turmoil of the period usually called the Difaqane. The latter process has perplexed historians, stirring an historiographical debate. The details of the controversy need not detain us here.[2] For our purposes it is enough to recognise that the process seems to have been a result of a conjuncture of forces. They included

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[1]R.C. Germond (assembled and translated), Chronicles of Basutoland: A Running Commentary on the Events of the Years 1830-1902 by the French Protestant Missionaries in Southern Africa (Morija, 1967), 580; also E. Eldredge, "Drought, Famine and Disease in Nineteenth-Century Lesotho", African Economic History, no. 16 (1987), 61-93, especially 67.

[2]For the debate on the Difaqane, see report of, and commentaries on, a colloquium on "The Mfecane Aftermath" Towards a new Paradigm", University of Witwatersrand, 6-9 September 1991, in South African Historical Journal, 25 (1991), 154-176; A selection of the papers presented at the colloquium has been published in C. Hamilton (ed.), The Mfecane Aftermath: Reconstructive Debates in Southern African History (Johannesburg and Pietermaritzburg, 1995); For earlier stirrings against the accepted paradigm, see, J. Cobbing, "The Mfecane as Alibi: Thoughts on Dithakong and Mbolompo", Journal of African History, 29, 3 (1988), 487-519; J. Richner, "The Withering Away of the Difaqane: or a Change of Paradigm", B.A. (Hons.) dissertation, Rhodes University, 1988; J. Wright and J. Cobbing, "The Mfecane: Beginning the Inquest", Paper presented to the African Studies Institute, University of Witwatersrand, 1988

demographic pressure, climatic changes and the desire of local leaders to control lucrative emerging trade opportunities.[3]

All these seem to have required the greater consolidation of former separate small-scale chiefdoms. It also encouraged centralisation of power for greater control over resources. The need to improve offensive or defensive capacity seems to have also featured prominently in this process. The result was that the former smaller clan-based political units of the region gave way to larger kingdoms. Locally based clans were incorporated into these more complex concentrations. The BaSotho state was one of these experiments at political centralisation.[4]

By a combination of fate, military prowess and grit, the BaSotho survived these disruptions territorially intact. They also were fortunate to inherit in their founding father, King Moshoeshoe, the leadership of a brilliant military strategist, a shrewd politician, an astute diplomat, a great statesman and a potential national-builder. Under his leadership, the various Sotho-speaking communities that had survived the Difaqane were to fuse with non-Sotho refugees from these disturbances into a cohesive nation.

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[3]For the main theories on the causes of the "Difaqane", see J. Guy, "Ecological Factors in the Rise of Shaka and the Zulu Kingdom", in S. Marks and A. Atmore (eds), Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa (London, 1980), 102-147; J. Guy, "Analysing Pre-Capitalist societies in Southern Africa", Journal of Southern African Studies, 14, 1 (1987), 18-37; M. Hall, "Archaeology and Modes of Production in Pre-Colonial Southern Africa", Ibid., 14, 1 (1987), 1-17; J. Omer-Cooper, The Zulu Aftermath: A Nineteenth-Century Revolution in Bantu Africa (Evanston, 1969); A. Smith, "The Trade of Delagoa Bay as a Factor in Nguni Politics", in L. Thompson (ed.), African Societies in Southern Africa (London, 1969), 171-189.

[4]The literature on BaSotho traditions of origin and migrations and the formation of BaSotho state is too extensive to list here. See the bibliography, especially, Ashton (1967); Burman (1982); Casalis (1861, 1889); Dornan (1909); Eldredge (1993); Ellenberger and Macgregor (1969); Germond (1967); Gill (1993); Hall (1987); Inskeep (1978); Kimble (1978); Lagden (1909); Laydevant (1952); Legassick (1969), 86-125; Lye and Murray (1980); Machobane (1990); MacGregor (1976); Mitchell (1992), 3-34; Orpen (1857); Sanders (1975); Sheddick (1953); Thompson (1975); Tylden (1950).

On the eve of the rinderpest, the size of Basutoland was only a fraction of its original extent. Afrikaner farmers now occupied the entire territory to the west of the Caledon River. These were descendants of boers who had trekked northwards from the Cape Colony in the 1830s. They had arrived on the outskirts of the mushrooming BaSotho state in their bid to escape from British influence in the Cape. A series of BaSotho-Boer wars in the 1850s and 60s, combined with a vacillating British colonial policy over the region and the sheer incompetence of some British colonial officials, deprived the BaSotho of this extensive territory. Known as the "Conquered Territory", it covered about 3,000 sq. miles of the most fertile arable land and the richest wheat-growing area in the entire South Africa.

Wearied by war, and with his people in dire straits as the boers redoubled their efforts to destroy his budding state, King Moshoeshoe eventually succeeded after repeated requests over many years in obtaining British protection. The Crown eventually took over the BaSotho as British subjects and proclaimed their country a protectorate on 12 March 1868. Britain, however, had annexed Basutoland reluctantly, against the Colonial Office's aversion to further colonial expansion. Consequently, in 1871 Basutoland was placed under the administration of the Cape colony, to which Britain granted responsible government a year later, in 1872.

Under the Cape administration, 1871-1881, the BaSotho made a remarkable comeback despite their truncated territory and their miserable plight. The extension of Cape colonial rule to the country enabled the BaSotho to participate directly in the unfolding economic expansion of the region. They exploited the opportunities offered by the burgeoning Cape mercantile capitalist economy. Later, they gained from the economic boom unleashed by the mineral discoveries. Contemporaries and later historians have marvelled at the BaSotho's enhanced agricultural production in the 1870s. They have also commented on how the BaSotho exploited the opportunities offered by the insatiable demand for labour in the mushrooming labour industries in

this period. By the mid 1870s, Basutoland had legitimately earned itself the twin reputation of being the "granary of South Africa" and the main supplier of labour.[5]

Despite the prosperity and apparent tranquillity of the decade of Cape colonial rule, tensions resulting from economic, political and social restructuring were already mounting by the end of the 1870s. They exploded in the BaSotho rebellion of 1880-1.[6] Consequently, the British Crown reluctantly re-annexed the country in 1884 when Cape colonial rule proved no longer tenable.

Careful to avoid the mistake of the Cape government in imposing direct colonial rule, and limited by financial and personnel restraints, the imperial government experimented with a parallel administration of the country. For day-to-day administration, it relied on the existing hierarchy of chieftainship, contenting itself with maintaining internal order and securing the country's borders.[7] Consequently, it maintained a skeletal staff. On the eve of the rinderpest, this consisted of the resident commissioner who reported directly to the high commissioner in Cape Town, seven

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[5]See especially the running commentary by Germond, Chronicles, 462-471; E. Eldredge, A South African Kingdom: The Pursuit of Security in Nineteenth-Century Lesotho (Cambridge, 1993); J. Kimble, "Towards an Understanding of the Political Economy of Lesotho: The Origins of Commodity Production and Migrant Labour, 1830-c1885", Unpublished M.A. thesis, National University of Lesotho, 1978.

[6]For the Cape government's rule of Basutoland and the BaSotho rebellion against it, see, R. Ajulu, "The Gun-War in Lesotho: Aspects of Capitalist Penetration and Class Formation", paper delivered at the Mohlomi Seminars, Department of History, National University of Lesotho, 1980; E. Bradlow, "The Cape Government's Rule of Basutoland, 1871-1883", Archives Year Book for South African History, xxxi, 2, 1968, 119-217; Burman, Chiefdom Politics; J.M. Mohapeloa, Government by Proxy: Ten Years of Cape Colony in Lesotho (Morija, 1971).

[7]For the thrifty hand of the exchequer and its influence on colonial policy and imperial administration, see, B. Blakeway, The Colonial Office, 1868-1892 (Durham, 1972); A. Burton, "Treasury Control and Colonial Policy in the Late Nineteenth-Century", Public Administration, 44 (1966), 169-71; For a more detailed survey of the status of British imperial rule of Basutoland, see R.M. Cassidy, "Britain and Basutoland: A Study of Men and Policies from the Gun War to the Anglo-Boer War", unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1967.

district commissioners, a government secretary, an accountant and a police officer commanding a BaSotho police force numbering 259 men.

Besides the skeletal staff, imperial officials in Basutoland faced the rinderpest crisis with hardly any financial resources.[8] The Colonial Office strictly insisted that they balance expenditure against revenue. The BaSotho provided the latter through annual hut-tax remittances. To balance the budget, the Cape government contributed an annual sum of £20,000 in place of customs duties.[9]

In charge of this administration on the eve of the rinderpest was Sir Godfrey Lagden. Impetuous, demanding, neurotic and highly tactless,[10] Lagden, however, was an efficient and conscientious administrator. His experience and skill in managing turbulent Basutoland clearly impressed his contemporaries in "native administration". In mid-1900, amid the raging South African War, his superior, the fastidious high commissioner, Sir Alfred Milner, appointed him to the difficult position of Transvaal Commissioner for Native Affairs. Milner, whose choice of efficient civil servants is legend, so trusted Lagden's abilities that he subsequently appointed him chairperson of the all-important 1903-05 South African Native Affairs Commission.[11]

Moreover, Lagden inherited from his predecessor, Sir Marshal Clarke, a securely established edifice that he could not undo. Clarke, was imbued with unique qualities.

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[8]Cassidy, "Britain and Basutoland".

[9]C.O. 48/510, original draft by Sir Hercules Robinson, attached to correspondence between Derby and law officers, 2 January 1884; For a more detailed survey of the status of British imperial rule of Basutoland, see R.M. Cassidy, "Britain and Basutoland: A Study of Men and Policies from the Gun War to the Anglo-Boer War", unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1967.

[10]See e.g. L.N.A., S7/3/12, Lerotholi to Lagden, 31 October 1897; Rhodes House, Lagden Papers, Mss. Afr. S. 213, 5/2,, "Memorandum on Draft Despatch", 6.

[11]Rhodes House, Milner Papers, FK 1194, Milner to Selborne, 14 April 1904, 262-64.

Relentlessly patient, sage, firm, just and tactful,[12] he succeeded in eventually winning the tacit trust and confidence of many BaSotho chiefs and people, including the most recalcitrant or dissident chiefs.[13] Correspondence between BaSotho chiefs and his successor, Godfrey Lagden, abounds with abundant encomiums for Clarke, urging Lagden to follow in his footsteps.

Clarke's policy in Basutoland was so successful that the Colonial Office selected him as the best man to "Basutolandize" the troubled Zululand administration in 1894.[14] "The principle I hold", he stated, outlining the policy he had carried out in Basutoland and would pursue in his new post,

> is that natives are the best judges in their domestic affairs, that the chiefs are the natural representatives of the natives, and that in place of abusing the chiefs as is rather the fashion in Natal it is better both for us and for the Zulus to make use of them and if possible gain their trust and confidence.[15]

Clarke securely established the strategy of "masterly inactivity" as the most effective to manage BaSotho affairs.[16] It turned necessity into virtue. Without a visible force to strengthen their authority, imperial officials depended entirely on their patience, while

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[12]J. Widdicombe, Fourteen Years in Basutoland: A Sketch of African Mission Life (London, 1891), C.O. 417/11, minute by Fairfield, 1 September on Robinson to Stanhope, 10 August 1886.

[13]On Clarke, see J. Widdicombe, Fourteen Years, 242; Sir Henry Rider Haggard's dedication to Clarke, Swallow: A Tale of the Great Trek (London, 1899), v; C.O.417/11, Minutes by Fairfield and Herbert, 1 and 2 September respectively, on Robinson to Stanhope, 10 August, 1886.

[14]C.O. 417/94, minute by Fairfield, undated, on annual report for Basutoland, 1892-93; see also R. Edgecombe, "Sir Marshall Clarke and the Abortive Attempt to 'Basutolandise' Zululand, 1893-7", Journal of Natal and Zulu History, 1 (1978), 43-53.

[15]Rhodes House, Lagden Papers, Clarke to Lagden, 3 March 1894.

[16]E.g., C.O. 417/13, Clarke to Letsie, 13 December 1886, in Robinson to secretary of state for colonies, 26 January 1887, and Clarke's successor, ten years later, Lagden Papers, Lagden Diaries, entry for 24 January 1897.

using their tact and personal relationships with the BaSotho chiefs to resolve crises. The success of this strategy ensured that in Basutoland, unlike elsewhere in the region, the imperial administration eschewed the use of military force to maintain public order. As the architect of the strategy stated when advising his more impetuous successor,

> ...The employment of force in Basutoland will modify all preceding conditions and offer a fresh problem for solution. There seems to me a danger that a section of the European population in South Africa will, in consequence of the collapse of the Matabele, believe that in maxims and machine guns are to be found the solution of the native question and all its difficulties.[17]

Although the staff of the Colonial Office in London allowed Lagden flexibility, they judged his strategy by what had now become colonial policy par excellence: "a government by moral force." His experiences in the Basutoland administration were to teach him a lesson on the best qualities for a colonial administrator. One of "the essentials to ultimate success in governing an alien people", he argued in 1899, was: "select men as governors who are distinguished rather for public spirit, tact, vigour and sound common sense than for genius".[18]

His counterpart in the joint administration was paramount chief Lerotholi, a grand son of King Moshoeshoe. He succeeded as the paramount chief at the ripe age of fifty-five in 1892. While he waited his turn as his father, Letsie, lingered on in his dotage, Lerotholi had effectively assumed the reigns of government. His administrative abilities and vigour were unquestionable. Both BaSotho and colonial sources agree in acclaiming him as an extraordinarily capable administrator. When he died in 1905, the colonial press consistently presented him as a model of the best of "native" chiefs. "The death of Lerotholi", the Standard eulogised him, "removes a native governor of

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[17]Ibid., Clarke to Lagden, 20 July 1894.

[18]G. Lagden, "Colonial Administration for the United States", in The Independent, li, 2656, 26 October 1899, 2861, in Lagden Papers.

state-manlike mind; one of the few to whom power meant more than the opportunity for self-indulgence."[19]

Relations between Lagden and Lerotholi were endemically tant bien que mal, at best. They were to be tested severely by the rinderpest crisis. Lagden acutely distrusted the paramount chief, accusing him of persistent deceit.[20] For his part, Lerotholi was shrewd and wily. He was also resolute, strenuously rebuffing imperial functionaries when he considered them unduly encroaching on his authority and prerogatives. Long before Africans asserted their dignity and demanded that their white compatriots respect them as human beings, Lerotholi had already driven home that message: "I say are we black people, are we people or are we animals, what are we? Or what are we looked upon as being?". He once confronted the highest imperial officer in the country:

> Chief although we are black we too are people, we are like all God's creatures, the only fault with us is this black colour we have it is it which is killing us that we are looked upon like animals....I am speaking about this disrespect with which you are always disrespecting me, as If I am nobody - whereas Chief you know although I am black I am far older than you are in years. You are only greater than I am in chieftainship. And, I say chief that all the Resident Commissioners and the magistrates none of them has ever treated me as you are treating me, grown up people speak to each other respectively but you when you talk to these black people you talk to us as if you are talking to a little child.[21]

Lerotholi was so determined to preserve his own authority and what was left of the BaSotho autonomy that when he died in 1905, speculation within the colonial and settler community predicted the demise of an autonomous Basutoland. Imperial and

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[19]Standard, 3 August 1905; see also Western Daily Mercury, 11 September 1905.

[20]E.g. Rhodes House, Lagden Papers, private letter by Lagden to Milner, 26 December 1897.

[21]L.N.A., S7/3/12, Lerotholi to Lagden, 31 October 1897.

colonial newspapers intimated that his death was a good opportunity to substitute the authority of the resident commissioner for that of the paramount chief.[22]

Nor were relations between the paramount chief and his subordinate chiefs cordial, straining requisite co-operation during the rinderpest crisis. Although the quagmire of dynastic conflict that beset the BaSotho polity at the end of the century originated from pre-colonial times, it had worsened in the years before the outbreak of the rinderpest.[23] The BaSotho rebellion against the Cape colonial administration in 1880 reflected and exacerbated these tensions. The issue of disarmament, which was the immediate cause of the rebellion, sharply pitted one chiefly faction against another, dividing the entire nation into factions.[24]

When the anti-colonial war formally ended, bitterness and resentment between the factions in the war persisted. The course of the war shifted from its original cause, becoming a destructive fratricidal war to settle old scores. Those who surrendered their arms and fought under the colonial banner were abandoned by their colonial mentors. They now bore the odium of treachery as those who had prosecuted the anti-colonial war determined that they should suffer more severe penance for their sins. "Rebel" chiefs allegedly deprived many "loyal" chiefs of their territorial jurisdiction.

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[22]See, e.g., Standard, 4 September 1905

[23]For more detailed discussion of dynastic conflicts in Basutoland, see I. Hammet, "Koena Chieftainship Seniority in Basutoland", Africa, xxxv, 3 (1965); Hammet, Chieftainship and Legitimacy: An Anthropological Study of Executive Law in Lesotho (London, 1975); L.B.J. Machobane, Government and Change in Lesotho, 1800-1966: A Study of Political Institutions (London, 1990); T. Mothibe, "Chieftaincy and Legitimation in Pre-colonial Lesotho", Paper presented to the Southern Africa Joint History Seminar, National University of Lesotho, 1-3 August 1988; T. Quinlan, 'Marena a Lesotho': Chiefs, Politics, and Culture in Lesotho", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1995; L. Thompson, Survival in Two Worlds: Moshoeshoe of Lesotho, 1786-1870 (Oxford, 1975); R. Weisfelder, "The Basotho Monarchy", in R. Lemarchand (ed.), African Kingdoms in Perspective (London, 1977), 160-189.

[24]Burman, Chiefdom Politics.

They also expropriated the lands and property of the subjects and followers of the "loyal" chiefs. So embittered did relations become that they occasioned significant population movements within and out of the country, changing the political map of the region.[25]

In its turn, Pax Britannica exacerbated these tensions after the country's protectorate status was restored in 1884. In attempting to reestablish the stability and order shattered by the 'Gun-War' and the ensuing civil strife, the imperial administration sought to revive the waning central authority of the paramount chief and to restore the traditional hierarchy of chieftainship. This policy, however, fuelled the intense jealousies of other chiefly lineages.[26] Indeed, the strategy of the imperial administration was precisely to maintain a dynamic equilibrium between the warring factions. It enabled the administration to localise potential anti-colonial activity by frustrating any common purpose. This strategy was also self-debilitating. It paradoxically attempted to sustain a hierarchical structure by centralising the authority of the paramountcy while simultaneously weakening it in the districts. The imperial administration further consolidated localism by extending the Cape colonial administration's policy of dividing the country into near autonomous districts.

Paramount authority also suffered severe erosion during the feeble administration of King Moshoeshoe's successor. At a critical moment in their history when the BaSotho needed robust and assertive leadership, Letsie was never a strong ruler. At an already advanced age of sixty when he took over the paramountcy of the deeply divided polity in 1870, he lingered on for twenty years. By the time of his death in 1891,

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[25]C. 3708, report of interview between the premier and the secretary for native affairs and certain Basotho chiefs, councillors and headmen, 14 March, 1883; A. 24-83, petition of loyal chiefs, encl. In secretary for native affairs to acting governor's agent, 3 December 1881; Blue Books, 1882, opinion of acting governor's agent, 107 ff., Ibid., G.8-83, 258; On the complicated settlement of Matatiele, see G. Bardsley, "Politics and Land in Matatiele, 1844-1900: A Report from the Archives", Social Dynamics, 8, 2 (1982), 47-82.

[26]Weisfelder, "The Basotho Monarchy".

Letsie had long since lapsed into a state of decrepitude and senility.[27]. His half brother, Sophonia, likened him to "an old bullock that cannot work any more and, therefore, is no longer fit for public affairs".[28]

And so, the feeble government and senile administration that characterised the last years of Letsie's reign emboldened other chiefly factions, including his own brothers and sons, to encroach on the authority and prerogatives of the paramount. His younger brother, Molapo and the latter's sons, Jonathan and Joel, lorded it over the northern districts of Leribe and Butha-Buthe, while his second brother, Masupha, resolutely resisted the paramount chief's interference in the affairs of his district of Berea.

The accession of his more vigorous heir and successor, Lerotholi, signalled a more stable administration and potent paramountcy. Lerotholi was determined to revamp the waning authority of the paramount. However, the vigour with which he pursued this aim, and the high-handed methods he often used, embittered opponents who already resented his vindictive energy, hot temper and incessant ambition. Lerotholi came out vigorously against the erosion of the authority of the paramount, while his brothers and uncles declared no less emphatically for district rights.

And so, throughout the 1890s the head that wore the crown wore it uneasily, and none more uneasily than Lerotholi. Molapo's son, Jonathan, in the north, his uncle, Masupha, and his brother, Maama, especially, flouted his authority in their jurisdiction, and encouraged their supporters to follow suit.[29] No sooner had he

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[27]Ibid., G.93-'84, 84; A. 24-81, A. 24-81, governor's agent to colonial secretary, 2 August 1881.

[28] G.17-'78, pitso of 1 November 1877, speech of Sophonia Moshoeshoe, 21.

[29]For example, ibid., S3/5/2/1, MaKhoakhoa Affairs.

ascended the throne than he had to confront the intransigent ambitions of his own brothers who immediately contested their father's estate.[30]

Into this already volatile scenario emerged a new stratum, the young and upcoming chiefs. This emergent generation of chiefs wanted land, status and territorial jurisdiction, and fretted under the restraint of their seniors and that of the imperial administration. Despite restraints imposed by patriarchal and gerontocratic pretensions, inter-generational tensions always hovered below the surface. Moreover, these young chiefs had not been involved in the earlier bitter confrontations with the boers and had no interest in the new colonial dispensation. Consequently, these "war-hawks" were perhaps weary of listening to fireside tales of the glorious past days of BaSotho fighting prowess. Now they were eager for an opportunity to engage in conflict and to recover the old and vanished independence.

These inter-chiefly and inter-generational disputes were debilitating, at best, during normal times. They often catapulted protagonists into violent conflict, at worst. During the rinderpest crisis they would flare up more prominently. In a crisis that called for maximum harmony, the tensions they engendered would strain the cooperation needed to contain the course and effects of the epidemic.

Relations between the state - indigenous and colonial - and the ordinary peasants, the voiceless and hidden BaSotho of the countryside, on the eve of the rinderpest are more difficult to unravel.[31] This is partly because we hardly hear the voices of ordinary people in the available historical sources. When we begin to eavesdrop on

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[30]e.g., ibid., S3/5/5/4 and S3/5/5/6, Lerotholi-Maama Dispute.

[31]For the existing historical literature tracing the chequered relations between chiefs and their subjects from the democratic tendencies of pre-colonial BaSotho society to the transformations unleashed by successive administrations which introduced, and sustained, the subsequent pattern of a repressive indigenous state, see Burman, Chiefdom Politics; Machobane, Government and Change; Rugege, "The Chieftaincy and Society".

their "early voices of protest" from the first decade of the twentieth-century, they come predominantly from civil society movements representing the interests of the emerging literati and the petit bourgeoisie.[32]

The BaSotho state had emerged and coalesced as a defensive strategem against invasive forces. First, the budding state had to defend itself against African neighbours during the turbulence of the "Difaqane". Then it had to stem the tide of encroachment upon its territory and sovereignty by the expansionist boer trekkers. Later the beleaguered state had to hold its own against the intrusive forces of successive administrations.

Against this background of relentless insecurity,[33] reciprocal cooperation between leaders and their followers gained maximum priority and became the state's main prop. The need for leaders to be able and willing to support their followers in times of crisis, rule them through consensus and negotiation, and dispense generosity, became so essential that it begot the BaSotho epithet that a ruler or any leader is "a chief by the people".[34]

By the eve of the rinderpest, however, these relations had become distorted and eroded. Decades of missionary endeavour to separate individuals from existing

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[32]R.F. Weisfelder, "Early Voices of Protest in Basutoland: The Progressive Association and Lekhotla la Bafo", African Studies Review, xvii, 2 (1974); also R. Edgar, Prophets With Honour: A Documentary History of Lekhotla la Bafo (Johannesburg, 1983).

[33]One of the striking contributions of E.A. Eldredge's A South African Kingdom: The Pursuit of Security in Nineteenth-Century Lesotho is the manner in which it forces us to reckon with this endemic insecurity of BaSotho, a point which is the core of analysis in this most recent comprehensive publication on the history of nineteenth-century Basutoland.

[34]Virtually all existing histories of early Basutoland attest this feature of the chieftaincy institution. For a more detailed and focused study, see Mothibe, "Chieftaincy and Legitimation".

patterns of social relations undoubtedly played a role.[35] The influence became even more potent when boosted by colonial legislation in the decade of Cape colonial rule.[36] More effective, however, was the commercialization of BaSotho production and consumption, especially the introduction and consolidation of new forms of property and new avenues of acquiring it.[37] The transformation of productive activity to commodity production required the dissolution of prior productive relations such as communal relations between BaSotho peasants, but especially of traditional relations between rural producers and their chiefs.[38]

During the early period of the consolidation of the BaSotho state, cattle provided the critical means for sustaining these reciprocal relationships, as we shall see. Cattle were valued for their use-value; they perpetuated the lineage and enabled leaders to attract and sustain a following. Cash, however, was valued for its accumulative power. It promoted individualism, weakening the lineage and enfeebling reciprocal ties. It also weakened the authority of the chiefs.

The policies of successive administrations also contributed toward transforming the relationship between chiefs and their followers. The Cape colonial government unleashed an avalanche of legislation aimed at weakening the power of chiefs by weaning their followers away from prior reciprocal relationships. While we are yet unable to measure precisely the impact of these legislative initiatives, they did

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[35]For a more balanced analysis of the role of European missionaries in this regard, see Eldredge, A South African Kingdom, 93-95, 147-150.

[36]For collusion between European missionaries and Cape colonial officials, see Burman, Burman, Chiefdom Politics.

[37] For details on these processes, see Eldredge, A South African Kingdom; Kimble, "Towards an Understanding of the Political Economy of Lesotho".

[38]For a general analysis of this process, see H. Friedman, "Household Production and the National Economy: Concepts for the Analysis of Agrarian Formations", Journal of Peasant Studies, 7 (1980), 158-84.

undoubtedly alienate the chiefs from their followers. Despite the astonishing support both factions of chiefs received from their followers in the 1880-81 rebellion, the tensions unleashed by the policies of the Cape colonial government hardened each faction's resolve. They also left an enduring legacy of animosity.

When the country returned to the less intrusive colonialism of imperial rule in 1884, the cardinal chiefs regained their former control of the productive process and the social relations associated with it. Wittingly or not, the policies of the imperial government helped to tyrannise the chieftancy, and distorted the principle of "chief by the people". Expediency forced the imperial government to collude with the cardinal chiefs, for the administration of the country and the maintenance of social and public order depended entirely on them. A reciprocal relationship thus developed in which the chiefs depended for their power and status on the imperial government, while the latter administered the country through the chiefs.

Paying the cardinal chiefs part of the annual tax collected enabled them to shift their reciprocal obligations towards their followers on to colonial functionaries. The imperial government also gave the cardinal chiefs carte blanche power over land allocation. This practice introduced a pernicious element in the relationship between chiefs and their followers. The colonial appropriation of land during and after the BaSotho-Boer wars had rendered land a scarce, and therefore contentious, commodity. Subsequent internal changes, including a significant increase in population, rapid extension of acreage and ensuing strain on available land increased the value of land, thereby enhancing the power of those who controlled its allocation. As chiefs strove to gain access to this key basis of chiefly authority, competition among chiefs for land and followers proliferated.

The preservation, albeit in a truncated form, of the traditional pitso offers a useful vantage point from which to glimpse the interaction between the chiefs and their followers on the eve of the rinderpest crisis. Chiefs and their subjects could at least

interact, albeit increasingly in strained tones, at these annual public gatherings. On the eve of the rinderpest, however, criticism of the chieftaincy was becoming more acrid. These large annual national gatherings had normally maintained an air of decorum imposing a tone of sobriety on the participants. As the century ended, however, the mood was becoming increasingly hostile, debates acrimonious. A crescendo of complaints was rising. These were directed at the parasitic bureaucracy and at the extractive tendencies of chiefs. "I have never known a nation with a hundred chiefs", a disconcerted commoner charged at the 1889 pitso at which commoners and lesser chiefs assailed the exactions of the cardinal chiefs:

> Men run from one chief to another.The chiefs are in number with the stars.The people are troubled about their gardens, their cattle and their goats a bone is thrown to the dogs and they are always quarreling.[39]

At the 1894 pitso, a rabid opponent of the chiefly institution wrily observed that "we are now unable to walk about as at every step you hear 'be careful, you are trampling on a chief."[40]

On the eve of the rinderpest, therefore, little formal consultative structure existed for the chiefs and their subjects to plan their anti-rinderpest campaign. The available sources do not take the historian into the countryside to view the scope and quality of cooperative interactions at the local level. Nationally, however, the entire anti-rinderpest campaign would be spearheaded by distrusted imperial officials.

Nor did the imperial administration concern itself much with the lot of civil society. This is hardly surprising. The emergence of the concept of a democratic order in western Europe coincided, as Mamdani has cogently observed, with the advent of the notion of civil society. To the European mind, civil society meant "civilized" society. And so, European colonial officials brought up in the notion of civil society as

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[39]Ibid., S11/3, speech of Thomas Setlaka, pitso of 24 October 1889.

[40]Ibid., speech of T. Sethlaka, pitso of 11 October 1894.

"civilized" society could hardly have included the fortunes of people they regarded uncivilized on their agenda.[41] Moreover, the imperial administration's dilemma of relying on the chiefs for administering the country undermined what interests it did have to include ordinary subjects in decision making.[42]

The BaSotho social fabric, always a key factor in a society's response to an epidemic, had also been undermined by decades of economic, political and social restructuring. This was expecially the case with precolonial methods of controlling outbreaks of epidemics. Although the pre-colonial ecological balance was undoubtedly fragile, its maintenance had been negatively affected by certain processes. These included the impact of social and economic convulsions, the effects of over half a century of European missionary influence and the political, social and economic transformation brought by the harsh decade of ruthless Cape colonial rule. Others included the impact of the rapid incorporation of the economy and way of life into the capitalist social formation, demographic expansion of both people and animals, the subtle, but effective, undermining of local authority and social cohesion by the imperial administration.[43]

A combination of these forces had gradually weakened precolonial ideological and institutional strategies that helped to manage resources and regulated practices that enabled people to cope with a risky environment. These practices depended upon the functioning of established institutional arrangements aimed at managing the utilisation of resources and incorporating these into a well-ordered system. Pastures,

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[41]For a lucid and convincing discussion of the origins of this notion, and its application on the colonial landscape, see M. Mamdani, Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism (Kampala, Cape Town, Londong, 1996), 13-21.

[42]For the role played by the colonial state in maintaining the repressive chiefly institution, see Machobane, Government and Change; Quinlan, "Marena a Lesotho"; Rugege, "The chieftaincy and Society".

[43]Eldredge, "Drought, Famine and Disease".

for example, had been controlled, transhumance regulated, and the productive cycle managed. The existence of a recognised political elite, backed by a coherent body of ideological mechanisms, ensured the active cohesion of the community, regulated productive activity, and managed resources through a negotiated and consensual style. These institutions and mechanisms, however, had undergone profound, if ambivalent, transformation through the last third of the century.

Decades of transformation of the chiefly institution, initially by missionary ideology, followed by the Cape colonial administration's efforts to weaken it, and its restructuring by the imperial administration, eroded the power and influence of the political elite. This undermined its cohesive and regulating force. "Everyone calls himself a chief but we do not see their good acts",[44] quipped a speaker at a pitso in the 1890s. At every pitso in the 1890s, commoners and lesser members of the gentry were urging the cardinal chiefs to take care of their people, reminding them of the real basis of their power as "chiefs by the people". Even when they did intervene in the management of productive activity, chiefs did so with the coercive and self-indulgent autocracy that now distinguished the institution of chiefship.

Specific strategies to cope with ecological and pestilential trauma had also been undermined. A risky environment, exacerbated by pestilential disasters throughout the century had forced the BaSotho to develop a range of adaptive measures and response strategies to mitigate the effects of ecological and pestilential disasters. The adaptive measures included famine insurance strategies, and the whole web of economic, political and social relations developed to cope with critical food shortages. When a food shortage did threaten, they could deploy a range of responses. These included activating creative and alternative production strategies, consuming alternative foods that relieved famine, breaking up the domestic unit, invoking reciprocal and patronal

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[44] L.N.A., S11/3, speech of Mphoto, pitso of 11 November 1890.

relationships, taking up wage labour, and migrating.[45] During the drastic shortages of the "Difaqane" upheavals, the plight of some BaSotho was so severe that they were said to have resorted to relieving hunger through cannibalism.

Economic and concomitant social dislocations through the second half of the century had progressively enfeebled these famine insurance mechanisms. They thus accentuated the effects of environmental trauma. Territorial losses in the 1850s and 1860s, made irreversible by the final territorial circumscription of Basutoland by colonially imposed boundaries, weakened established famine insurance mechanisms. Without enough land, planned overproduction in a good year to insure insufficient harvest in a bad season became more difficult to effect. The strategy of microspatial

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[45]Some of these strategies are discussed in some detail by Eldredge, "Drought, Famine and Disease in Nineteenth-Century Lesotho", 74-83; many have been found to be common for many peasant communities across space and time, see, among others, A. B. Appleby, Famine in Tudor and Stuart England (Stanford, 1978); J. Bourriau (ed.), Understanding Catastrophe (Cambridge, 1992); T.W. Gallant, P. Garnsey and G. Woolf, "Patronage and the Rural Poor in the Roman World", in A. Wallace-Hadrill (ed.), Patronage in Ancient Society (London, 1989); P. Garnsey, Famine and Food Supply in the Graeco-Roman World: Responses to Risk and Crisis (Cambridge, 1988); P. Halstead and J. O'Shea (eds.), Cultural Responses to Uncertainty (Cambridge, 1988); U. Putnaik, "Food Availability and Famine: A Longer View", Journal of Peasant Studies, 19, i (1991), 1-25; P. Nolan, "The Causation and Prevention of Famine: A Critique", Ibid., 21, 1 (1993), 1-28; R.I. Rotberg and T.K. Rabb (eds), Hunger and History: The Impact of Changing Food Production and Consumption Patterns on Society (Cambridge, 1983); for similiar studies on African famines, see, among others, M. de Braijn and H. Van Dijk, "Drought and Coping Strategies in Fulbe Society in the Hayre, Central Mali: A Historical Perspective", Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines, xxxiv, 1-3 (1994), 85-108; I.A.F. Clark, "Environmental Decline and Ecological Response in the Upper Senegal Valley, West Africa, from the late Nineteenth-Century to World War I", Journal of African History, 36, 2 (1995), 197-218; J. Giblin, "Famine and Social Change during the Transition to Colonial Rule in Northern Tanzania, 1880-1896", African Economic History, xx (1986), 84-104; M.H. Grantz (ed), Drought and Hunger in Africa (Cambridge, 1987); K. Hill, "Demographic Responses to Food Shortages in the Sahel", Population and Development Review, special supplement (1989), 15, 168-192; D.H. Johnson and D.A. Anderson (eds.), The Ecology of Survival: Case Studies from Northeast African History (London, 1988); G. Maddox, "Mtunya: Famine in Central Tanzania, 1917-20", Journal of African History, 32, 2 (1990), 181-97; D.D. Treanter, "Strategies for Coping with Food Consumption Shortages in the Mandara Mountain Region of North Cameroon", Social Science and Medicine, xvi (1982), 211-27; A.W. de Waal, Famine that Kills: Darfur 1984-5 (London, 1987); P. Webb and J. Von Braun, Famine and Food Security in Ethiopia: Lessons for Africa (New York, 1994).

fragmentation of land-holdings became virtually impossible to activate for ordinary households. It was contingent on acquiring land in different microenvironments, thus reducing the risk of wiping out the entire household's crops or animals in the wake of localized ecological trauma.

Diminishing availability of land resulting from dispossession was exacerbated by the commercialization of BaSotho production and a significant demographic expansion of humans and animals within a circumscribed territory. In a sense, land had always been scarce in the country even before the closing of the frontier in the 1850s and 60s. The latter, however, drastically accentuated the shortage. Hence, although the remaining arable land proved to be exceedingly productive, its overall scarcity soon became evident.

The agricultural boom of the 1870s and 1880s both caused and resulted from a significant increase in acreage. Assisted by rapid accumulation of the ox-drawn plough, this process soon exhausted opportunities for further dispersal.[46] From the onset of imperial rule in 1884, imperial officials consistently reported the increasing scarcity of additional land for cultivation, pasturage and settlement. "The whole face of the country up to the mountain slopes is a vast corn field", observed the resident commissioner in 1886, "and numbers are now actually ploughing in the mountains".[47] A significant demographic expansion compounded this process. The BaSotho population increased by 71 per cent from 1875 to 1891, and by 14 per cent from 1891 to 1895.[48] More significant for the unfolding process of progressive pressure on the land was the age structure of this demographic expansion. Despite the absence of systematic studies on population patterns and trends in this period, both quantitative

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[46]L.N.A., S1/1, 1891 census returns for Basutoland.

[47]L.N.A., S3/25/1/3, annual reports, report for the year ending 30 June 1886.

[48]H.G. 1875, Census of the Cape of Good Hope, 1875, 17; L.N.A., S1/1, census returns for Basutoland, 1891.

and qualitative data suggest an even distribution of adults and younger members in the population.[49] The key factors seem to have been high birth rates resulting from an increased food supply,[50] and adult immigration.[51] The result was an immediate and relentless pressure on the circumscribed land.

Rapid stock increases accompanied the equally significant increase in human population. This aggravated the vicious cycle of rural marginalization. From 1875 to 1891 the bovine population increased at the rate of forty-seven per cent. In less than twenty years in the same period, the number of horses had increased by fifty-six per cent. Sheep and goats were not counted in the 1891 census, but it is almost certain that their rearing had greatly expanded as revealed by the rise in the volume of wool and mohair exports.[52]

The integration of intensive sheep and goat rearing into the already strained pattern of land use disturbed agro-pastoral equilibrium, for sheep and goat rearing could only be successful through an extensive use of land. Sheep and goats also wrought havoc on

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[49]L.N.A., S1/1, 1891 census returns for Basutoland.

[50]For the link between high birth rates and increased food supply resulting from the intensification of agriculture, see H. Barry & L. Paxton, "Infancy and Early Childhood: Cross Cultural Codes 2", Ethnology, 10 (1971), 466-508; J. Hajnal, "European Marriage Patterns in Perspective", in D.V. Glass & D.E. Eversley, Population in History (London, 1965), 101-43; J. Kasada, "Economic Structure and fertility: A Comparative Analysis", Demography, 8 (1971), 307-318; T. Malthus, An Essay on the Principle of Population (London, repr. 1970); R. Schofield, "The Impact of Scarcity and Plenty on Population Change in England, 1541-1871", in Rotberg & Rabb (eds.), Hunger and History:, 67-94; R. Sipes, Population Growth, Society and Culture (New Haven, 1980); E. Wrigley & R. Schofield, The Population History of England, 1451-1871: A Reconstruction (Cambridge, 1981), 15-154.

[51]For contemporary observations on waves of immigrants during this period, see L.N.A., S1/1, 1891 census returns for Basutoland; G.21-75, 15, 17; G.17-78, 7, G.13-80, 19, 28; L.N.A., S3/25/1/2, S3/25/1/3, S3/25/1/4, annual reports, 1884-5, 1885-6, 1886-7; Widdicombe, Fourteen Years, 40-41.

[52]H.G. 1875, Census of the Cape of Good Hope, 17; L.N.A., census returns for Basutoland, 1891.

the natural fauna. As over-grazing depleted the palatable and nutritious grasses, bush and weed invaded the veld. Contemporary observers confirmed the intense competition between commercial agriculture and pastoral pursuits.[53]

Shortage of land resulted in relentless pressure on its productive capacity, further rendering it difficult to maintain surpluses to ward off famine during years of harvest failure. It also disrupted the pattern of settlement, which had been shaped by the prospects of ecological trauma. Shortage of suitable land for agricultural and residential purposes led to a significant increase in the size of homesteads, encumbering established coping mechanisms during food shortages. As settlements spread randomly across the landscape, it became increasingly difficult to maintain the old pattern of settlements that was established on the logic of minimising the effects of ecological trauma.

Structural incorporation of BaSotho's production into an erratic market economy further increased vulnerability to environmental trauma. It also worsened the effects of bad seasons. By the 1890s, the BaSotho's economy was firmly absorbed into the market economy.[54] BaSotho producers produced what the market required, and when it required it. Yet, that market was extremely variable, influenced by a set of factors outside the control of BaSotho producers.

The "boom of the early 1870s" ended with "a time of trial and difficulty" through the half-decade, 1875-1880. The next five years, 1881-1885 witnessed "a wave of extraordinary depression", to be followed by "a cycle of prosperous years" between 1885-1889. These five years of "excessive speculation" unleashed by the gold discoveries led to a collapse, with "solid prosperity" returning only in 1892. The last

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[53]E.g., L.N.A., S3/25/1/3, annual report for 1886, report for Berea.

[54]Kimble, "Towards an Understanding of the Political Economy of Lesotho"; Eldredge, A South African Kingdom, 147-181.

five years of the century, 1895-1899 were decidedly an era of economic and ecological crises throughout, exacerbated by political turmoil and general unrest which finally exploded in the conflagration of the South African War in October 1899.[55]

The BaSotho economy, however, suffered more than it benefited from the regional prosperity of 1885-1889, and 1892-95. For example, the opening of gold diggings in the Witwatersrand from 1886 helped to alleviate the economic recession that had begun to assail South Africa generally from the mid 1870s. Among others, it opened a new and vast market for produce. The BaSotho, however, were severely restricted from fully realising the benefits of these discoveries.

The prolonged disruption in the supply of BaSotho grain during their rebellion and the civil war blemished the country's reputation as a secure supplier, forcing importers to look elsewhere. Coincidentally, secure and economical suppliers readily emerged, mainly from the American Midwest and Australia. Thus, from the mid-1880s, the highly capitalised agriculture of the American Midwest began to alter the former exclusive dependence of the mining markets on local produce by supplying cheaper foreign grain. The extension of railway lines from Cape ports to the gold diggings assisted this process by reducing the cost of transporting foreign grain.

During this period, too, a major transformation was occurring within the white rural community in the Free State and the Transvaal. Formerly relying on transport riding, pastoralism, hunting and itinerant trade, white farmers now began to resort more earnestly to arable farming.[56] Ironically, what nudged white Free State farmers into

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[55]Mabin and Conradie, The Confidence, 23-474; also C.G.W. Schumann, Structural Changes and Business Cycles in South Africa, 1806-1936 (London, 1958).

[56]See, among others, M.L. Morris, "The Development of Capitalism in South African Agriculture: Class Struggle in the Countryside:, Economy and Society, v., 3 (1976), 292-343;

self-reliance was the scarcity of grain from Basutoland during the rebellion. "It will now be for us to seize the opportunity", urged an editorial of a Free State newspaper, "to try and make the great part of the conquered territory the granary of at least our state."[57]

The Transvaal and Free State governments began actively to encourage the monopolisation of production by white farmers. They achieved this by passing restrictive legislation unfavourable to African farmers, and by giving financial and professional aid to white farmers.[58] To protect her market against BaSotho competition, the Free State imposed import tariffs on all produce coming from Basutoland, while the Transvaal also imposed a heavy tax on grain imported from anywhere else except the Free State.[59] It was estimated, for example, that in 1888 Basutoland's trade had suffered from this prohibitive tariff to the extent of almost £20,000 in one year alone.[60]

BaSotho producers who could not afford these prohibitive tariffs were unable to transport their produce directly to the external markets. Wagon-hawkers, who had been a familiar scene in the country were seen only very rarely, only when they trafficked cheap brandy that had found a secure niche among the bewildered populace, especially the chiefs. Consequently, the volume of production declined owing to frustrated incentive. While in 1879 the country had exported £400,000 worth

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[57]Friend, 1 January 1885; see also 3 September 1885.

[58]S. Trapido, "Landlord and Tenant in a Colonial Economy, the Transvaal, 1880-1910", Journal of Southern African Studies, 5 (1978); T. Keegan, "The Sharecropping Economy, African Class Formation and the 1913 Native Land Act in the Highveld Maize Belt", in Marks and Rathbone (eds.), Industrialisation and Social Change, 195-211; Keegan, "The Share-cropping Economy on the South African Highveld in the early Twentieth Century", Journal of Peasant Studies, 2/3 (1983), 201-225; Keegan, Rural Transformation in Industrialising South Africa (Johannesburg, 1986).

[59]L.N.A., S7/6, O.F.S. govt. gazette of 18 March 1887.

[60]Ibid., annual report, June 1888.

of grain, in 1887 it would manage to export only £20,000 worth.[61] Unable to market their produce externally where prices were generally higher, producers had to sell locally, thus exposing themselves to exploitation by unscrupulous local European traders.

Commercialisation of production added an additional onus. The pre-commercialisation productive strategy took advantage of the complementarity of the qualities of the sorghum and maize staples. Sorghum had superior resistance to drought, while maize, in its turn, was relatively invulnerable to birds and had a shorter growing season. Commercialisation, however, encouraged the cultivation of the new commercial crop, wheat. The climatic and seasonal pattern within which the production of wheat took place, however, introduced a profound change in the productive cycle. It disturbed agro-pastoral balance while compounding the vicious cycle of soil exhaustion and the shrinking of arable land.

Specifically, the cultivation pattern of the wheat crop increased the relentless pressure on the land. The wheat seed was sown in winter at the time that the transhumance cycle required the grazing of cattle on maize and millet stubble. Sowing the wheat seed immediately after the harvesting of the maize and sorghum limited winter grazing on stubble. Yet the temperatures in the mountain pastures plummeted with the onset of winter, thus forcing the return of stock to the lowlands where grazing opportunities were scanty. No evidence exists that stubble was cleared and turned into fodder prior to sowing wheat. The need for organic manuring necessitated turning over stubble. Besides, grass, where still available, would have withered or been purposely burnt to regenerate it for spring grazing.

Claimants to a share of the harvest also increased through the last third of the century. This limited the BaSotho's ability to maintain surpluses that might tide them over to the next harvest. Besides household claimants who increased as the size of the

[61]G.17'-78, annual report, 1878; L.N.A., S3/25/1/5, annual report, 1887.

homestead expanded, and the growing demands for manufactured goods, there were also extra-household claimants, especially the colonial state and the expanding parasitic indigenous state. Colonial taxation was a tax on the household's productive capacity. So was the payment of chiefs with part of the hut-tax. It represented the appropriation of the labour of the homesteads. Even though the hut-tax was paid in cash, the money came mainly from the sale of produce and from migrants' earnings.

The burden of paying the hut-tax was exacerbated by the way it was collected. Colonial officials collected it within three months immediately after the winter harvest. If the season had been a lean one, payment was postponed to the harvest of the wheat crop.[62] This pattern of payment forced producers to sell their surplus, even part of their subsistence grain, immediately after harvest. Being when the market was glutted, prices were consequently deflated. Should the next harvesting season be a meagre one, the same producer was back to the same store to re-purchase the same produce he had sold at a depreciated value. Now, however, the price had inflated because of scarcity. It was also when the producer had no cash, and was forced to arrange for credit. Prices of goods, including grains, purchased on credit were usually higher, which worked against the peasant, and benefited the trader. Without cash, many people arranging for credit, placed their stock as security, or purchased grain with stock.

When the BaSotho did produce a surplus, they were forced to sell it to acquire cash to purchase consumer goods, pay the hut-tax and invest in further production. Their grain, however, glutted the market, depressing prices, with producers generally receiving consumer goods rather than cash.[63] The weakness of producers to control

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[62] C.O. 45/508, tax payment, 1 Jan 1892 - November 1892, encl. In L. Smythe to Earl of Derby, 5 May 1893

[63]For the rising level of protest against this economic strangulation, see, e.g. L.N.A., S11/3, speech of chief Seeiso, pitso of October, 1888; ibid., speech of Rampa; ibid., speech of Setha Matete, pitso of 12 October 1893.

the fruits of their labour was further worsened when the imperial administration professed inability to intervene. When in 1891, for example, the chiefs ordered a total boycott of local trading stations, the resident commissioner lectured them on the ubiquitous liberal economic laws. "Such action cannot influence prices nor can government do so", he cautioned. "We are all governed by the law of supply and demand".[64]

Besides these man-made tribulations, Basutoland was also hit by a cycle of ecological disasters in the years leading to the rinderpest. Although these disasters were a useful foretaste ahead of the rinderpest, and gave the BaSotho valuable experience in confronting the impact of the panzootic, these scourges were debilitating. A combination of them unleashed severe food shortages, sometimes famine.

The cycle seems to have begun with the devastating drought of 1884, coinciding with the reestablishment of imperial rule. The drought was appalling.[65] A chief in the southern district of Mohales'Hoek reported that hunger was among his people "because we had no harvest last reaping season..."[66] So threatening was the famine that the Paris headquarters of the French Mission mounted a Destitute Relief Fund.[67] The almost total crop failure led to the price of grain soaring, forcing people to place their cattle as security for grain acquired on debt. The cattle themselves, however, were in a poor state, their security value at its lowest ebb. The drought coincided with a devastating smallpox epidemic, necessitating quarantine regulations and restrictions

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[64]Ibid., speech of resident commissioner.

[65]Germond, Chronicles, 465

[66]L.N.A. S7/3/1, Chief Molomo Mohale, to R.C., 16 November 1884.

[67]Germond, Chronicles, 466.

on travel. This compounded the severity of the drought by hampering normal pursuits and restricting commerce, trade, and even migration to the labour centres.[68]

The drought was partially broken in 1885, though some districts remained in its grip. For the southern district of Quthing, for example, 1885 was "a time of great scarcity. People had reaped scanty crops for several seasons and were unable to obtain money with which to purchase grain. The stock that they could exchange for food had depreciated in value.[69] Those in the more favoured districts could reap a fair harvest of wheat and sorghum.Chiefs, however, imposed a ban on the sale of cereals to prevent the recurrence of the severe shortages of the previous year[70]

The ploughing season of 1885 was blessed with copious rains and the harvest looked "promising."[71] The harvest of 1887 was "exceptional".[72] in some districts, but the early onset of winter frost destroyed the maturing grain in others. Southern Basutoland was especially affected. During the harvest month of June, it was reported from Quthing that many people were already buying sorghum at the enhanced price of 10/- a 200lb bag. The following month, the price had escalated to 12/- and to 15/- by September.[73]

The year 1888 also brought a "plentiful" crop, but the spring rains in 1889 came late. When they did come, they helped to ensure a good harvest of wheat and an average crop of mealies. Late ploughing and the early frost, however, drastically

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[68]Lesedinyana, 1 January 1884, 7, and 1 April, 1884, 4; also Friend, 15 January 1885.

[69]L.N.A.., S3/25/1/3, annual reports, 1885-6, report for Quthing.

[70]Lesedinyana, 15 February 1885; also Friend, 2 and 30 April 1885.

[71]Lesedinyana, 15 November 1885 and 1 February 1886.

[72]Germond, Chronicles, 469.

[73]Leselinyana, 1 June, 1 July and 1 September 1897.

reduced the next harvest of the staple crop, sorghum.[74] The same pattern recurred in 1890.[75] Rains came late in the ploughing season of 1891. When the seed struggled to come out, swarms of locusts, which arrived early in 1892, devoured the sprouting crop. They "totally destroyed" the mealie and sorghum crops, reducing people to "great straits".[76]

Observers throughout the country made dreary reports of people being "on the verge of starvation".[77] A petition from twenty-five senior chiefs of Leribe district revealed that "some people sleep and wake up again without eating".[78] During the same month of November, two chiefs from the district were reporting great scarcity in their districts and appealing to colonial officials to intervene by importing grain and selling it at cost.[79] To avert a looming famine, imperial officials did oblige, importing mealies. They, however, sold them at "enormous prices".[80] The famine of 1892 was so devastating that the colonial administration had to start a relief scheme, employing parties of men on public roads and paying them in imported mealies.[81]

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[74]C.A.R, L.N.A., S3/25/1/7, reports from districts for the year ending 31 July 1890.

[75]Ibid., S3/25/1/8, reports for the year ending 31 July 1891.

[76]Ibid., S3/25/1/10, report for Maseru for the year ending 31 July 1893.

[77]Ibid., T.Y. 1/1/2, assistant commissioner, Berea, to R.C., 27 October 1892; also S7/1/2/8, assistant commissioner, Leribe, to R.C., 10 November 1892.

[78]Ibid., S7/1/2/8, petition of chiefs of Leribe district to the chief Jonathan Molapo and Leribe magistrate, 2 November 1892.

[79]Ibid., chief Jonathan Molapo and Peete Lesaoana to assistant commissioner, Leribe, 8 and 10 November 1892, respectively, encl. In assistant commissioner, Leribe, to R.C., 10 November 1892.

[80]L.N.A., S3/25/1/10, annual reports, report for Maseru, year ending 31 July 1893.

[81]e.g. Ibid., S7/1/3/8, assistant commissioner, Mafeteng, to R.C., 29 September 1892 and T.Y. 1/1/2, assistant commissioner, Berea, to R.C., 27 October 1892.

Owing to the famine of the 1891-2 season, the imperial administration closely watched the prospects of the harvest of the 1892-3 season. The resident commissioner requested all assistant commissioners to make weekly reports on the conditions of the crops.[82] They all reported bleak prospects for the upcoming harvest. From Maseru, the assistant commissioner there regretted that he had not "been able to hear of any kaffir corn crops which (showed) any promise at all". He predicted that the "prospects of harvest may be described as nil".[83] From Mafeteng came the report that the sorghum "in most instances did not grow". All along the valleys of Berea the sorghum crop had "been almost completely destroyed".[84]

When it appeared that the blight was receding and after farmers had re-sown their fields with mealies, the locusts arrived in December and January. It caught the late-sown mealie crop at its tender stage. In some districts, Mafeteng among them, the crops "were almost entirely eaten up".[85] To worsen the already bleak prospects for a sufficient harvest, the drought set in early in the summer, while foot and mouth disease (Epizootic Aphta) among cattle broke out in December 1892. This panzootic was not very virulent and soon became endemic. It, however, necessitated strict quarantine, requiring regulation of the movement of cattle and humans during a crippling drought.[86]

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[82]Ibid., circular no. 168 of 1 November 1892.

[83]Ibid., S7/1/4/3, assistant commissioner, Maseru, to R.C., 10 November 1892

[84]Ibid., S7/1/3/8, assistant commissioner Mafeteng, to R.C., 6 November 1892; S7/1/1/6, assistant commissioner, Berea, to R.C., 1 December 1892.

[85]Ibid., S3/25/1/10, annual reports,, report for Mafeteng.

[86]Ibid., S7/1/1/6, assistant commissioner, Berea, to R.C., 22 November, 6 and 26 December 1892; also, S7/1/2/8, assistant commissioner, Leribe, to R.C., 29 December 1892; S7/1/2/9, assistant commissioner, Leribe, to R.C., 19 and 21 January 1893.

Food shortages became so severe that people sold their livestock in exchange for grain, or put up their cattle as security for debt. In 1892, for example, "fat cattle were [being] bartered for a half a muid of mealie per head". Reports of assistant magistrates from virtually all the districts confirmed that "a bag of mealies required absolutely for subsistence could only be repurchased from the traders by payment of a fat ox or the value of it". The report for Mafeteng district revealed that 3,000 head of cattle had been received by traders in exchange for grain[87]

The 1893-4 season was average, and by the summer of 1893 crops were promising. Late in the summer, however, torrential rains destroyed the ripening wheat crop and the young mealies and sorghum crops.[88] In the mountain districts of Quthing and Qachas'nek, the early frost withered the crops of maize and sorghum. The quality of the wheat crop was poor due to the continuous summer rains that came during the harvest.[89]

The next season, 1894-1895, was prosperous. The rains were seasonable and an "abundant" harvest, particularly the sorghum crop, was realised.[90] 1895-6, however, repeated the pattern of drought, locusts, and a poor harvest, leading to escalating prices of produce. In Mafeteng District, where the price of a muid of mealies was 4/6 in the preceding season, it had escalated to 17/6 in the next.[91] An average rainfall was recorded during the growing season of 1896. An "abundant harvest" of mealies was

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[87]Ibid., S3/25/1/11, report for Maseru, Mafeteng and report of the resident commissioner, 1893.

[88]Ibid., S3/25/1/11, annual reports, reports for Berea and Mafeteng, year ending 31 July 1893.

[89]Ibid.

[90]Ibid., S3/25/1/12, reports from districts, year ending 31 July 1895.

[91]Ibid., S3/25/1/12 and S3/25/1/13, reports for Mafeteng, 1894-5 and 1895-6, respectively.

expected early 1897. The same pattern recurred. The crops were caught up in the drought of late summer and the locusts wrought their yearly destruction.

Recurring agrarian distress, therefore, marked the closing two decades of the nineteenth century. This was due mainly to high levels of climatic variability, exacerbated by the devastation of locusts, human and animal epidemics. It resulted in high levels of crop yield variability. Although not new[92] the climatic and pestilential calamities of the late nineteenth century were more devastating. They bunched together in runs of two or three years. More importantly, they burst upon a society whose productive system and coping mechanisms had been undermined.

The pastoral branch of production was itself equally besieged, making its products unavailable as a line of defence against starvation and famine. Drought dried up pastures, weakening and sometimes killing stock. Droughts were also often accompanied, or immediately followed, by stock diseases which found stock already enfeebled. Now, in 1896, the economy, already strained to the limit by agrarian crises, was suddenly struck by a devastating murrain that threatened the bastion of its already battered economy, cattle.

When cattle secured a critical niche in the lives and history of the BaSotho is still in doubt.[93] As immediate descendants from the Sotho-Tswana sub-grouping of the Bantu-speaking cattle farmers of Southern Africa, however, the BaSotho were definitely cattle-keepers by the time they settled on the valley bisected by the Caledon River (mohokare) from about the 14th century AD.[94] The type of cattle they brought with them was the Sanga, which was a cross between the humpless longhorn type and

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[92]Eldredge, "Drought, Famine and Disease in Nineteenth Century Lesotho".

[93]M. Wilson,, "The Sotho, Venda and Tsonga," in M. Wilson and L. Thompson, ed. The Oxford History of South Africa (Oxford, 1969), vol. 1, 162-63.

[94]Ibid.

the humped longhorn Zebu.[95] Interbreeding, especially with European breeds, however, further adulterated this distinctive breed towards the nondescript brachyceros type that was common in Basutoland on the eve of the rinderpest.

Basutoland was never a cattle-ranching country. Its ecology and climate favoured agro-pastoralism. Animals thrived in the lowlands and the foothills after the spring rains had generated the growth of thick carpets of grass that clothed the valleys and hillsides. The main grass types seem to have been the sweetveld and the sourveld, with the former predominant.[96] Although sour, stock can still eat the sourveld. Its feed value, however, is shorter, about four months, after which it becomes indigestible as it matures. The sweetveld, in its turn, retains its palatability and nutritive value through a longer period. However, it requires a free growing period in the summer months.[97] Its scarcity, fragility, and feed value required institutional mechanisms to regulate its grazing. The BaSotho achieved this through a combination of a system of reserved grazing - maboella - and animal transhumance. The former involved restricting grazing to designated areas while reserving others to allow the sweetveld to grow undisturbed. In the latter, shepherds drove their herds to the mountain region in the summer to exploit the grazing opportunities offered by the still palatable sourveld. It also enabled the sweetveld grass in the lowlands to grow. In the winter months, as temperatures in the mountains dropped, cattle returned to the lowlands to graze on the reserved sweetveld grass. Transhumance also enabled the spatial dispersal of productive activities during the growing season. It thus permitted crops to grow and

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[95]H. Epstein, The Origin of the Domestic Animals of Africa, vols. 1 & 2 ( New York, 1971), especially vol. 1, 410 for distribution of the Sanga type.

[96]J. Melville, and G.A. Kolbe,, "Missionary Tour Through the Country of the Basuutoos", Transactions of the Missionary Society, 52 (October 1, 1929), 221-38.

[97]Cf. J. Guy, "Ecological Factors in the Rise of Shaka and the Zulu Kingdom", 103; D.I. Bransby, "The Ecology of Livestock Production in Natal and Zululand", Paper Presented to the Workshop on Production and Reproduction in the Zulu Kingdom, Pietermaritzburg, 1977, 2-3.

mature undisturbed by stock. In the winter months, after harvest, cattle returned to exploit the grazing potential of stubble.

This ecology in which cattle thrived had all but changed as the century drew to a close. The main influences, closely related, were the processes which we have already surveyed - dwindling availability of land, commercialisation of BaSotho production and the steady demographic growth which occurred in the closing three decades of the century. The expansion of acreage under grain production resulted from commercialisation of production, population growth and the need to colonise virgin land. This intruded into pasturage. So extensive and encroaching did cultivation become by the 1890s that people were said to be "bringing ploughing too close to the roads".[98]

As acreage expanded in the lowlands, displaced homesteads increasingly populated the mountain region, originally reserved for seasonal grazing. In 1891, an Anglican missionary, observing population trends and settlement patterns in the country over the previous ten years noted that "even the remote valleys of the Malutis are rapidly becoming populated". [99] This, however, restricted the viability of this region to relieve pressure on the land in the lowlands. It also replayed the same drama of increasing competition between humans and animals over land that was underway in the lowlands.

The increasing reliance on commercial agriculture and the corresponding decrease of pastoral production encouraged a more permanent settlement, further imposing more pressure on the land. Most of the land was devoted to wheat cultivation to supply the burgeoning urban centres in South Africa with wheaten bread. The climatic and seasonal pattern of wheat cultivation introduced a profound change in the BaSotho

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[98]L.N.A., S11/3, speech of resident commissioner, pitso of 1893.

[99]J. Widdicombe, Fourteen Years, 40-1.

productive cycle, disturbing agro-pastoral equilibrium and compounding the vicious cycle of soil exhaustion and the shrinking of arable land.[100] Wheat was planted in winter when the transhumance cycle required that cattle be grazed on maize and millet stubble. Thus, winter grazing on stubble was increasingly limited.

Despite the increasing difficulties with maintaining agro-pastoral equilibrium, cattle still retained their secure niche in the economic, political, religious and social lives of the BaSotho on the eve of the murrain. The BaSotho settlement pattern still included a kraal for cattle as the central place, firmly confirming the crucial importance of these animals. Although the introduction of new crops had added variety to the BaSotho diet, the most basic relish consisted almost invariably of cow's milk. Soured milk formed the basic relish, while fresh milk was an essential food for growing babies and their mothers.

Beef was also important in the BaSotho diet. Without reliable means to preserve large quantities of meat, people preferred to slaughter smaller stock, notably sheep. Cattle were slaughtered mainly on ritual occasions. These rituals were themselves closely associated with productive activity. The regularity of such occasions within a village, or between adjoining villages seems to have been frequent enough to satisfy the beef needs of the community without extensively slaughtering cattle merely for providing beef.

The BaSotho consumed beef mainly during the winter when low temperatures could preserve it. Most festivities and rituals associated with slaughtering cattle also occurred in winter when the harvest was in and food was more plentiful. Beef was also an essential protein supplement during this season when milk was scarce. Weaker animals that could not survive the harsh conditions of the winter climate were

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[100]For the requisite climatic and environmental factors for successful wheat cultivation, see D.B. Grigg, The Agricultural Systems of the World (Cambridge, 1974).

slaughtered, or died on their own. Old cows were also slaughtered and the beef of those that died of disease or other natural causes was eaten. Thus, a common thought was expressed in the phrase: Lebitla la khomo ke molomo, literally "the tomb of an ox is in the mouth".

Although cattle retained their value as sources of food throughout the century, their value as tractive animals had increased on the eve of the rinderpest. This resulted from the agrarian expansion already referred to. Its basis was the use of the ox-drawn plough in cultivation. The BaSotho attached such importance to the productive capacity of ox-drawn ploughs that the wide diffusion of this technology further unleashed a cultural revolution. It transformed the traditional division of labour, where women dominated cultivation. The wide diffusion and use of the ox-drawn plough brought male labour into cultivation. This reflected the tradition of exclusive male domination over cattle-related activities. Correspondingly, it diminished the practice of polygyny as the plough assumed the economic role of that institution, the acquisition of human labour. Ploughs were so valued that they replaced cattle in marriage transactions during times of cattle shortage.

The tractive power of cattle also dominated the transport sector. Oxen were used as pack animals and mounts although ponies increasingly performed this function. They also fulfilled a crucial role of conveying produce home from the fields, and to local and distant markets.

Their versatility gave cattle their prime value. Besides providing the all-important milk and beef, and the only source of tractive power, the same animals could also be used in other vital productive activities. They provided clothing, their products being used as raw material for other crafts and industries. The dung of cattle fertilised the fields and was used for plastering floors and walls. It also provided fuel.

Cattle, of course, also served as money. Despite extensive commercialisation and the introduction of a cash economy, cattle continued to act as a medium of exchange or security in all financial transactions, they were what the saving bank is to western society. Capital accumulation took the form of an expansion in cattle holding. Cattle stored the entire wealth of the family and the nation in movable property. "We have grain and cattle only", implored a senior counsellor challenging the colonial administration's insistence on cash payment of the hut-tax, "we do not understand money".[101]

Even the cash earned from migrant labour was invested in the accumulation of cattle. The South African historical literature on labour migrancy has paid undue attention to the later migration to the diamond and gold mines, thus linking labour migrancy exclusively to factors like the growing desire to accumulate firearms and ammunition, the introduction of a cash economy, the spread of, and general urge for, European manufactured goods, the effects of colonial military defeat, territorial losses and colonial taxation, environmental and climatic deterioration, and the decline of rural productive capacity. Long before the existence of labour centres for the South African mines, many individual BaSotho worked on white farms in the Free State and on public works in the Cape Colony. Here payment was generally in stock, or in cash which could be invested in the purchase of stock, especially cattle.[102]

The later labour migrancy to the mines was also influenced by the same logic. Originally, the main incentive seems to have been the desire of chiefs to accumulate firearms and ammunition.[103] Yet money, to invest in acquiring factors of production, especially cattle and ploughs, also featured prominently. Moreover, BaSotho

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[101]L.N.A., S11/3, speech of Setha Matete, pitso of 1888.

[102]Kimble, "Towards an Understanding of the Political Economy of Lesotho", 162-190.

[103]G.20-1881, colonial annual report for Quthing, 13-14; C.0. 517/355, encl. in high commissioner to the secretary of state for the colonies, 28 February 1902.

labourers did not make exclusive choices of their destinations. Those who travelled to the mining centres and those who worked on public works or on white farms were often the same men, astutely gaining different advantages from the various labour markets. A young man might prefer working on white farms in the Free State. He might then choose to go to public works or the mines. While moving to and from the mines, men might do stints on white farms or on public works to supplement their wages, or to earn stock. The example of the two sons of one Morokane is not atypical:

> In the year 1881, I sent my two sons to Kimberley for the purpose of procuring employment. Shortly afterwards they were returning home when they met with Mr. Grobler. Mr. Grobler said he wished to hire them to work on his farm. For three years I searched for my children but was unable to find them. At last I found my sons at Elands Kop, Bethlehem district, O. Fr. State. I asked Mr. Grobler why he had stolen my children. He said it did not matter now how he had possessed himself of them as he was paying them good wages. He showed me the cattle he intended to pay the boys with. He showed me two cows with calf and said they were mine for the boys.[104]

It was, however, in their role as a means of production and reproduction of labour power that cattle acquired a preponderant value as an investment. They were used to marry wives, who provided actual productive labour and reproduced it through reproductive capacity.[105] Cattle created and reproduced labour and society itself. This

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[104]L.N.A., S7/6/1, Morokane vs Grobler, court of sub inspector of the Basutoland Mounted Police, Butha-Buthe, 8 September 1885.

[105]For some of the well-known works on gender, production and reproduction, see B. Bozzoli, "Marxism and South African Studies", Journal of Southern African Studies, 9, 2 (1983), 139-71; Eldredge, A South African Kingdom, 101-16, 126-46; Eldredge, "Women in Production: The Economic Role of Women in Nineteenth Century Lesotho", Signs, 16, 4 (1991), 707-31; M. Epprecht, "Gender and History in Southern Africa: A Lesotho Metanarrative", Canadian Journal of African Studies, 30, 2 (1996), 183-213; J. Guy, "Analysing Pre-capitalist Societies in Southern Africa", Ibid., 14, 1 (1987), 18-37; Guy, "Gender Oppression in Southern Africa's Precapitalist Societies", in C. Walker (ed), Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945 (Bloomington, 1990); M. Kinsman, "Beasts of Burden: The Subordination of Southern Tswana Women, ca. 1800-1840", Journal of Southern African Studies, 10, 1 (1993), 39-54.

intrinsic connection between women, cattle, production and reproduction emerges distinctly in a remarkable interview between a group of visiting missionaries and a MoSotho chief in the 1880s. The chief made a fascinating statement that summed up the primary value of women in a labour-intensive economy:

> "**Question**: If a person kills another, what do you do to him?
>
> **Answer**: He is fined **ten** head of cattle if he killed a **female**, but if he has killed a male he pays eight head of cattle.
>
> **Question**: What is the difference? Are they not all human beings?
>
> **Answer**: A **female** person **makes people**."[106]

"It is evident that in this system, the woman represent capital", a French missionary observed cogently on the eve of the rinderpest,

> though immobilised, it is true, but nevertheless capable of bearing enormous interest since.... each of her daughters is the equivalent of a herd of cattle probably of the same value as the herd that they had originally given for herself. For a Mosotho, therefore, to marry is the best investment which he can make, and the more wives a male has, naturally, the better it will be[107]

In addition to creating labour power and reproducing it, cattle also perpetuated the lineage - leloko.[108] A wife was married to bear healthy children to the husband's lineage, and upon divorce, the children of the marriage remained with their father's lineage. Female children, in turn, were similarly valued. Their potential lay in attracting cattle to their own lineage. Her brothers, including other male members of her lineage, used these cattle to marry and perpetuate the lineage. "Leloko ke ntho e kholo" (perpetuating the lineage is fundamental), stated chief Masupha at a pitso to

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[106] L.N.A., S3/7/20

[107] Germond, Chronicles, 437.

[108] For a detailed discussion of this role of cattle among African societies in Southern Africa, see A. Kuper, Wives for Cattle (London, 1982).

discuss the vexing problem of Christianised wives who returned to their maiden homes with their children upon the death of their husbands or divorce. "Ha re nyale mosali, re nyala popelo" (We do not marry a woman, we marry her womb", affirmed the paramount chief's counsellor at the same pitso.[109]

Cattle linked lineages together in an endless and enduring reciprocal relationship. They belonged to the lineage, and several members of the lineage contributed the bohali cattle. This linked members of the husband's lineage to those of his wife. Settlement of the full complement of bohali was seldom ever effected, rendering it virtually impossible to settle lineage debts thus established.[110]

Cattle also determined economic, political and social status. There clearly was inequality in the level and extent of cattle acquisition and ownership across the social spectrum. The great chiefs remained the richest cattle owners, followed by heads of junior houses, chiefs of clans amalgamated into the BaSotho nation and village chiefs.[111]They used their wealth in cattle to exploit and consolidate the system of cattle trusteeship - mafisa. It involved the loaning of cattle to those who did not possess this asset. The tenant possessed usufruct of the stock. Mafisa was a very effective method of investment. It ensured that the owner's cattle were territorially and regionally distributed. This guaranteed optimum exploitation of the best pasture. It spread the risk of cattle losses through disease. It provided for the herding and care

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[109]Leselinyana, 1 July 1888, speeches of chief Masupha and Ramabilikoe at Matsieng pitso of 21 June 1888..

[110]On lineage debts and how they were transformed by commercialisation and colonial law in Zimbabwe, see R. Smith, "Money breaks Blood Ties: Chiefs' Courts and the Transition from Lineage Debt to Commercial Debt in Sipolilo District", Journal of Southern African Studies, 24, 3 (1998), 509-526; on endless litigation over lobola debts among the BaSotho, see, S. Poulter, Family Law and Litigation in Basotho Society (Oxford, 1976).

[111]For an idea of Chief Lerotholi's wealth in cattle, see, L.N.A., S3/5/5/4, Lerotholi-Maama Papers; For Chief Jonathan's large estate, see, P. Hadley (ed), Doctor to Basutho, Boer and Briton, 1877-1906: Memories of Dr. Henry Taylor (Cape Town, 1972), 42-3; also L.N.A., S3/5/13/6.

of the owner's cattle at no cost to himself. It also enabled the owner of the cattle thus loaned to attract followers and to sustain support through dispensing patronage.

Within the homestead, cattle defined gender and masculine identities. Their ownership and control determined hegemonic and subordinate genders and masculinities.[112] Institutions of social relation vested property rights in the hands of male heads of homestead. Cattle and activities associated with them were the exclusive preserve of males. Females occupied the most subordinate position in the complex network of property relations. Despite their crucial contribution to the production and reproduction of cattle wealth, women were strictly excluded from cattle ownership, and from cattle-related activities.

There was differentiation among males. Although the unmarried men contributed significantly towards the requisite labour for the production of cattle, that asset remained the property of the head of the homestead. A young man did acquire access to cattle mainly as gifts after initiation, but this would have been only a limited acquisition. There is no evidence that fathers allocated portions of their herd to their sons during the former's lifetime. Even after fathers had passed their productive years, their sons had limited access to their herds, if at all. Only at the death of his father did a son gain any significant access to cattle. Yet even then, considerations of seniority within the patrilineage ensured that brothers, uncles and widows of the deceased had prior claim to the inheritance.

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[112]For a classic and persuasive analysis of masculinities, including an extensive review of the literature, see R.W. Connell, Masculinities (Cambridge, 1994); On the construction and expression of masculine and gender identities specifically in Southern African, see the "special issue on masculinities in Southern Africa", Journal of Southern African Studies, 24, 4 (1998), especially the introductory essay by R. Morrell, "Of Boys and Men: Masculinity and Gender in Southern African Studies", 605-630; On the salient caution that women in African societies were not subordinated as one universal gender, but that there was significant stratification even within this gender category, see, S. Hanretta, "Women, Marginality and the Zulu State: Women's Institutions and Power in the Early Nineteenth Century", Journal of African History, 39, 3 (1998), 389-416.

Class relations relating to the production and circulation of cattle within the homestead were the microcosm of those operating at the level of the state. The ruling elite drew their authority as custodians of custom and as lawmakers because they dominated the entire base of the economy, especially the ownership and distribution of cattle. Thus, they generated laws and customs that reproduced their class and consolidated their dominance over the productive process and productive relations.

These laws and customs, however, were pliable, adjusted to the changing demands of the time. For example, the amount and type of admissible bohali varied across time and social status, and was also influenced by economic vicissitudes. In the mid 1860s, for example, when cattle were devastated by the lung sickness epizootic, bohali was negotiated through an I.O.U system, as would happen after the rinderpest. It involved depositing stone pebbles, which would be redeemed later after successful restocking. The panzootic also affected the earlier custom of replacing bohali cattle that died in the custody of the bride's kin. A defendant, sued for replacement of cattle that had died in the custody of the bride's kin, reminded the plaintiff of this convenience in 1879: "in the olden times, it was our custom to replace cattle that died, but that it was no longer our custom as the plaintiff himself knows".[113]

Undoubtedly, these laws and customs were distorted during decades of economic change, missionary and colonial impact.[114] While these initiatives did challenge BaSotho social relations, their impact was not immediate and absolute. The Cape colonial administration lacked effective means of enforcing its regulations amid

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[113]Ibid., unreferenced, evidence of Ramabilikoe and Pholwane, respectively, in Pholwane vs Salomone, undated, no. 75 of 1879.

[114]For details of attempts by missionaries and colonial officials to restructure BaSotho social relations, see Cape of Good Hope, Report and Evidence of Commission on Native Laws and Customs of the Basutos, 1873, C.O. 48/441, regulations enclosed In Philip Wodehouse to Buckingham, no. 31, 2 May 1868; Bradlow, "The Cape Government's Rule of Basutoland", 119-217; Burman, Chiefdom Politics; Report of the South African Native Affairs Commission, 1903-5, vol. iii.

overwhelming defiance. Colonial officials were themselves careful to avoid too radical changes, fearing that it might provoke violent resistance. Thus, many colonial regulations were often half-heartedly enforced, or people simply flouted them.

Imperial rule from 1884 deliberately reversed the policies of the previous Cape colonial administration. The new imperial policy officially recognised the traditional political structure. To consolidate colonialism-on-the-cheap, as many studies have shown,[115] imperial officials firmly upheld some traditional political and social institutions in a neutered form, while distorting others. Similarly, to maintain social order, they collaborated with elders and chiefs as happened elsewhere in similar colonial situations.[116] Missionaries, especially those of the French church, who had spearheaded most of the earlier attempts at social restructuring, lost institutional support for their intervention in BaSotho affairs when imperial rule was re-established.

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[115]J. Banaji, "Modes of Production in a Materialist Conception of History," Capital and Class, 7 (1977), 1-44; for summaries of the debate on "articulation of modes-of-production", see A. Foster-Carter, "Can we articulate articulation?," in J. Clammer (ed.), The New Economic Anthropology (London, 1978), 217-231; J. Taylor, From Modernisation to Modes of Production: A Critique of the Sociologies of Development and Underdevelopment (New York, 1979); H. Wolpe, (ed.), The Articulation of Modes of Production (London, 1980); R. Chilcote and D. Johnson (eds.), Theories of Development: Mode of Production or Dependency? (Beverly Hills, 1983).

[116]See among others, T. Barnes, "The Fight for Control of African Women's Mobility in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1900-1939", Signs, 17 (1992), 586-608; M. Chanock, "Making Customary Law: Men, Women, and Courts in Colonial Northern Rhodesia, in M. Hay and M. Wright (eds), African Women and the Law: Historical Perspectives (Boston, 1982); Chanock, Law, Custom and Social Order: The Colonial Experience in Malawi and Zambia (Cambridge, 1985); L. Manicom, "Ruling Relations: Rethinking State and Gender in South African History", Journal of African History, 33 (1992), 441-65; K. Mann, "Women's Rights in Law and Practice: Marriage and Dispute Settlement in Colonial Lagos", in Hay and Wrigh, African Women and the Law, K. Mann, and C. Roberts (eds.) Law in Colonial Africa (Portsmouth, New Jersey, 1991); E. Schmidt, "Negotiated Spaces and Contested Terrain: Men, Women, and the Law in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1890-1939", Journal of Southern African Studies, 16, 4 (1990), 622-48; E. Schmidt, "Patriarchy, Capitalism and the Colonial State in Zimbabwe", Signs, 16 (1991), 732-56; C. Summers "Intimate Colonialism: The Imperial Production of Reproduction in Uganda, 1907-1925", Signs, 16, 4 (1991), 787-807.

Most of the challenge against established social relations came from within - from young men and women. They expressed the conflict thus engendered through what the elders, chiefs, colonial officials and missionaries echoed as deterioration of morality. It was expressed in the increased incidence of adultery, divorce, premarital pregnancy, infanticide, seduction of young women, runaway spouses, and single parenthood.[117] Inter-generational conflicts abounded in the closing quarter of the century. They were reflected in the rising pattern of labour migrancy of young men, and, more dramatically, in the increasing restlessness of younger chiefs.

Cattle had a central place in the lives of the BaSotho, for whom these animals were objects of intense emotional attachment. Men were socialised into the activities surrounding cattle from a very early age.[118] They started herding calves early, soon graduating into cattle herders. When they returned home with the cattle, they stayed with their male elders at the cattle kraal and had their meals there. The cattle kraal was a central arena for engendering boys into men. They were responsible for collecting the fuel for fires at the cattle kraal. Here, boys were taught responsibility and hardiness, and were praised for masculine escapades like collecting fuel, running errands and for rising early to make the first fire. They also learnt male crafts and industries - weaving ropes for thatching, constructing baskets, and tanning.

From the cattle kraal herd-boys proceeded to communal sleeping quarters designated especially and exclusively for them, and a boy who slept at his home was shamed. Conversation often centred on cattle and the experience of herding. Brave action to protect cattle was a common topic of conversation. Boys also taught one another riddles, proverbs and tales often related to cattle.

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[117]See e.g., S. Burman, "Fighting a two-pronged attack: The Changing Legal Status of Women in Cape-ruled Basutoland, 1872-1884", in Walker (ed.), Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945, 48-75.

[118]Most of what follows was gleaned from an unpublished manuscript by S.L. Moremi, Balisana Ba Lesotho (BaSotho Herdboys), 1944.

Male circumcision centred on cattle. A boy on the verge of circumcision was called leqai, and his socialisation was in part geared to enhancing his herding capabilities. It also taught him everything connected to animal husbandry. Circumcision itself began and ended with boys slaughtering a bull with their bare hands. During their initiation, the husbanding of cattle was further taught. After initiation, the boys returned to herding awhile, soon signifying their intention to marry and begin new homesteads. Here, too, cattle became the medium of alerting the elders to the boy's designs. A boy wishing to marry released the calves on their mothers at dawn, depriving his family of the essential milk. Marriage, itself, was contracted through cattle.

And so, cattle were central to the life of an individual. It is hardly surprising, then, that relations between humans and cattle were so close. Human relations with domestic animals, especially cattle, in nineteenth century BaSotho society were characteristically African. They contrasted sharply with western notions at a similar stage of development that cultivated a more distanced view of domestic animals. The BaSotho had more intimate relations with their animals.[119] They displayed this attitude in several significant ways. Cattle were not regarded as ordinary livestock, but assumed personality, even superhuman characteristics. A beast was, as the BaSotho fondly referred to it, molimo o nko e metsi (a God with a wet nose).

Each animal had a special and distinctive name. Many of these names were descriptive terms, referring to colour, bearing, physical characteristics, or

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[119]See, e.g., K. Thomas, Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England, 1500-1800 (London, 1983); For literature on the "warming-up" of human-animal relations in western society, see S.R. Kellert, & J.K. Berry, A Bibliography of Human/Animal Relations (Lanham, 1985); also the special issue on "The Role of Animals in Human Society", Journal of Social Issues, 49, i (1993); For a characteristically African view of domestic animals, see C. Levi-Strauss, The Savage Mind (Chicago, 1966), especially 205; For a discussion of the clash of differences between Western and African notions of domestic animals, and how these differences influenced white attitudes of Africans, see, P.D. Morgan, "Slaves and Livestock in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica: Vineyard Pen, 1750-51", William and Mary Quarterly, Lii, I (1995), 47-76.

temperament. Others, however, were often anthropomorphic. Praise poems were created for cattle, inspired by the deep affection for the animals. Praise songs for humans, especially chiefs, used symbols and metaphors derived from cattle.[120] The common metaphor for the handsome features of a chief, for example, used the symbolism of a female cow. For example, Chief Posholi's praise singer admires him as:

> **Khomo e tolotsana e ka khaka linala,**
> **Khomo ea Ramothele e khoalipana,**
> **E tolotsana e ka khaka linala.**[121]
>
> The white-spotted black cow is like a guinea fowl,
> The white-spotted black cow of Ramothele,
> It is white-spotted the cow,
> It is like the guinea fowl of the claws.

The special place held by cattle in the minds and hearts of the BaSotho is illustrated perhaps most strikingly by the people's perception of colour. Although SeSotho language, like most Bantu languages, struggles to distinguish intermediate shades of colour and colour patches and patterns, this difficulty does not exist when the BaSotho describe complicated colour combinations in cattle hides. Consequently, besides original words describing the basic distinction of white, brown, black, and yellow, all other words in the language describing colour combinations derive from those used for colours of cattle hides.[122]

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[120]M. Damane & P. Saunders, Lithoko: Sotho Praise Poems (Oxford, 1974); Z.D. Mangoaela, Lithoko tsa Marena a Basotho (Praise-Poems of the Chiefs of the Basotho) (Morija, 1921).

[121]Mangoaela, Lithoko, 11.

[122]A Mabille, Sesuto-English Dictionary (Morija, 1924); Cf. for Tswana in A. Sandilands, Introduction to Tswana (London, 1953); For Ndebele, J.W. Brownlee, Popular Ndebele Descriptions relating to Cattle Colour, Patterns and Horn Shapes (Harare, n.d.).

Thus, despite profound, albeit ambivalent transformations throughout the last half of the century, cattle still played a preponderant role in the lives of the BaSotho on the eve of the rinderpest. As the panzootic approached the country, even an exceptionally empathetic perception of a missionary in the country still only touched the tip of the iceberg. Predicting the "obvious flood of miseries and privations" awaiting the people, he bewailed:

> No more cattle, no more milk,
> What shall we eat?
>
> No more cattle, no more fuel,
> What shall we use for making fire?
>
> No more cattle, no more skin clothes,
> What shall we wear?
>
> No more cattle no more marriages,
> How shall we marry?
>
> No more cattle, no more ploughing,
> What shall we eat and where shall we get money?[123]

The BaSotho themselves fearfully awaited their turn. "We are Basutho and have no money, we live by cattle", asserted chief Seeiso at the 1896 pitso which discussed the impending catastrophe. "The loss of [our] cattle", lamented the paramount chief's counsellor, "is the death blow of the Basotho nation".[124]

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[123]H. Dieterlen, "La peste bovine au sud de l'Afrique", Journal des Missions Evangelique, 1897, 15-16.

[124]L.N.A., S11/3, pitso of 1 October 1896, speeches of chief Seeiso and Nehemiah, respectively.

# CHAPTER 3

## THE RINDERPEST IN BASUTOLAND

When the news of the approaching catastrophe reached Basutoland, a massive effort was set apace to keep the disease at bay. The anti-rinderpest campaign devised by imperial officials was, by regional standards, commendable. In August 1896, Lagden attended the International Rinderpest Conference at Vryburg. Here, he singled himself out by rejecting the conference's resolution to destroy all cattle already infected and those suspected of being infectious. "It is not desirable that cattle should be slaughtered", he cautioned, "seeing that such a course has hitherto proved futile in other parts of South Africa".[1]

Lagden carried out anti-rinderpest strategies with admirable zeal. Soon after returning from the rinderpest conference, he briefed the paramount chief and his counsellors on suggested measures to keep the rinderpest at bay. These included severing all communications with infected regions and enforcing regulations stopping all external traffic in animals and vehicles. He also recommended fumigating all travellers coming into the country and controlling traffic by proclaiming specified ports of entry. He printed in SeSotho general instructions for public guidance and had them approved by the paramount chief-in-council. Lagden further proposed to summon all district commissioners, representatives of Christian missions, traders and the nation's representatives, to a conference. This would devise measures for transporting essential supplies should the need arise summarily to close the borders. He brought forward the annual pitso to "call upon the nation to co-operate with us".

Lagden also briefed government officials, missionaries and traders. The briefing recommended limiting traffic to principal ports while closing all extra ports of entry.

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[1]L.N.A., S8/2/25, resident commissioner to paramount chief, 24 November 1896.

It suggested guarding the entire border especially ports of entry, fumigating visitors entering the country, and declaring a five-mile zone along the border from which to exclude cattle. It also reaffirmed the policy that shooting infected cattle was inadvisable. This took the cue from an impassioned appeal by the resident commissioner:

> It will be asked, I dare say, how we shall carry out our measures. You know we have no powerful police, or striking force in the country. BaSotho are more easily led than driven. Their intelligence admits of appeal to it. What I have been lately trying, and will continue is to impress upon the native mind the necessity of earnestly listening to our advice and strictly carrying out the measures we may determine upon. If we succeed, and I have hope of it, in arousing their conscience, it will be of more value than a thousand border guards along our extensive line.[2]

The resident commissioner submitted these resolutions to the national annual pitso. "It is useless you depending solely upon government and being indifferent or careless yourselves," he urged the assembled populace:

> you may pray but God helps those who help themselves. Our energies will be lost unless you co-operate with us and act without hesitation. In preparing to combat this disease you should sink all tribal differences and unite with one voice and hand. We shall advise you the best measures to adopt. If you despise or neglect this advice and suffer in consequence you must blame yourselves. Your cattle are your life. We wish to preserve them for you. We have self-help only to rely upon.[3]

A report by the missionary paper, Leselinyana, avowed that the pitso adopted these measures unanimously.[4] Lagden's own official report of the pitso impressed the staff of the Colonial Office in London. "It [the report of the pitso] gives a vivid picture of the national meeting in an hour of great peril", the under-secretary for colonies

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[2]Lagden Papers, Mss. Afr. S. 212, Box 4, Lagden's speech at Rinderpest Conference, reported in Cape Times Weekly, date unknown, press cutting in Lagden Papers.

[3]L.N.A., S11/3, speech of Lagden, pitso of 1st October 1896.

[4]Leselinyana, 5 October 1896.

enthused, "and of their complete confidence in, and readiness to obey, the Queen's government in the attempt to keep out the disease". He went on to pour encomiums on the imperial administration in the country:

> I do not think that in the British Empire there is a parallel to the government of Basutoland where we have established order and won the complete confidence of the native at a cost entirely borne by themselves.[5]

The proposed measures immediately came into operation. In October 1896, the imperial administration closed borders with the Free State, the Cape and Natal, leaving only selected points of entry opened under stringent conditions. It cleared zones in each district, and ordered the exclusion of cattle from the "free zones". It advised the removal of all cattle to mountain sanctuaries for isolation. By the end of October Lagden had completed a tour of Northern Basutoland, where he personally inspected the anti-rinderpest projects.[6]

The key to these measures was the absence of coercion. They differed from the baleful seventeenth century plague regulations described by Defoe in London, or the harsh and coercive regulations imposed by the Romanov, Habsburg and Hohenzollern autocracies during the European encounter with cholera in the early 1830s.[7] They neither bore any resemblance to the equally Spartan measures adopted by neighbouring governments towards Africans. The reason was the lack of a strong military force to oversee coercive anti-epidemic measures. The imperial administration depended on the co-operation of the BaSotho themselves.

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[5]C.O., 417/186, Minute by Meade (undated), on high commissioner to secretary of state for colonies, 30 October 1896.

[6]L.N.A., S4/1/4, Lagden's Diary, 1896, entry for 31 October and 4 November 1896; also S5/13, Resident commissioner to High commissioner, 30 October 1896.

[7]D. Defoe, A Journal of the Plague (London, 1722); For a survey of the universal relaxation of these measures during the second European encounter with the cholera at mid-century, see Evans, "Epidemics and Revolutions."

BaSotho chiefs initially seemed willing to co-operate. Soon after the national rinderpest pitso in August, the paramount chief met with the principal chiefs at his headquarters in Matsieng. They proposed a joint action against the spread of the disease. Chiefs were to appoint vigilance committees to carry out anti-rinderpest precautions. They were also urged to establish teams to guard the borders and isolate every sick animal. They agreed to co-operate with imperial officials in keeping the disease at bay.[8]

Various factors, however, prevented the fulfillment of these well-intentioned designs. The paramount chief was indisposed for much of the last quarter of 1896.[9] He was thus unable to take personal command of the campaign. When he did engage in matters of state, he was taken up with dynastic disputes. These flared more prominently during this period of impending crisis. These dynastic feuds militated against a cooperative effort. The paramount chief's commitment to carry out measures devised by distrusted imperial officials now exacerbated the feuds. He became alienated from the more conservative chiefs. Thus, when Lagden lambasted Lerotholi for failing to mobilise his subordinate chiefs, [10] the latter protested his inability to command obedience among subordinate chiefs, claiming that "they do not admit my being a chief and therefore ignore me and refuse to carry out my instructions". Further, he reported that his attempts to carry out the regulations proposed by the imperial government had earned him the odium of aping "a white man". His enemies now dubbed him "a white black".[11]

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[8]See for example, L.N.A., S5/13, resident commissioner to high commissioner, 8 October 1896.

[9]Ibid., S4/1/4, resident commissioner's Diaries, entry for 28 and 29 October 4. 7 and 9 November 1896; also S5/13, resident commissioner to high commissioner, 15 December 1896.

[10]Ibid., S8/2/2/4, resident commissioner to paramount chief, 23 November 1896.

[11]Ibid., S7/3/12, paramount chief to resident commissioner, 24 November 1896.

Most of the senior chiefs, also, seem to have pinned all their hopes on the initiatives of imperial officials. "Whatever orders I get from government", presaged the paramount chief. I will carry out":

> I will work hard, this fat body that you see before you will be worn thin by work in a single day. I am the arm that will carry out the work which government orders to be done.

"We are your [resident commissioner] cattle," confirmed the next most senior chief, Jonathan,

> We hear about this disease. We wish to know what we must do to prevent it coming in. We have always been protected and taken care of. Some of us are stupid and some imprudent. Don't get tired on account of our ways. We are the government's flocks. We are caretakers of cattle and will carry out your orders. See for us and tell us where to take our cattle.[12]

Masupha, the third next senior chief, did not even attend the pitso, drawing sneering criticism from a speaker attending the briefing.[13]

The anti-rinderpest campaign had its merits, but also practical weaknesses. The measures were neither stringent enough to ensure the country's protection, nor flexible enough to reassure the populace of the administration's good intentions. Fearful of the popular discontent they had evoked, the imperial administration carried out the measures cautiously. The measures also depended on local community support. Individuals from communities that doubted the existence of the disease policed cordons and borders. It is unlikely, therefore, that those who saw no clear reason for such cordons would have been diligent to enforce them. Besides, believing the unlikely tidings that the imperial government had suddenly taken an interest in their welfare was difficult for the populace.

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[12]Ibid., S11/3, speeches of Lerotholi and Jonathan, pitso of 1 October 1896.

[13]Ibid., speech of Snei Moshoeshoe, pitso of 1 October 1896; also Leselinyana, 15 October, 1896, speech of Snei Moshoeshoe, pitso of 1 October 1896.

Restricting the movement of people and stock was also difficult because the value of cattle lay in part in their mobility. Cattle had to move between families, villages and regions. They were the medium in marriage and financial transactions; and various social activities were associated with them. The problem was exacerbated when people were restless, prone to move about at the slightest suspicion of an outbreak of the disease.

The rinderpest also coincided with other climatic disasters; further complicating efforts to restrict stock movements. The year 1896 had brought with it a universal drought reputed to have been the most severe in living memory. This impelled widespread migrations in search of pasture and water. Climatic disasters also spurred people to move both within and out of the country in search of food. There was also the massive repatriation of BaSotho labourers from various labour centres in South Africa. They returned home amid rumours that their country was under threat. The movement of these men with their stock acquired in areas already infected, hastened the spread of the rinderpest.[14] Besides, the country had become irrevocably incorporated into the regional commercial and labour nexus, rendering it especially vulnerable to the movement of goods and people during epidemics.

Furthermore, the whole length of the country was a gaping hole in the national defence against epidemic disease. Basutoland was especially vulnerable because territories where there had already been outbreaks of the disease surrounded it. A large part of the country's long border had no natural barriers, and there were meagre resources to protect it. The imperial administration had never anticipated the likelihood of such an emergency.

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[14]L.N.A., S11/3, speech of chief Seeiso, pitso of 1 October 1896; also speeches of Nehemiah, Philip, Setha and Pshatlella.

The supposedly superior European knowledge of science and medicine was not useful either in this crisis. The lack of epidemiological knowledge in South Africa was replicated, in its worst form, in Basutoland. Public facilities, for people and animals, did not exist. As late as in 1899, patients could be treated at one of only four medical centres in the country, each with an average of six beds.[15] Given these meagre facilities for people, one can only imagine the extent of neglect of veterinary services. When the cattle murrain broke out, there was no trained veterinarian in the country. The battle against the disease began with one veterinarian lent by the Cape government.[16]

Nor was imperial assistance forthcoming. In the 1890s, Britain was the centre of veterinary education and knowledge with some of the best established veterinary schools in the world. The oldest was the Royal Veterinary College, founded in 1791. In 1823, the Royal (Dick) Veterinary College was founded, and the establishment of the Glasgow Veterinary College followed in 1862.[17]. Most of the veterinarians who now had to cope with the rinderpest in South Africa had been trained in Britain: Hutcheon (Cape Colony), Gray (Rhodesia), Watkins-Pitchford (Natal), to name only the most prominent.

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[15]C.O., 417/297, report of chief medical officer, year ending 31 December 1899, in Sloley to Chamberlain, 7 May, 1900.

[16]L.N.A., S5/15, resident commissioner to high commissioner, 7 September 1897.

[17]E. Cotchin, The Royal Veterinary College, London: A Bicentenary History (London, 1900); I. Pattison, The British Veterinary Profession: 1785-1948 (London, 1984); Pattison, John MacFadyen: A Great British Veterinarian (London, 1901); For the early history of the Glasgow Veterinary School, see M. Moss, "The Origins of the Glasgow Veterinary School", University of Glasgow Veterinary Newsletter, issue 1997, at http://www.gla.uk/acad/vet/news/no.5/origins,html

Yet, the imperial government, including British institutions like the British Board of Agriculture and the Royal Veterinary College,[18] failed to assist its South African colonies, including Basutoland, with veterinary expertise. This was despite the development of the process of "professionalizing" the British government that had started long before the 1890s.[19] It involved the increasing reliance of the civil service on the advice of experts. Even six years after the outbreak of the rinderpest, when East Coast Fever threatened South Africa, the staff of the Colonial Office was hard put to identify a suitable pathologist to undertake research on the disease. They had not even heard of Professor John MacFadyen, a pathologist who was to be recognized as the first modern veterinary scientist in Britain. He had been principal of the oldest veterinary college in the country - the Royal Veterinary College - since 1894.[20] When the British high commissioner in South Africa requested the Colonial Office to send him to South Africa to study the disease, a staffer minuted as follows:

> I think we [should] first find out something privately about this Professor. It is my experience that such proposals are sometimes made, quite wildly, on hearsay evidence. Make private inquiry at the Agricultural Department - about Professor MacFadyen [sic]".[21]

Britain had also acquired extensive experience in confronting the same epizootic that now threatened its South African colonies only two decades before. Rinderpest devastated British cattle between 1865 and 1867, an episode ranked the most dramatic in British agricultural history in the nineteenth century.[22] Yet the only advice imperial

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[18]On the contribution of the Royal Society to the development of science in the nineteenth-century, see M. Hall, All Scientists Now: The Royal Society in the 19th Century (Cambridge, 1984).

[19]R. MacLeod (ed.), Government and Expertise: Specialists, Administration and Professionals, 1860-1919 (Cambridge, 1988).

[20]Pattison, John MacFadyean.

[21]C.O., 417/344/36657.

[22]Orwin & Whetham, History of British Agriculture, 200-2; J.R. Fisher, "The Economic Effects of Cattle Disease in Britain and its Containment, 1850-1900", Agricultural History;liv

officials in Basutoland received from the Board of Agriculture was to slaughter all infected cattle including those that had merely been exposed to infection.[23]

Epidemiological knowledge among the BaSotho was not lacking. Fragmentary evidence suggests that they were not ignorant of the basic principles of contagion and quarantine. During an unprecedented outbreak of smallpox in 1884, for example, BaSotho chiefs had adopted stringent measures for the isolation of the victims. Whole villages were quarantined, the disease dying out in some villages with the last inhabitant.[24] Another strategy was to quarantine infected or suspected victims in the mountain sanctuaries where they allowed the disease to run its course.[25] In 1892 when foot and mouth disease hit the country, the cattle were quarantined in the mountains.[26] Charles Currey, under-secretary for agriculture in the Cape, observed that during an epidemic of horse-sickness some years before, the loss was modest. This was because their owners had driven the horses into the mountains, where the water was pure and untainted by germs.[27]

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(1980), 278-94; Fisher, "British Physicians, Medical Science and the Cattle Plague, 1865-66", Bulletin of the History of Medicine, 67 (1993); Fisher, "Not Quite a Profession: The Aspirations of Veterinary Surgeons in Britain in the Mid-nineteenth-century", Historical Research, ;xvi (1993), 284-7; Hall, "The Great Cattle Plague of 1865", 259-66; M. Worboys, "Germ Theories of Disease and British Veterinary Medicine, 1860-1890", Medical History, xxxv (1991), 308-27.

[23]L.N.A., BGB 1/21, "Memorandum on Measures to be adopted for Suppression of the Disease Known as Rinderpest, or Zambesi Fever in Cattle", encl. in under-secretary for agriculture, London, to the Department of Agriculture, Cape of Good Hope, 19 March 1896, in L.N.A., S3/1/5/8, high commissioner to resident commissioner, 13 January 1897.

[24]U.S.P.G. Archives, 1884 B, annual report of Rev. Stenson.

[25]L.N.A. S11/3, minutes of pitso of lst October 1896, see especially speeches of Chiefs Seeiso, Jonathan, Nehemiah, Philip and Pshatlela.

[26]Ibid., S7/1/2/8, assistant commissioner, Leribe, to resident commissioner, 22 December 1892.

[27]C. Currey, in Southern Post and Border, 7 November 1896.

During the rinderpest outbreak, the BaSotho did display knowledge of contagion and epidemiology. They did view the rinderpest as a contagious disease. At the rinderpest pitso of October 1896, speakers drew attention to this aspect. They understood that the disease would spread from region to region and through physical contact. They realised that the main vehicle for its spread would be migrants returning from the labour centres with infected cattle, and transport riders crossing into the country with infected teams. One speaker observed that the disease could "be brought by clothes and boots".[28]

However, a new, unknown disease would test the prevailing interpretative system, imposing strain on what remained of traditional epidemiological expertise. Although people could explain why one neighbourhood after another was infected the yearning was for an explanation of the original source of the disease. It is hardly surprising that an overwhelming and inexplicable disease, like the rinderpest, taxed every one's explanatory faculties - both black and white, literate or illiterate. Moreover, the dramatic impact of the rinderpest created a crisis atmosphere, a sure source of conspiracy theories. Furthermore, in the grip of an inexplicable epidemic, a system of surveillance, fundamental for disease control, did not exist. Gaining information about the disease and the sources of contamination was difficult.

Yet, against all odds, it was to the credit of the country, its authorities and people, that the outbreak of the disease was delayed for as long as it was. By the end of October 1896, the murrain was raging in Winburg and Senekal, southwest of the BaSotho border with the Free State. By mid-November, it had broken out in Rouxville on the southeast border, thus encircling Basutoland in a flanking movement.[29] Soon,

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[28]L.N.A., S11/3, minutes of pitso of 1st October 1896, especially speeches of Chiefs Seeiso, Jonathan, Nehemiah and Philip and Pshatlela.

[29]L.N.A., S4/1/4, resident commissioner's Diaries, entry for 26 October & 11 November 1896.

afterwards, it streaked through a strictly imposed cordon, suddenly appearing in two villages in the northern district of Leribe.

Considering the elaborate campaigns that imperial officials and neighbouring states mounted, this first outbreak puzzled everyone. However, it was snuffed out before it could spread. Strict quarantine measures and the shooting of infected cattle on the orders of the district chief stalled the outbreak for a while. The fight against the disease seems to have been more effective at the local than national level. Colonial officials attributed this success to the district chief Jonathan. "Upon his own responsibility", he shot all the sick cattle and drove those still healthy into the quarantine area.[30]

So effective were these measures, in the short term, that the mortality of the disease was slight. Although the outbreak occurred on the Phuthiatsana River separating the two districts of Leribe and Berea, the disease did not appear in the latter district. It testified to the efficacy of the stringent quarantine measures enforced by the chiefs of both districts. Only in March, the following year did the panzootic reappear in the country.

This delay, and the effective strategy of stamping out the first outbreak, gave people a false sense of confidence and control. It resulted in relaxing precautions, and confirmed in the minds of the already skeptical populace that the entire panic had been a false alarm. In January 1897 the resident commissioner, at the request of the paramount chief, reluctantly reduced the five-mile free zone along the border to 1000 yards.[31] With the approach of the winter months, cattle-owners began bringing their cattle down from the mountain retreats. With the rinderpest raging in neighbouring Free State, many BaSotho wished to commence their ploughing before the disease should appear in the country. They violated the restrictions imposed for the removal

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[30]Ibid.,S3/25/1/14, annual reports, year ending 30 July 1897.

[31]Ibid., S5/14, resident commissioner to High commissioner, 23 January 1897.

of cattle within the five-mile free zone along the Caledon River, and brought their cattle to plough their fields[32]

Then the disease struck again. On 5 March 1897 the assistant commissioner for Mafeteng district tersely reported that a disease suspected to be rinderpest had appeared in a village bordering the Free State, at Sephapo's gate, in the neighbouring district of Mohaleshoek. By the next morning, at least sixty-five cattle were already dead, and all others in the village were sick.[33] This dramatic and rapid mortality suggests that the disease had been in the area for sometime, and that cattle owners had concealed its presence.

Now there was no doubt - the dreaded disease had arrived and the cattle were dying. The successful quarantine measures implemented during the first outbreak instilled confidence for halting this latest outbreak. A massive effort was concentrated on the strictly quarantined area. Lerotholi dispatched his most senior son, Letsienyana, to establish a stringent quarantine in the infected area. Lagden, in turn, appointed Lerotholi's energetic and progressive younger brother, chief Maama, to help enforce quarantine regulations. Imperial officials and BaSotho chiefs immediately called for the closure of district borders to localise the outbreak. Vigilance committees were hurriedly set up to guard both the country's borders with neighbouring states and district boundaries. Dipping stations were established to disinfect travellers between districts.[34]

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[32]Friend, 24 November 1896.

[33]Ibid., S3/1/5/4, assistant commissioner, Mafeteng, to government secretary, 5 March 1897; assistant commissioner, Mafeteng, to resident commissioner, 9 March 1897.

[34]Ibid., acting government's circulars 35.97 and 38.97 to assistant commissioner, Quthing; circular 25.97 to assistant commissioners.

This outbreak sealed the fate of the rest of Basutoland. Ten days later, the disease was reported spreading northwards, devastating cattle belonging to the enterprising BaTaung, the Mfengu of Basutoland. In panic, cattle-owners fled with their cattle, driving them to the mountain posts. This took the infection to the only remaining reliable quarantine areas. The fleeing herds also spread the disease *en-route*.[35]

The disease advanced on the rest of the country in a flanking movement. None of the districts knew what had hit them, and from where. From the centres of infection, the disease travelled along the main road, ravaging both southwards and northwards. It hit the northern district of Leribe in mid-March when the panzootic broke out in one village. Strict quarantine measures were imposed and the disease died out by the end of May, having killed only close on 150 head of cattle. It appeared in another village in the district late in May, with Chief Jonathan ordering the slaughter of all the sick animals. Only in late June did the disease gain the upper hand, spreading "like wild fire" throughout the district.[36]

April and May was the fatal period for all districts. Neighbouring Berea was struck in mid-May. Here the disease was thought to have come through two stolen cattle that had arrived from a village in the district of Mafeteng. It soon "ran riot" over the entire district, despite "spasmodic" attempts made by some of the more progressive chiefs of the district, among them 'Mamathe and Martinus, to halt it through quarantine. Within a month, between 30 May and 30 June, close on six thousand cattle had died, and the assistant commissioner for the district was speculating a mortality rate of ninety-eight per cent of unreported deaths.[37]

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[35]Ibid., S4/1/4, resident commissioner's diaries, entry for 29 March 1897.

[36]Ibid., S3/1/5/8/11, rinderpest report for the district of Leribe, 30 June 1897; Ibid., L2/1//6.

[37]Ibid., S3/1/5/8/3, Rinderpest report for the district of Berea, 30 June 1897; ibid., TY 1/1/17.

May was also a fateful month for the central district of Maseru. Defying well-conceived and enforced measures to arrest its spread, the rinderpest broke out in the district early in May. It "spread from hut to hut with alarming rapidity".[38]The Southern districts of Basutoland - Mohaleshoek Quthing and Qachasnek - in their turn, had been protected from infection from East Griqualand by a fence constructed hurriedly. Quarantine had been imposed in Mohaleshoek and Quthing in October 1896 and no animal transport was allowed through the sole waggon road from the latter district into the Cape Colony at the Telle Drift. In April, however, rinderpest was spreading through Mohaleshoek and Quthing, probably from the initial outbreak at Sephaphos. Early in May 1897, another infestation came from across the border after the panzootic had appeared near the Orange River on the Herschel border. From then on, the disease raged through entire southern Basutoland.[39]

By keeping the disease at bay for a while, Basutoland was able to derive the benefits of Koch's newly discovered immunisation remedy. The administration's plan of defence thus took advantage of this new prophylactic. Lagden tried to win the support of BaSotho chiefs for the prophylactic. He, however, cautiously avoided committing the imperial administration until its efficacy was no longer in doubt.

The imperial administration established its own experimental laboratory to test the effectiveness of Koch's method of immunisation and to develop a vaccine. This station was established near the village where the first outbreak had occurred. Two veterinarians lent by the Cape Government, Harry Armstrong and William Robertson, manned it. Both were convinced disciples of the Koch remedy. On arrival at the quarantined camp, they met a bewildered populace. It included the paramount chief who accompanied them as they demonstrated a diagnosis of the disease among dead

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[38]Ibid., S3/1/5/8/4, Rinderpest report for the district of Maseru, 30 June 1897

[39]Ibid., S3/1/5/8/7,8,9, Rinderpest reports for the districts of Mohaleshoek, Quthing and Qachasnek, 30 June 1897

and dying cattle and the method of collecting and injecting bile. They commenced using Koch's method immediately. By the end of their first week in Basutoland, they had inoculated upwards of five hundred cattle that, though not yet exhibiting any symptoms, were regarded as infected.[40]

Their experiments started with twelve cattle from a healthy area. They inoculated six of these animals with bile in a public demonstration, and kept the remaining six uninoculated as a control experiment. Eight days later, the period required for an animal to gain immunity, they mixed all twelve animals with an infected herd.[41] If the six uninoculated cattle should manifest symptoms of the disease, unlike the six inoculated cattle, Koch's method would have proved its effectiveness. Four days later, the signs were promising. Three of the six inoculated cattle remained perfectly healthy. Most of the cattle inoculated outside laboratory conditions also displayed signs of immunity, prompting the assistant commissioner for Mafeteng to recommend full-scale inoculation.

However, three of the six inoculated cattle soon died even before being mixed with an infected herd. Their death sparked a rumour that the cattle had been poisoned through inoculation. It emerged, however, that these cattle had already been contaminated before their arrival at the experimentation centre. This speculation, however, did little to allay the suspicions of the pessimistic populace.

General inoculation also brought problems. Koch's method of inoculation had several shortcomings. It demanded zealous care and effort. Its success depended on experience with the process of inoculation. With only two veterinarians to attend to a national herd totalling approximately 500,000, distributed through 30,343 square

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[40]Ibid., S3/1/5/8/5, report by William Robertson and Harry Armstrong, 27 March and 3 April 1897.

[41]Ibid., report of 2 April 1897.

kilometres of rugged countryside, successful inoculation on this large scale and under epidemic conditions was impossible. One had to use clear and fresh bile, which had to be extracted either by killing a sick donor, or immediately after its death. Killing a sick animal for the express purpose of extracting its bile was a knotty affair because cattle-owners held out hopes that some of their sick cattle might mysteriously recover. Doomed cattle did miraculously recover.[42] Persuading cattle-owners to sacrifice even one head was difficult.

An unwitting, but necessary, paradox of Koch's method was that the salvation of a cattle owner was the perdition of another, for the prophylactic to save the former's herds came from the latter's dying animals. The rinderpest, like most disasters, brought out the best and the worst in people. While in some cases it encouraged generosity, in others it engendered individualism. It also exacerbated social fragmentation, and led to a tenacious desire for the preservation of self and family even when that resulted in cruelty to others.[43] It was thus difficult to obtain sufficient doses of bile owing to the reluctance of owners of moribund cattle to donate it - their attitude was "let others' cattle as well as mine die."[44]

The bile had to be injected immediately after extraction, for preserving its immunising agent was difficult. Some bile could also convey the disease to an otherwise healthy animal, fanning the suspicion of deliberate poisoning among already sceptical cattle-owners. The quantities of bile needed - 10cc per injection - though modest in normal circumstances - was large under epidemic conditions. Enough of it could only be

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[42]Ibid., S5/14, resident commissioner to high commissioner, 7 April 1897.

[43]For these contradictory reactions to most plagues and other disasters, see e.g. Evans-Pritchard, The Nuer (Oxford, 1940), 85; D.M. Schneider, "Typhoons on Yapii:, Human Organization, 16 (1957), 10-15; C. Laughlin, "Deprivation and Reciprocity", Man, 9 (1974), 380-96; "In Time Of Plague: The History of Social Consequences of Lethal Epidemic Disease", special issue, Social Research, 55, 3 (1988), 337-8.

[44]L.N.A. S3/1/5/8/10, resident commissioner to high commissioner, 12 June 1897.

acquired by killing several infected animals. Inoculation had to be accomplished before a neighbourhood was infected. This was an onerous task among people who remained doubtful if the prophylactic worked.

The latest that one might inoculate a herd was within three days of the onset of the first symptoms. This, however, was an elusive period to determine. Immunity did not take effect immediately, thus exposing the animal to infection between inoculation and the start of immunity. The inoculated animal acquired only transient immunity, for three to six months, after which it had to be re-inoculated. Moreover, the immense popularity of the prophylactic, after the initial suspicion, caused logistical problems around the availability and delivery of the bile.

Tracing the onset of infection before affected cattle could infect healthy ones was difficult. At the end of March, for example, about two thousand cattle of an ardent disciple of inoculation had been inoculated. At the completion of the campaign, however, the veterinarians discovered that among the inoculated herds were a cow and its calf both in the last stages of rinderpest. It also emerged that the cattle inoculated included his son's herds that came to the inoculation site from some distance. They had mixed with the village cattle, and had returned home before the infection of the village herds was discovered. They had thus helped to spread the disease.[45]

The impediment to convincing cattle-owners of the effectiveness of inoculation arose largely from the death of inoculated herds treated after they had already become infected. It also weakened their faith in the veterinarians and their prophylactic; they stood to bear the blame of poisoning the cattle.[46] What happened at one village was dramatic and chilling. When the veterinarians arrived at the village to collect bile

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[45]Ibid., S3/1/5/8/5, report of Armstrong and Davis, 2 April 1897.

[46]Ibid., report of 3 April 1897.

from the dying cattle, they observed the villagers throwing their cattle down and cutting out the spot on the animals' bodies where the incision for inoculation had been made. Then a woman accosted the veterinarians, swearing that "we were wizards and had killed the cattle and were now come to destroy the rest of the herd".[47] The villagers had destroyed the inoculation camp and cattle-owners were fleeing with their herds.

Successful inoculation, especially when administered by the same people who collected bile from contaminated animals, depended on maintaining clinical conditions. This meant using sanitary needles and syringes, submitting to rigid disinfection in carbolic baths, and changing clothing. The expertise and capacity for inoculating on such a large scale were lacking. There was no trained staff and the imperial administration engaged in a massive effort to give rudimentary training to potential inoculators. Unprofessional procedures so bothered the authorities that the paramount chief had to campaign for caution:

> From the way I hear how the inoculation is being done I find that it differs from the way the doctors showed us. I remember an important word which was spoken by the doctors when they said great care was to be taken in inoculating; that the skin only was to be pierced and the needle not to reach the animal's flesh; that it is to be between the skin and flesh. And this to be done with the greatest care. Now I hear that those inoculators do not do so. They prick right into the flesh so that when the needle is drawn out blood gushes out. This is why I say do again advise those who are inoculating.[48]

Disinfection procedures did not encourage cattle-owners to submit willingly. At the first public demonstration of the inoculation procedures, the paramount chief himself

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[47]Ibid., resident commissioner's diary for 7 April, 1897.

[48]Ibid., S3/1/5/8/10, paramount chief to resident commissioner, 11 June 1897.

failed to tolerate the discomfort of being subjected to a carbolic bath. To relieve the irritation, he and counsellors resorted to intemperance.[49]

The racist undertones of the disinfection also disturbed the BaSotho. The burden of fumigation seemed to bear more on Africans than on their white counterparts. Following the Vryburg Conference, the imperial administration had adopted the measure of fumigating "every person white or black". Fumigators were to subject clothes to a dry heat of 220 degrees Fahr., washing people with water and carbolic soap. It soon became evident that the authorities were applying these measures only to the BaSotho. European travellers, unlike the BaSotho, could deposit spare suits of clothing at disinfecting stations. This enabled them to change into fresh clothes while leaving others at the stations to undergo disinfection. Further, washing their hands and face at disinfecting stations was deemed sufficient for Europeans, while Africans had to undergo a complete soaking.

The initial immunisation experiments did prove disastrous. From the Mafeteng district, where these experiments were first conducted, the early reports caused anxiety. "I fear", Lagden wrote early in April "all experiments with inoculation are working out unfortunately". A month later, the paramount chief, in turn, expressed his apprehension - "the cattle", he warned, "are dying from inoculation".[50] Similar reports came from other districts as the disease began to spread through May, June and July.[51]

This failure of inoculation and the striking resemblance between the symptoms of rinderpest and those of inoculation convinced cattle owners of foul play. The suspicion that assistant commissioners, who supervised inoculation, were deliberately

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[49]Ibid., S5/14, resident commissioner to high commissioner, 29 March 1897.

[50]Mss. Afr. S. 169, Lagden's Diary, entry for 3 April 1897; L.N.A., S3/1/5/10, paramount chief to resident commissioner, 23 May 1897.

[51]E.g. from Quthing and Mohaleshoek, L.N.A., Q2/1/13, assistant commissioner to resident commissioner, 30 June 1897, and S3/25/1/14, assistant commissioner to resident commissioner, 3 July respectively.

poisoning their cattle spread with the panzootic. Some came to implore the assistant commissioners to save at least some of their herds, believing that as they brought the disease, they could also take it away.[52]

Attitudes towards inoculation varied among cattle-owners. Some preferred to have their cattle treated, saying, "save at last some of our herds"! Others opposed inoculation, suspecting that it was the surest means of spreading the disease. Rumours associating inoculation with witchcraft were rife. For example, on reaching one infected village, an inoculation team found the villagers "sulky", saying, "their cattle were dying from the effects of the inoculation". All over the area, "the common people [were] very suspicious and [said] that their cattle [were] bewitched by inoculation."

At another village, a man confronted assistant commissioner Kennan. He showed the latter a sixpence piece that he claimed to have found in the stomach of his dead cow that had been inoculated. He accused the inoculators of placing the foreign object in his cow's stomach to bewitch it. So persistent was he in his accusations that he spread the allegation around. He wished the government, the chiefs and the populace to know that the reputed rinderpest was nothing but witchcraft.[53] A month later, another alarming story spread that a blanket pin had been found in the stomach of a dead cow that had been inoculated.[54]

Initially, the chiefs had promised to co-operate with the imperial administration in its inoculation campaign. The early disasters of inoculation, however, tested their resolve. After appearing to give his approval for the campaign, Lerotholi failed to live

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[52]M. Pascal, 24 August 1897, Journal des missions, 1897, 600.

[53]L.N.A., S3/1/5/8/5, Kennan's diary, week ended 9 April 1897.

[54]Lesedinyana, 15 May 1897.

up to expectation. Once the programme was under way, he neglected inoculating his own herds and was reluctant to order inoculation as a national policy. His reluctance was understandable. Amid widespread suspicion that inoculation was the deliberate poisoning of cattle by the imperial administration, the paramount chief had to avoid carrying the blame for collaborating with an administration that people suspected of killing his own people's herds. If he ordered inoculation on a national scale, and the cattle died, he would have to bear the blame for the disaster. His role as a partner in the parallel administration that managed the anti-rinderpest measures placed him in a quandary. He had to conceal his initial apprehension about the inoculation campaign. So he employed various subterfuges, including proposing that the country be partitioned into two parts, the one for disciples of immunisation, and the other for its opponents. This would enable the former to have their herds treated, while also allowing the latter to follow the dictates of their hearts.[55]

Lerotholi continued to discourage the supporters of inoculation. His own chief councillor, Ramabilikoe Matete, upon finding that his own ward was infected, petitioned the assistant commissioner to intervene:

> I am sitting here quite amazed to see the sickness around about my place.... I sent to the Paramount chief to ask for inoculation and I see that the chief is hesitating. I request you to be kind enough to speak to the paramount chief to permit us to have our cattle inoculated. Perhaps he might listen to you and the Resident Commissioner. I see that our cattle will die before we could do something to save them.[56]

Many conservative chiefs, themselves equally apprehensive, employed similar subterfuges. In Mafeteng one headman applied to the principal chief of the district, through the assistant commissioner, to have his cattle treated. He, however, received a belated reply asserting that the principal chief was without the power to authorise

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[55]L.N.A.., S3/1/5/1, paramount chief to resident commissioner, 22 and 25 April, 1897.

[56]Ibid., Ramabilikoe Matete to Assistant commissioner, Mafeteng, 26 April 1897.

inoculation, and that he would refer the request to the paramount chief. To evade similar requests, the principal chief disappeared from the district for a lengthy period, until imperial officials tracked him to the village of his uncle, Chief Bereng. The latter was reputed to be irrevocably opposed to inoculation.[57] Chief Masupha, at Berea, persistently opposed inoculation, threatening those who treated their herds with confiscation of their stock. His sons and subordinate chiefs who preferred immunising their herds incurred his wrath.[58] In Leribe, Chief Joel frustrated efforts by missionaries to treat his people's herds by banning the inoculation campaign in his ward.[59]

Suspicious of the "white man's medicine", some cattle-owners attempted their own remedies. They drew on indigenous resources and expertise to combat the disease. Many attempted everything - germicides, anodynes, astringents, laxatives. Chief Masupha expressed this attitude best, arguing that "it isn't to say that I know how to treat this disease, but I am only trying".[60]

The principle behind inoculation was not, itself, foreign to the BaSotho. It was based on the familiar principle of similia similibus curatur, which the BaSotho practiced. Koch's method of immunisation with bile was actually the BaSotho's cure for snakebites. A European doctor who worked in Leribe in the 188Os admitted receiving his first practical lesson in this homeopathic remedy locally. He also speculated that the BaSotho ideas of inoculation could have influenced Koch's method.[61] Some cut their cattle on their forehead and "rubbed in medicine". Others "pierced the cattle's

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[57]Ibid., S3/1/5/5, assistant commissioner's diary of week ended 30 April 1897.

[58]E.g. Ibid., TY1/17, Lepoqo to assistant commissioner, Berea, 13 July 1897.

[59]M. Christeller, Journal des Missions, 1897, 351.

[60]L.N.A., TY1/17, Masupha to Resident commissioner, 12 March 1897.

[61]Hadley, Doctor to Basutho, 28.

dew laps and gave them to drink".[62] Others made their cattle drink from a medicinal potion, the efficacy of which is difficult to determine. Others fumigated their herds with a mixture of a charm potion and sulphur.[63] Still others adapted medicinal cures used by neighbouring boer farmers, who also possessed an impressive store of homemade veterinary knowledge.

Many of these remedies emanated from local curative lores in treating lung sickness (contagious pleuro-pneumonia), for the symptoms of rinderpest exhibited the worst forms of this endemic bovine disease. Some of these domestic remedies may have worked, depending on the virulence of infection. Generally, however, they probably did more to ease the anxieties of perplexed cattle-owners than to cure their sick and dying cattle.

The medicines used before infection were probably protective charms against suspected witchcraft. The cures used most probably included medicines intended to fight the particular symptom of sickness. While they may have temporarily relieved symptoms, they did not cure the disease. The rinderpest was a serious test of medical expertise, and unleashed an admirable scramble to experiment.

After the initial reluctance to inoculate, attitudes soon changed. In time, most cattle-owners turned wholeheartedly to inoculation as the remedy began to display signs of relative success. Reports from the main experimental centre in Mafeteng soon revealed the prophylactic potential of Koch's remedy. Within three months of the onset of the immunisation programme, only a tenth of the inoculated cattle within infected areas had died. Compared with the massive death toll of fifteen thousand reported uninoculated cattle during the same period, the prophylactic sparked a realistic hope of saving at least some herds.Results persuaded cattle-owners better

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[62]L.N.A., S3/1/5/6 , Snei Moshoeshoe to resident commissioner, 19 June 1897.

[63]Leselinyana, 15 May 1897.

than words or coercion. Sometimes, whole herds of inoculated cattle showed symptoms of permanent immunisation without a single casualty. By mid-May, the resident commissioner was observing that

> The striking difference in mortality between inoculated and uninoculated herds had made itself popularly felt, and that the paramount chief and many other chiefs whose cattle they do not infect are clamouring for inoculation.[64]

Those still harbouring doubts were convinced when the success of the prophylactic was displayed in villages that embraced the inoculation campaign. Christian villages, like Morija, and mission stations took the lead in the inoculation campaign. They readily listened to advice and inoculated their herds. They thus saved some of their stock and demonstrated the effectiveness of the prophylactic.

Christian and other enlightened villagers living in non-Christian villages also saved some herds because they readily treated them. Many enlightened chiefs, Jonathan among them, also enthusiastically inoculated their herds and encouraged their subjects to do the same. Even within one household, initial attitudes towards inoculation might differ. The relative survival rate of herds belonging to one member of the household who treated his animals soon convinced the initially recalcitrant member. For many, conversion to inoculation grew proportionally to the proximity of the disease to their respective kraals.

Towards the end of April, the immunisation programme entered a new phase. Rather than the initial ordeal of convincing the public of the value of immunisation, now the urgency was for an accelerated programme. On an average, 300 head of cattle were inoculated every day, often over 500 per day. In one day, on 22 April 1897, veterinary surgeon Armstrong broke the existing record, inoculating 268 cattle alone "and could have done more if he had had more bile".[65]

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[64]L.N.A., S5/14, resident commissioner to high commissioner, 18 May 1897.

[65]Ibid., S3/1/5/8/5, rinderpest camp diary for Mafeteng district, entry for 22 April.

The paramount chief, who had previously disclaimed any control over those who refused to treat their herds, now actively encouraged the inoculation campaign. He startled the resident commissioner:

> I really say that inoculation does save some, and I have inoculated a great number of mine here and those that are with caretakers. There were some caretakers who said they refuse their caretakings to be inoculated saying that I am killing the cattle and I fetched them by force and also told them that I will not return to them their caretaking.[66]

Even his son in Mafeteng district, who had prevented his people from having their cattle treated changed his attitude, as the rinderpest approached his own kraals. In mid-May the inoculation team spent the entire week inoculating his cattle. Although by the end of the month he had lost thirty inoculated cattle, he "appeared pleased with the results of inoculation so far, as most of the cattle not inoculated in his neighbourhood [were] now dead".[67]. Anxious cattle-owners besieged inoculation teams.

By mid-July, the rinderpest had spread to the districts of Mohaleshoek and Maseru and to the southernmost district of Quthing. The inhabitants of these districts clamoured for the preventive. In Leribe, district veterinary surgeon Armstrong had lost all hope for success of the immunisation programme owing to the "usual opposition of the native."[68] His letter had hardly reached the resident commissioner's office when he followed it with another telling a different story. Inoculation in the district was now proceeding "in a most satisfactory manner", and cattle-owners were "eager" to have their cattle treated.[69]

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[66]Ibid., S3/1/5/10, paramount chief to resident commissioner, 11 June 1897.

[67]Ibid., S3/1/5/5, diary for 15 May and 4 June 1897.

[68]Ibid., Armstrong to resident commissioner, 15 July 1897.

[69]Ibid., Armstrong to resident commissioner, 22 July 1897.

So widespread and relentless were appeals for inoculation by desperate cattle-owners that imperial officials had to abandon its cautious policy of inoculating only in infected areas. By the end of May, the government had extended the sphere of inoculation to those districts that had not yet been infected. In Maseru district alone, approximately 10,363 cattle had been inoculated by the middle of July 1897, the number rising to 20,000 by the end of the month.[70] The programme had begun with the inoculation of the resident commissioner's own herd, "so that if it kills, mine should be the first to die."[71] Soon after, "messengers from all sides" arrived at his office requesting urgent treatment of their cattle.[72]

Every available resource was mobilised to support this campaign. The police force was diverted to the immunisation campaign, and many BaSotho were trained in the requisite procedures. Protestant missionaries brought immunisation to the lower classes. This contrasted sharply with the concerns of colonial officials who sought to endear themselves by concentrating on saving the herds of the chiefs. "I do not want to abandon these little ones for the great people", declared Rev. Dieterlen:

> As for the chiefs, they have an incarnated egoism, people are nothing, the chiefs are everything, their word is final. What saves the situation is that people still find that normal and do not dream of revolting or complaining. These people adore their kings.[73]

Thus, Koch's treatment seems to have worked remarkably well in Basutoland. The immunisation campaign in the country solved one of the most difficult problems of Koch's method - the stage at which the immunisation properties of the bile were at

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[70]Ibid., S3/1/5/8/4, Rinderpest report for the district of Maseru, 30 June 1898

[71]Mss. Afr. S. 170, Lagden's Diaries, entry for 11 May 1897.

[72]Ibid.

[73]Ibid., 597.

their most ideal. It led to the discovery that the most effective bile was that extracted from a donor in the last stages of sickness, or immediately after death. This earned the country the reputation for being the most successful experimental and demonstration centre for the method in the entire subcontinent. Even the Cape government, with greater veterinary and financial resources, looked to Basutoland for guidance.[74] When the prophylactic came under public assault, those who had witnessed its success in Basutoland defended it:

> Neither shooting, fences, neutral zones nor cordons of police stay the progress of it [rinderpest]. In Basutoland, there are, in round numbers, 70,000 head of cattle alive today which, but for inoculation would have been rotting in the sun...The credit of saving them is due to Dr. Koch. Where Dr. Koch's method of bile inoculation has been faithfully, though often (owing to great urgency) very roughly carried out, the returns have been astonishing. I know of many instances where not a single herd has died and others where the loss has only been from six to 10 per cent.[75]

When the rinderpest re-appeared in South Africa in 1902, the lessons learnt from Basutoland provided the basis for the successful inoculation campaign that brought the disease under control.[76]

This eventual willingness of the BaSotho to embrace inoculation relieved the anxieties of imperial officials. The latter had lived in constant fear that the rinderpest would provoke an anti-colonial rebellion among the BaSotho. It is to the reactions and responses of the BaSotho to the approaching catastrophe, and as it swept through their herds, that this study now turns.

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[74]L.N.A., S/14, high commissioner to resident commissioner, 30 August; also Resident commissioner's reply, Ibid., 7September 1897; D. Hutcheon, "Rinderpest", Agricultural Journal, xiv, no. 12, June 1899, 774.

[75]Agricultural Journal, xiii, 1897.

[76]D. Hutcheon, "Rinderpest, in South Africa: A Short Description of its History, General Characteristics and Methods of Treatment", Cape of Good Hope, Department of Agriculture, Cape Town, no. 8, 1902.

# CHAPTER 4

## REACTIONS AND RESPONSES

The outbreak of the rinderpest in Basutoland was delayed by almost a year after it first appeared south of the Zambezi River. This delay led to the dissemination of rumours, which engendered distrust and restlessness ahead of the panzootic. The shock waves generated by the panzootic as it approached Basutoland attracted the BaSotho to seek news of its progress. Those with links, however tenuous, to existing networks of communication, kept abreast of the news of the rinderpest. They spread alarming reports among their brethren.

The local press also carried grim eyewitness reports of the panzootic. The widely circulating missionary paper, Leselinyana, plied its readers with dire reports. It printed alarmist reports of BaSotho evangelists who had accompanied French missionaries to the Zambezi. It reported that the rinderpest formed the backdrop to the Ndebele-Shona rebellion then underway. It also informed of the bleak famine conditions in the Transvaal and Bechuanaland.

These reports generated alarm among the BaSotho ahead of the arrival of the panzootic. Like the symptoms of cholera in nineteenth-century Europe that "set an indelible stamp on the responses it evoked",[1] those of the rinderpest instilled terror and perplexity in the hearts and minds of those who watched the disease devour its victims within days. "There has never been anything like it before," wrote Lerotholi after observing the rapid deaths of rinderpest-infected cattle.[2]

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[1]F. Snowden, "Cholera in Barletta, 1910", Past and Present, no. 132 (1991), 88.

[2]L.N.A., S3/1/5/9, paramount chief to resident commissioner, 25 December 1896.

The symptoms of the rinderpest puzzled everyone, including those with veterinary expertise. This rendered explanation, and therefore control, difficult. This new disease seemed to embody many diseases in one: gall sickness, diseases of the paunch, entrails, liver, even the brain. Its symptoms were similar to those of redwater and lungsickness. This inspired the Xhosa to call this strange, all-encompassing disease, Zefosonke - every disease.[3]

Even more alarming were widely circulating allegations that the disease was a zoonosis, that it was transmissible to humans. Thus, a MoSotho living in the Bechuanaland Protectorate sent a sensational description of the ravages of the rinderpest there to his local newspaper:

> After the death of cattle, the disease enters among human beings. Oh! You have never seen anything of the like before! In one day, approximately 100 people die in every village.[4]

Reports reaching Basutoland from the Transvaal averred that a terrible disease afflicted those who ate the meat of the dead animals and that worms came out of them.[5]

The dramatic, relentless sweep of the panzootic and its carnage horrified the BaSotho as they waited their turn. "Its (rinderpest) characteristic pattern", Leselinyana reported, "is that if you have 100 cattle in the kraal the night before, you wake up the next morning with nothing left".[6] These dramatic and often exaggerated reports terrified many BaSotho.

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[3]C.M.T. 3/59, Report of a meeting of the inhabitants of the district of Butterworth, 1 February 1897.

[4]Leselinyana, 15 July 1897.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Leselinyana, 15 July 1897.

Colonial and settler governments also alarmed the BaSotho when they began sealing off their borders with Basutoland and guarding them with armed police and military cordons. Thus by December 1896, the Cape government had completed fencing the entire border between Basutoland and its territory, deploying armed guards along its length. The Natal government followed suit, fencing off its and connecting with the fence erected by the Cape government from the Atlantic Ocean to the Drakensberg Mountains. As early as in June 1896, the government of the Free State had established cordons prohibiting the movement of cattle from any infected area. It also enforced stringent fumigation of BaSotho *en route* from the Transvaal.

These actions made the BaSotho suspect that a plot was astir to besiege their country. The anti-rinderpest measures enforced by the imperial administration, especially those of clearing a five-mile neutral belt from the border, also created suspicions. The BaSotho watched these measures with scepticism. Many were apprehensive. This was a natural response by a society bracing itself for an approaching catastrophe. It also revealed specific deep-seated suspicions. In the popular imagination, that Europeans were the first to know about the existence of this disease showed that they knew about its origin. Letsoalo le molato lea ikahlola, one BaSotho proverb cautioned: "Beware of him who first cries 'stop thief'! He might be the thief". That was how they knew when a chick had laid an egg: E kakatletsang lehe kea eona: (The chick you hear cackling has just lain). Besides, the few Europeans in the country owned very few cattle. Why did they panic so much? Why did they exert so much effort to stamp out the disease? They could only do it for something - "they will reclaim their compensation. Then war with us."[7]

When imperial officials attempted to reassure them by telling them that boer-owned cattle were also dying, what could the BaSotho do but shrug their shoulders? They also suspected that the boers were targets of British vengeance, and they its unwitting

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[7]Journal des Missions, 1897, 15.

victims. "This disease has been sent from England by the Queen," Dieterlen, a French missionary, reported hearing some BaSotho whispering, "she is angry with the Boers for refusing her railways. She kills their bulls to force them to accept it. A messenger has been ordered to spill the rinderpest from a large bottle".[8]

They also suspected that the isolation measures to close the borders and to create free zones were pretexts - perhaps to transfer the border area to neighbouring colonial governments. Were these measure not first attempts to open their country to mineral exploitation? they wondered.".[9]

Familiarity with transhumance and quarantine did not reassure the suspicious populace. The BaSotho knew about the practice of isolating cattle in mountain sanctuaries. Now, however, they were apprehensive. They suspected that colonial troops deployed in the mountains would steal their cattle.[10] Even more alarming was the fencing of the East Griqualand border and the deployment of armed guards along the frontier. These preparations seemed to the BaSotho an excuse for the Cape government and the imperial administration to encroach into their territory. There had to be some mischievous plot behind the whole enterprise, the people suspected. Dieterlen represented popular fears in these words: "***Vous nous cachez les choses, vous blancs. Vous avez des pensees de derriere la tete. Vous voulez nous tuer.***" (You hide things from us, you, white people; you have some hidden ideas. You want to kill us).[11]

This mistrust of neighbouring governments and imperial officials in the country almost exploded in an armed rebellion. When the Cape government started fencing

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[8]Ibid.

[9]Ibid.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Ibid.

the Griqualand East border with Basutoland, and deploying armed cordons, the BaSotho were alarmed, suspecting a looming invasion of their country. These activities further convinced them that the alarm over the rumoured rinderpest was nothing more than an excuse.[12] Armed BaSotho, under the youthful charge of the paramount chief's son, Makhaola, were soon gathering along the border. Initially they angrily watched the fencing operations. As the week progressed, however, they actively obstructed them, disrupted inter-governmental communications, and threatened Cape colonial officials supervising the work.[13]

This volatile atmosphere escalated. Armed BaSotho removed the pickets along the border, taunted and mocked the border guards, forcing them to retreat. The local colonial official in Matatiele found the situation inflammatory and feared that "the slightest mistake would bring the BaSotho down on us."[14] The mood was so volatile that if Lagden and the paramount chief's emissaries had delayed in intervening, a full-scale rebellion might have erupted.[15]

After appearing before a roving court consisting of the resident commissioner and the paramount chief's counsellors, those involved in this demonstration were sentenced to twelve months imprisonment with hard labour.[16] Makhaola, in his turn, faced the graver charge of "ordering armed guards along the border and threatening the peace of a foreign state". He, however, claimed that he had acted on his father's instructions.

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[12]G.82-96, Minutes of Rinderpest Conference held at Vryburg, p.3.

[13]L.N.A., S7/3/12, "Makhaola at Qachasnek", evidence of Arthur Bovil, Edward Hogge, John Garbutt, Henry Chaplin, Rooijan and Arthur Bovill.

[14]Ibid., evidence of Edward Hogger.

[15]Ibid., resident commissioner to high commissioner, 15 December 1896.

[16]Ibid., S5/14, Regina vs Makhaola, Rakoche, Poli, Radisiu and Ntili, 16 December 1896, B53, charge sheet, court of the resident commissioner held at Qachasnek, encl. in resident commissioner to high commissioner, 16 January 1897.

Ever astute, Lagden preferred to place the matter before a full court of all the principal chiefs at a full pitso. The pitso attended by "the whole tribe",[17] sentenced Makhaola to imprisonment.

Fearing the risk of exacerbating the situation, Lagden thought it prudent to waive the sentence. Instead, he recalled Makhaola from Qachasnek to place him as a native police officer under his charge. This would teach him "the essentials of discipline and order."[18] When summoned, however, Makhaola, now joined by his brothers, Letsienyana and Griffith flouted authority. They rushed from the pitso with their entourage, menacingly riding away amid the prevailing pandemonium.[19] This action increased anxiety. The fugitives camped at Mafeteng and resisted surrender. Reports asserted that they were doctoring their armies in preparation for war.[20]

Just then, the Griqua leader, Andreas Le Fleur, began threatening the small and scattered white community around Kokstad, the capital of East Griqualand. The rumours surrounding his movements suggested that he was mobilising various African communities in the area for an armed revolt against colonial rule. More alarming to the imperial authorities in Basutoland were reports that he was eliciting the support of the young rebel chief Makhaola. Early in 1897, colonial officials in Basutoland were receiving startling telegrams reporting "almost total consternation in [Matatiele]". The cause was the rumour that "young Chiefs Makhaola and Griffith propose crossing border of East Griqualand and joining in attacks on Europeans".[21]

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[17]L.N.A., S4/1/4, resident commissioner's diaries, 11 January 1897.

[18]S5/14, encl. in resident commissioner to high commissioner, 16 January 1897.

[19]Ibid.

[20]Ibid., S5/14, assistant-commissioner to resident commissioner, 16 January 1897.

[21]G. 42-'98, 116-120.

From Kokstad, the chief magistrate warned Lagden of a "scare" throughout the districts of Matatiele and Umzimkhulu in Griqualand East. It arose from reports that Makhaola had defied the imperial government in Basutoland and returned to his village. From here, it was believed, he intended invading Griqualand East.[22] Simultaneously, the government secretary in Maseru in Basutoland received alarming news from the assistant commissioner in Qachasnek. It averred that "natives were rising in East Griqualand. It also reported that white farmers were going into laager." More disturbing were the reports that BaSotho chiefs intended to cross the border to aid the Griqua rebels.[23]

The paramount chief's second senior son, Griffith, with Makhaola, had arrived in Qachasnek two days before, amid rumours that they intended freeing their imprisoned comrades.[24] Although Lagden placed "little reliance"" on these rumours, he did suspect the motives of the fugitives. Fearing for the safety of the assistant commissioner of Qachasnek, he permitted him the discretion to withdraw "if danger is manifest."[25]

Just then, newspapers began circulating reports that Lagden had despaired of his efforts to control the turbulent BaSotho and considered transferring the country to the Cape government.[26] The threat produced the desired effect. It led to Lerotholi and his subordinate chiefs promptly edging the young chiefs to surrender. They later appeared

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[22]L.N.A., S5/14, high commissioner to resident commissioner, 25 January 1897, encl. telegram from chief magistrate (Kokstad), undated.

[23]Ibid., S7/1/6, Griffith to govt. secr., 24 January 1897; also S5/14, high commissioner to resident commissioner, 25 January 1897.

[24]Ibid., S7/1/6, Griffith to govt. secr., 24 January 1897; also S5/14, high commissioner to resident commissioner, 25 January 1897.

[25]Ibid., S5/14, resident commissioner to high commissioner, 25 January 1897.

[26]Ibid., high commissioner to resident commissioner, 12 February 1897.

before a "moot" court that fined them a hundred head of cattle. Lerotholi and his subordinate chiefs promptly brought Letsienyana to Lagden, making him apologise for his part in the unrest.[27] Later, Griffith and Makhaola tendered their apologies.[28]

Various factors had combined to avert a potentially serious disturbance without a shot fired. Yet, the significance of this episode lies more in exposing the ambiguities of colonial interaction in a volatile colonial setting. The rinderpest and its associated discontents became "a test of social cohesion," as Morris has observed in similar responses to the nineteenth century cholera epidemic in England. "To follow [its] track", he continues, "is to watch the trust and co-operation between different parts of the society strained to the utmost".[29] The Makhaola disturbance shocked imperial officials. Basutoland appeared a haven of peace. Why this ominous disturbance?

Lagden's foreboding was revealing. Undoubtedly, he mused, the rinderpest crisis and the political tension accompanying it provided the backdrop to the disturbance. "It is certain", he wrote to the high commissioner, "that the BaSotho in common with most other tribes, harbour ideas that the plague would be introduced by white people or even by government".[30] What made the BaSotho suspect government motives was especially the actual construction of the fence along an ill-defined and contested boundary.

Nevertheless, the episode, he suspected, was not an isolated affair; he warned of a general undercurrent of "restlessness." The haste with which the culprits and their entourage had left the pitso was ominous, suggesting a conspiracy. Lerotholi's failure

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[27]Ibid., S7/3/13, paramount chief to resident commissioner, 12 February 1897.

[28]Ibid., paramount chief to resident commissioner, 26 February 1897; Ibid., S8/2/2/6, resident commissioner to paramount chief, 26 February 1897.

[29]Morris, Cholera 1832, 17.

[30]L.N.A., S5/14, resident commissioner to high commissioner, 16 January 1897.

promptly to apprehend his fugitive sons suggested complicity. A report from the assistant commissioner of Mafeteng, where the fugitives encamped, seemed to confirm this suspicion: "I am swarthily suspicious about Lerotholi and other chiefs and don't believe they are sincere".[31] When Lerotholi tried reassuring him that he was attempting to negotiate the surrender of his sons "through persuasion and not force," Lagden rejected this assertion as "a blatant lie."[32]

Further than that, Lagden considered it safer to speculate on the wider implications of the affair. "Presumably," Lerotholi would follow his children if a full-scale rebellion had occurred. "Perhaps" the BaSotho had plotted a massive onslaught on the scattered European population.[33] More ominous was the likelihood of the disturbance signalling a revolt against imperial rule, a theory to which Lagden and others inclined. The character of the dramatis personae in the disturbance appeared to support this theory. "The characteristics of the people resident in the mountain", Lagden observed,

> vary considerably from those of the people living in lower altitudes who are brought into more continual contact with Europeans, government officers and civilisation. They inherit in the first place the wild traditions of all mountain people who feel a certain sense of security on account of their inaccessible position and are correspondingly inamenable to order and control. Many of them are moreover refugees of tribes that have been broken by war in previous years and sought exemption from the trammels of government in the forbidding recesses of the Drakensberg. It is with such sections of people I am now dealing.[34]

The youthful composition of the "rebels" added further weight to the evidence of an anti-colonial conspiracy. Throughout the region during this period, young men were

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[31]Ibid., assistant commissioner (Mafeteng) to resident commissioner, 18 January 1897.

[32]Ibid., S7/13/13, paramount chief to resident commissioner, 17 January 1897; S4/1/4, resident commissioner's diary, 19 January 1897.

[33]Ibid., S5/14, resident commissioner to high commissioner, 16 January 1897.

[34]Ibid., S5/13, high commissioner to resident commissioner, 15 December 1896.

in the vanguard of anti-colonial agitation. Le Fleur in Griqualand East, for example, was twenty-nine years old and most of his comrades-at-arms were young men. In British Bechuanaland, "the younger men pressed for rebellion".[35] W.C. Scully, the magistrate of the Nqamakwe district of the Transkei, perceived a similar pattern there. In his view, one had to divide the community into categories in a bid to comprehend the entire rebellious spirit so prevalent among the once placid Mfengu: the old men, the men of middle age and the young men. To reveal their feelings towards colonial rule, it would be found that "the first class was loyal, the second more or less loyal with a tendency towards more disloyalty, and the third absolutely disloyal".[36] Observing for Basutoland, Lagden identified a similar pattern and suggested the reason:

> These younger men became impatient of restraint and, having all the brutal instincts of the race in their blood, thought to win back for the tribe barbarous habits and the attractive rapine and oppression pertaining to chieftainship of bygone days.[37]

Lagden's reflections, however, betrayed a conventional pattern of thought, which was typical of his generation of colonial officials, including other Europeans. Typically, they were quick to find the prevailing restlessness among Africans in the "barbarian" mind steeped in ignorance, superstition and emotionalism. Always baffled by African expression of discontent, they often seized on supposed innate African personality traits to explain social unrest.[38]

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[35]Saker and Aldridge, "The Origins", 316.

[36]C.M.T., 3/145, confidential report by magistrate of Nqamakwe, 1 December 1897.

[37]L.N.A., S5/14, resident commissioner to high commissioner, 16 January 1897.

[38]For such explanations see T.O. Ranger, Revolt in Southern Rhodesia, 1896-7 (London, 1967); Ranger, "From Humanism to the Science of Man: Colonialism in Africa and the Understanding of Alien Societies", Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 26 (1976), 120 , for the Shona-Ndebele rebellion; Saker and Aldridge, "The Origins", 299, for the Southern Tswana rebellion; C.M.T. 3/106, report of resident magistrate of Kentani, 22 September 1897 and Ibid., 3/59, confidential report by magistrate of Nqamakwe, 1 December 1897. .

Thus, Lagden argued that the BaSotho acted from "passions [which] become aroused without any reason apparent to civilized people". It was "hardly necessary to say that these people are profound masters of the art of deception":

> Communications couched in plausible and polite language have generally to be read conversely. The true workings of a native's mind can only be guessed at.[39]

He also condemned the BaSotho for their lack of gratitude, accusing them of "biting the nurturing and protecting hand of" their benefactors. "It is hard, after all our efforts", he complained despondently, "to be turned on in such a way, but the word gratitude is unknown to natives - there is no corresponding word in their language".[40] Europeans around him echoed the same sentiments. "Never", agonised a French missionary long resident in the country,

> have I better perceived what lies in the spirit of the Black, the inability to believe in the disinterested devotion, and of unlimited capacity to believe in things very absurd and in perverse intentions. These ill sentiments reveal the spirit of the Mosotho, his ignorance, his stupidity, his pride and his ingratitude.[41]

The "unfounded" rumours accompanying the rinderpest were, in Lagden's mind, behind the disturbance. Especially, he thought, the boers had started the rumour that the ubiquitous Cecil Rhodes had spread the rinderpest "as a policy to [sic] Matabeleland, the Transvaal, Orange Free State and Basutoland."[41] Such rumours, "however childish," he argued, "once rooted, take a firm hold upon native imagination." An entry in his private diary might throw further light on this pattern of thought:

> There is a nasty spirit amongst the Basotho bred by Lerotholi and his sons, which bespeaks their savage nature and shows how characteristic

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[39]L.N.A., S5/14, resident commissioner to high commissioner, 16 January 1897.

[40]Ibid.

[41]Journal des Missions, 1897, 18.

> of the kaffir it is to have outbursts of fury without any apparent reason.[42]

In the early part of the disturbance Lagden was nervous: "Considerable scare going on...People under arms for some unknown reason", he wrote in his private diary on 18 December 1896. Subsequent entries reveal his anxiety:

> January 1 1897: Reflex of excitement in country...
>
> January 4: There is a nasty spirit among the Basotho...No complaints have been made - I think it simply that the whole native mind of South Africa is unhinged.
>
> January 18: Alarming reports current and considerable uneasiness.
>
> January 24: The time is very anxious. The Basotho seem alive with suspicion and liable to rise on any sudden impulse.[43]

There is no substantial evidence that the BaSotho were conspiring for an anti-colonial rebellion. Most of the alarm among colonial officials and neighbouring white settlers existed in the minds of those who typically feared "native restlessness"; Lagden's fears were exaggerated. He would have soon recognised that most of the would-be-rebels had been caught up in the affair almost by accident - that they now found themselves in a blind alley, with little prospect of making it a national rising. Panic, rumour-mongering, scapegoating, and insecurity are normal reactions at a time of crisis. In times of social stress especially in the throes of a devastating epidemic, conspiracy explanations have found fertile ground, regardless of culture, race or historical epoch.

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[42]Mss. S. 169, Lagden Diaries, 4 January 1897.

[43]Ibid.

In the fourteenth century, for example, Christians blamed the bubonic plague on the Jews, and on the Arabs in Spain. In London, the government prohibited lepers from entering the city because of the popular belief then current that they were the originators and carriers of the plague.[44] In the minds of fifteenth and sixteenth-century Europeans syphilis originated in the New World. Even when it became endemic in Europe, each country named it after another: called the "French" disease by the Germans, the "Italian" by the French, the "Polish" or the "Neapolitan" disease by others, depending on their nationality. In the New World itself, it was blamed on the Indians.[45] In the eighteenth-century when it spread all over the globe, the Japanese called it the disease of the Portuguese, the Persians attributed it to the Turks, while the Poles called it the disease of the Russians.

Panic, insidious rumours and conspiracy theories abounded in revolutionary France. The causes of these fears, their character, down to the social classes who entertained them, have provided rich material for Georges Lefebvre's The Great Fear of 1789.[46] The cholera epidemics on both sides of the Atlantic during the 1830s and 1840s generated wild rumours as people cast about in search of scapegoats.[47] The famous French historian, Louis Chevalier, one of the first to fathom the powerful historical function of rumour, captures well the psychology of stress:

> In a word, in this troubled Europe of the first half of the nineteenth century, not only was the cholera everywhere considered by the popular classes as an aspect of social inequality, but in the most retarded countries or groups, it was denounced as a criminal enterprise of the authorities and the privileged.[48]

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[44]Cloudley-Thompson, Insects and History; Ziegler, The Black Death.

[45]Dennie, A History of Syphilis; Rosebury, Microbes and Morals.

[46]G. Lefebvre, G., The Great Fear of 1789: Rural Panic in Revolutionary France (Princeton, 1973).

[47]McGrew, Russia and the Cholera; Rosenberg, "Cholera"; Sussman, "Carriers of Cholera"; Ziegler, "Germany: The Flagellants and the Persecution of the Jews", 65-79.

[48]Chevalier, Le Cholera, xv-xvi.

In our century examples abound from the Protocols and the Elders of Zion after the First World War, through Stalinism and McCarthyism, to the conspiracy theories of the extreme right and left today. Here we might also note that despite the sophisticated scientific knowledge underlying concepts of disease and infection in the late twentieth century, the most prominent modern epidemic, AIDS, has generated a thriving set of conspiracy theories. Africans and Russians have blamed it on Americans, the latter on Haitians, American protest groups on the C.I.A., right-wing religious groups on immoral behaviour and God's Wrath, heterosexuals on homosexuals, to mention only a few.[49] Nor has the most recent outbreak of cattle disease, of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy, or "Mad Cow Disease" in Great Britain been without its own set of conspiracy theories.[50]

The state, especially, has often been targeted as a scapegoat in times of plague. It has borne the odium of criticism both for being responsible for spreading disease and for perceived failure in its efforts to contain or eradicate it. From the Black Death in early modern Europe, through the cholera epidemics in the nineteenth century, to the "Mad Cow Disease" of our times, fierce criticism of the state has been a common ingredient in popular responses to plagues.[51]

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[49]B. Chirimunte & R. Chirimunte, Aids, Africa and Racism (London, 1988); J. Cribb, The White Death: On the Origins of AIDS (Sydney, 1995); P. Farmer, "Aids and Accusation: Haiti, Haitians and the Geography of Blame", in D.A. Feldman (ed.), Culture and Aids (New York, 1990), 67-91; E. Fee & D.M. Fox (eds.), Aids: The Burden of History (Berkeley, 1988); J. Fenton, "The Disease of All Diseases", New York Review of Books, 1 December 1994, 48; L. Garnett, The Coming Plague (London, 1993); J. Seale, "Aids Virus Infection: A Social View of its Origins", Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine, lxxix (1986), 494-5; R. Swanson, "Plagues, History and Aids", American Scholar, 57 (1988), 183-200.

[50]J.R. Fisher, "Cattle Plagues Past and Present: The Mystery of Mad Cow Disease", Journal of Contemporary History, 33, 2 (1998), 215-228.

[51]See, among others, C.M. Cipola, Fighting the Plague in Seventeenth Century Italy (Madison, 1981); R. Evans, Death in Hamburg: Society and Politics in the Cholera Years, 1830-1910 (Oxford); Fisher, "Cattle Plagues"; L. McGrew, Russia and the Cholera (Madison, 1965); P. Slack, The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart England (London, 1985); Slack, "Responses to Plague in Early Modern Europe: The Implications of Public Health", Social Research, 55 (1988), 433-53.

Given the universality of such responses, the tendency among Africans in Southern Africa, generally, and especially the BaSotho, to cast about in search of scapegoats for the rinderpest and to act on these suspicions cannot be seen as peculiar to them. Even when people blamed epidemic disease on God's Will or the Lord's Wrath, they still looked for the behaviour among them, or others, which was to blame for divine judgement and retribution. Indeed, blaming has its own rationale - it is a way of making a mysterious epidemic disease comprehensible to render it controllable.[52]

Of course, a thin line always divides blaming from agitation because blaming is also a means for defining boundaries as disease is often associated with "the dangerous other".[53] Blaming, therefore, is "an identification of the enemy and an implicit call for his destruction". History is replete with examples where disease, and the blaming for it, has justified persecutions and destruction. Some notable examples might suffice. The Black Death in the fourteenth-century infused a poisonous suspicion leading to widespread persecution of lepers, Jews and Moslems. Christians blamed Jews for spreading the pestilence, and for plotting with Moslems to destroy Christendom. So was the great outbreak of "witch hunting" during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. During these times, tens of thousands of women were set alight for their supposed responsibility in causing illness through their black magic.[54]

Some fears accompanying the rinderpest reflected the prevalent political and social strains. Some were the culmination of the general sense of unease, which had been

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[52]D. Nelkin and S.L. Gilman, "Placing Blame for Devastating Disease", Social Research, 55 (1988), 361-78.

[53]A. Brandt, No Magic Bullet, 2nd edition (New York, 1987); K. Burke, A Rhetoric of Motive (Berkeley, 1969); M. Douglas, Purity and Danger (London, 1979); G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, Metaphors We Live By (Chicago, 1980); S. Sontag, Illness as Metaphor (New York, 1978).

[54]Barber, "Lepers, Jews and Moslems"; K. Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-century England (London, 1971); B. Shapiro, Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth Century England (Princeton, 1983).

simmering in the years leading up to the outbreak of the panzootic. The year 1895 had ended with the Jameson Raid. Although the Raid was a white-on-white affair, it had implications for the BaSotho. Boer burghers in the neighbouring Free State, and some of their brethren in the Transvaal, used it to subvert BaSotho allegiance to the imperial government.[55] They spread exaggerated imputations of imperial government's complicity in the Raid, and attempted to mobilise the BaSotho and other African peoples in the region for a common anti-imperial resistance. Simultaneously, their newspapers printed alarming "reports as to [BaSotho's] warlike attitude, intentions and possible confederations".[56]

The Raid and the military movements around it in turn alarmed many BaSotho. The commandeering of forces in the Transvaal, and more particularly the arming of the Free State burghers in aid of their Transvaal brethren, alerted the BaSotho to the prospects of a war on their borders. The Raid also occasioned a mass exodus of BaSotho working in the Transvaal. They returned home in panic ahead of what they viewed as a looming war between the English and the boers. Upon their arrival, they spread reports of an imminent war between the two protagonists.[57]

More alarming were the widespread rumours that the Free State boers were readying themselves for a final showdown with the BaSotho. The menacing movements of armed boer burghers in the Free State seemed to verify these fears. Moreover, those boers who tried to avoid joining the campaign in support of the Transvaal employed the excuse that they could not leave their homes. The reason, they alleged, was the rumour that the BaSotho planned to attack their farms in their absence. In early

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[55] L.N.A., S3/25/1/13, annual reports, 30 July 1896.

[56] Ibid., S3/25/1/13, annual reports, 30 July 1896.

[57] Ibid.

January 1897, reports in the newspapers bewailed the "friction that exists between the BaSotho and the Free State burghers".[58]

The dust had no sooner settled in the aftermath of the Raid than the alarming news of the advancing rinderpest crisis arrived early in 1896. The press put out sensational reports, leading to the exodus of BaSotho workers from South African labour centres. The chiefs had recalled them to help in watching over their threatened herds. Others simply wished to join their families before the borders were closed as an anti-rinderpest precaution. Another mass exodus occurred in October 1896. It resulted from the miners' revolt against the reduction of wages and the lengthening of working hours.[59]

All these movements generated intense suspicion in the white community, fanned by sensational journalism. The press interpreted them as preparation for war. "Forewarned forearmed" was the typical reaction in an alarming report of the Daily Express late in 1896:

> For some time part of the Basotho have been leaving the Rand by every goods's train almost in hundreds. Now the boys that have been working in the district [Heilbron] on local roads have left in a hurry in some cases leaving their wages behind. And all that leaks out is that they have been called home to prepare for a great move to commence at Christmas. One rumour has it that they are going to sweep clean the Free State while the Zulu do the same for Natal.[60]

Free State burghers believed these rumours amid a sensational call to arms by the local press. "The proposal to call the Free State people to arms to defend themselves

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[58]Star, 8 January 1897

[59]L.N.A., S7/7/18, H.E. Mabille to acting government secretary, 28 October 1896.

[60]Daily Express, 18 December 1896.

against their worst enemy that ever threatened our national existence", a typical report speculated, "will find a ready echo in every Free State heart."[61]

Suspicion and imaginings within colonial and settler communities also implicated the BaSotho in the prevailing restlessness of their African neighbours. Earlier, in the 1860s, colonial officials and many white settlers had suspected BaSotho complicity in the Xhosa cattle killing and in intrigues with Kreli and other Xhosa chiefs.[62] Similarly, during the spate of African rebellions in the early 1880s, the BaSotho featured prominently in the colonial mind as the main instigators. For example, the 1880-81 Transkeian rebellion was directly linked to similar activities then underway in Basutoland. A powerful rumour was astir, believed by colonial officials, that the BaSotho paramount chief had dispatched messengers throughout the entire region urging all Africans to join in the rebellion. "Disarmament was a question affecting all the tribes in South Africa", the message was alleged to say, "and if they stood aloof while the Basotho were being disarmed, their turn would follow".[63]

On the eve of the new crisis, the colonial press represented the BaSotho as the only undefeated "tribe", and therefore as dangerous. "Thousands and thousands have gone out from their country year after year to work at the mines and have brought back money and fighting materials", a Cape colonial newspaper warned,

> they are hardy, know your language, ideas, and the subjects which are engaging public attention. Being observant they will be calculating; in case of new trouble with them, they will be therefore more dangerous, as a nation, than previously.[64]

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[61]Ibid., 8 September 1896.

[62]See e.g., C.O. 48/377, encl. In Grey to Labouchere, 13 October 1856; B.P.P., vol. XI, 1857-8, Grey to Labouchere, 25 March 1857.

[63]C. Brownlee, Reminiscence of Kaffir Life and History (Lovedale, 1916), 194; see also his The Transkeian Native Territories: Historical Records (Lovedale, 1923).

[64]Cape Times, 17 July 1895.

The Cape government also suspected BaSotho complicity when the Southern Tswana in Langeberg rebelled in 1896.[65] Simultaneously, it implicated them in a suspected attempt by chief Mhlonhlo, to rekindle the rebellion he had led in 1880 in the Transkeian district of Qumbu.[66] This veteran Mpondomise rebel was in exile in Basutoland, hiding in the mountains there. In 1894, the Cape had finally annexed the territory of the Mpondo, faithful allies of the BaSotho. Immediately, rumours circulated in the public press linking the BaSotho to a plot by the Mpondo to resist the colonial harness.[67] The perceived link between their resistance and supposed collusion of the BaSotho resurfaced on the eve of the rinderpest.[68] Fuelling this speculation was a visit by a relative of the Mpondo chief Sigcau to Basutoland early in 1896.[69]

Suspicious circumstances also seemed to link the BaSotho to the Griqua rebellion led by Andreas Le Fleur on the south-eastern border in East Griqualand. Evidence at the trial of the rebels did suggest that the leaders of the rebellion attempted to canvass some BaSotho chiefs, including the paramount chief.[70] Even the Shona-Ndebele

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[65]L.N.A., S7/3/13, Patrick Lenkwane to resident commissioner (Basutoland), 6 January 1897.

[66]Ibid., S5/14, affidavits of Lerotholi's counsellors, J. Sehole & L. Matete, enclosure in resident commissioner to high commissioner , 8 April 1897; also resident commissioner to paramount chief, 29 March 1897, enclosure in same; Paramount chief to resident commissioner, 28 March 1897, enclosure in resident commissioner to high commissioner, 8 April, 1897; Ibid., S5/13, resident commissioner to high commissioner, 3 April 1896; also S4/1/4, resident commissioner's diaries, entry for 4 April, 1896; ibid., S5/14, resident commissioner to high commissioner , 8 April 1897, with enclosures..

[67]Ibid., S5/12, resident commissioner to high commissioner, 20 September 1894, enclosing Lerotholi's letter denying involvement.

[68] Ibid., S5/13, high commissioner to resident commissioner, 28 April 1896, encl. copy from Secretary to the prime minister (Cape Colony) to the prime minister (Cape Colony) enclosing telegram from special commissioner, East Pondoland.

[69]Ibid., S5/13, resident commissioner to high commissioner, 3 April, 1896

[70]The Kokstad Advertiser, 25 February 1896, evidence of Stoffel Bezuidenhout," preliminary examination of the Griquas and Natives arrested in connection with the Le Fleur outbreak", Kokstad; 25 February 1898, evidence of Lepula.

rebellion of 1896 caused a ripple in Basutoland. When BaSotho chiefs declined to mobilise their men to form a "native levy" being conscripted to help subdue the uprising, the imperial administration suspected their complicity in the rebellion.[71]

White fears peaked on the eve of the rinderpest. Sensationalist journalism, to which many BaSotho had ready access, heightened this paranoia. It helped to fuel panic and to confirm suspicions by disseminating the false expectation of an impending all-out African rebellion. Typically, the press singled out the BaSotho as the villains. This white alarmism on the eve of the rinderpest was not new, nor did it end with the rinderpest crisis. As a recent study has revealed, it has been a common and enduring feature of black-white relations, recurring especially during crises.[72]

This combination of circumstances was bound to spur restlessness. All these disturbing events alarmed the BaSotho. Predictions made in the public press further fuelled their fears. One appearing in the editorial of the Free State paper, Daily Express, early 1897, was among the most disquieting "Tribal Rule's Last Stand", was its ominous headline. "What has thus far kept the large body of Basutos on the side of the British government," it proclaimed,

> is neither love nor loyalty, but the prevailing consciousness that being the last nation of any consequence in South Africa, they are now sitting on a veritable powder magazine, and stand in imminent danger of being blown up the moment a light is set to the fuse.[73]

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[71]L.N.A., S7/1/3, resident commissioner's circular no. 83, 1896, to assistant commissioners, 5 April 1896; paramount chief to resident commissioner, 2 May 1896; J.P. Kennan, "Memorandum for the information of G.Y. Lagden", 21 April 1896; Ibid., S4/1/4, resident commissioner's diaries, entry for 24 April 1896; Ibid., S7/3/12, paramount chief to resident commissioner, 2 May 1896.

[72]J. Krikler, "Social Neurosis and Hysterical Pre-Cognition in South Africa: A Case Study and Reflections", Journal of Social History , (Spring, 1995), 491-520.

[73]"Tribal Rule's Last Stand", Editorial, The Daily Express, 22 January 1897.

BaSotho fears did have a basis, although suspicions linking them directly to the rinderpest were unwarranted. Fears over the fencing of their borders and the creation of free zones along their frontier had more deep-seated roots. Conflicts over boundaries had embittered relations between the BaSotho and Free State boers for six decades. The rumours about fencing the borders and clearing a free zone on the frontier heightened popular insecurity. They convinced the BaSotho that this was another attempt to grab what was left of their land. Even the ally of the imperial administration, Chief Jonathan, was apprehensive. "What has surprised us here at Leribe", he protested, "it's said that the country will be divided into two and it is to be a five-mile line from the Caledon. This we do not understand".[74] The strongest opposition to the proposed measure came from the recalcitrant Chief Masupha:

> I have heard what you said about this new line which we do not know.... I say you are to tell these chiefs that I and the nation are dissatisfied with this zone because it has consumed space in Basutoland.... I and all of us say that the Caledon is sufficient.... I say that it is sufficient that the line should be the Caledon river which is the usual line. Again, know that Basutoland is very small, even this line of the Caledon is near to our doors. Even the Caledon line we were not satisfied with but it was said that we were to blame.[75]

Intractable problems with fencing the border inevitably arose. The greater length of the border had been surveyed in 1869 but had never been clearly defined. Except where a river identified it, beacons marked the rest of the boundary. These, in time, had become inconspicuous and indistinguishable. Fencing the Griqualand East border, especially, touched a particularly raw nerve. It reminded the BaSotho that the fencing of the nearby Pondoland border had heralded the annexation of that territory two years before. Besides, this was a contested border, which was not clearly delineated. "The beacons were difficult to find", conceded a report to survey the border in 1896;

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[74]L.N.A., S3/1/5/7, Jonathan to resident commissioner, 15 October 1896.

[75]Ibid., S3/1/5/7, Masupha to resident commissioner, 12 October 1896.

"they had in some cases been pulled down and at other points there [were] as many as three in a line at right angles to the fence".[76]

Faced with this difficulty, both the imperial administration in Basutoland and the Cape government negotiated a compromise. It would allow the anti-rinderpest fence to "take the line of the actual boundary in so far as possible". Otherwise, it would have to "converge into the Cape Colony or Basutoland as the physical features of the country may demand".[77] Soon, however, imperial officials in Basutoland themselves began complaining that at several points there were "considerable encroachments on Basutoland territory, where the fence instead of going round the heads of valleys, strikes across them from point to point".[78] Officially, the fence was to "be regarded as a temporary rinderpest fence only, without prejudice to the desire of either government to readjust it."[79] It, however, became the permanent boundary.

Neither were the rumours reading military intentions into official actions altogether a product of the BaSotho imagination. The deployment of Cape colonial military guards on the BaSotho border and the military metaphors applied to the rinderpest in both the contemporary press and popular discourse confirmed BaSotho suspicion that a plot had been hatched to invade their country. Words like "attack," "invasion," and "devastation" echoed ominously in reports on the panzootic. The connection between epidemics and conquest is well attested in history. The Aztec and Inca empires, for example, owed their demise to military defeat followed by "invasions" of smallpox,

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[76]Ibid., S3/1/5/7, report of Sub-Inspector Cartwright of the Basutoland Police on the Barkly-Basutoland Fence, encl., in assistant commissioner, Quthing, to resident commissioner, 24 April, 1897

[77]Ibid., S3/7/3/1, resident commissioner to assistant commissioner, Quthing, 14 December 1896.

[78]Ibid., resident commissioner to Assistant commissioner Quthing, 24 April 1897.

[79]Ibid., resident commissioner to assistant commissioner, Quthing, 4 December 1896

measles and other diseases that Europeans transmitted.[80] A similar pattern emerged in Southern Africa, with the rinderpest epidemic coming hard on the heels of the most decisive and military phase of colonial expansion.

BaSotho fears that the anti-rinderpest measure of clearing free zones along their border also reflected real concerns. They had watched the dispossession of neighbouring African communities to make way for mining operations. They, therefore, were determined to resist mineral prospecting in their country. Their suspicions were especially ignited as the scramble for mining concessions peaked on the eve of the rinderpest. The years 1895 and 1896 witnessed a frenzied prospecting scramble in the country, rendering the coincidence with the rinderpest uncanny. Count de Ferreres, representing a conglomerate of European financiers, submitted to the suspicious paramount chief a proposition to prospect for minerals.[81] One Captain de Burgh made the most alarming allegations in a bid to obtain sole prospecting rights:

> The Cape government is trying to get the British government to hand your country over to them in the same way as they have recently acquired Bechuanaland. If they succeed in this (and they are bringing and will continue to bring very great influence to bear), the Cape Colony will throw the whole of Basutoland open to the whites of South Africa as has been done with Mashona and Matabele lands, and what will become of you and your people? In answer to this, you may say you will fight. If you do so, what chance have you? You will face armies ten times the number you had to encounter in 1880, armed with the latest improved weapons and versed in the latest art of war. The Matabele were a brave nation, yet how long did it take to scatter their people and take possession of their country... Call your chiefs together before it is too late and lay the truth before them. Read them this letter and tell them it comes from one who would be your friend, and theirs and who proves this by warning you of the danger that lies immediately before you and shows you a safe way to keep you and your country from being eaten up...[82]

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[80]A. Crosby, The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492 (Westport, 1972); W. McNeal, Plagues and People (New York, 1976).

[81]L.N.A., S5/13, Ferreres to the Paramount Chief of Basutoland, 20 May 1896.

[82]Ibid., S5/12, Ulick de Burgh to the chiefs of Basutoland, 27 August 1895.

BaSotho chiefs also received intimation that the high commissioner had asked imperial officials in the country to gauge their likely reaction to opening their country to mining prospectors and white settlers.[83] A combination of this and de Burgh's letter had caused consternation among BaSotho chiefs, inspiring them to petition the high commissioner never to consider such a request.[84] Despite official disavowal of any such designs, suspicions persisted.[85] Against this background, it is understandable that some BaSotho suspected a malevolent connection between the intentions of mineral prospectors and the anti-rinderpest measures along their borders. When asked to remove their cattle from the cordoned area along the borders, many BaSotho demurred:

> This zone along the frontier, from where we have to remove our animals, the government will surrender this frontier to gold searchers who have menaced us last year.[86]

The BaSotho also suspected that colonial governments and captains of labour had introduced the panzootic to force them out to the labour centres. This suspicion was rational, for BaSotho labour at the labour centres was highly prized. They were renowned for their hard work, skill and discipline. Often, when BaSotho deserted from labour centres, production almost ceased. It happened in 1880 when the "Gun War" commenced. All BaSotho working in the diamond mines deserted en masse, returned home to be with their families, and protect their property. A manager of one of the mines reported that:

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[83]Ibid., S5/12. high commissioner to resident commissioner, 13 January 1895; resident commissioner to high commissioner, 3 February 1895.

[84]Ibid., S5/13, Petition of Chiefs of Basutoland to the high commissioner, 20 September 1896.

[85]Ibid., S11/3, minutes of 1895 annual pitso.

[86]Journal des Missions, 1896, 17.

> the works at the different mines were about to come to a stand still for want of labour...caused by the wholesale desertion of the British Basutho.[87]

Now, on the eve of the rinderpest, two other mass desertions of BaSotho workers occurred. They caused panic in the labour centres as evidenced by the large numbers of labour touts who descended on the BaSotho countryside earnestly re-recruiting BaSotho labourers.

This high value attached to BaSotho workers had infused in them a spirit of independence and worker consciousness. This enhanced their bargaining power when negotiating terms of employment. It is not surprising, then, that many BaSotho saw in the rinderpest, a deliberate attempt by the captains of labour to undermine their ability to bargain for the best terms of employment. They were notorious for spurning organised recruitment, preferring to find employment on their own, or through their chiefs. If recruited through a recruiting company, they insisted on a specific contract before departing from home. The contract had to stipulate the level of wages, duration of the contract and conditions of work. Should the employer breach any of the terms of the contract, BaSotho workers simply deserted. They sought employment as gangs under a supervisor, usually a son of a chief, who bargained for them and represented their interests. They also had the potential support of the imperial administration. The latter could bolster BaSotho demands for higher wages and better conditions of work as part of the wage they earned at labour centres paid the hut-tax on which the colonial administration largely depended for revenue.

The reef gold mines were especially unpopular among BaSotho migrants. Recruiting agents often experienced vexing problems with recruiting and keeping recruits on the job.[88] In 1892, for example, a recruitment agent presented an attractive scheme to the

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[87]G.20-81, 20, see also ibid., 130.

[88]For the unpopularity of the reef mines among African workers generally, and the reasons for it, see especially P. Harris, Work, Culture, and Identity: Migrant Labourers in

colonial administration. He would start a recruiting agency in Basutoland. It would place about eight thousand workers under a six-month contract with different gold-mining companies in the reef. A headman would take charge of each gang and ensure that wages were duly paid. The agency would pay for the return transport of recruits, and pay the chiefs a commission per head of a recruited labourer from their villages.[89] "No purpose would be served by such an agency", replied the resident commissioner, for, "all attempts hitherto made to recruit native labourers in large parties in Basutoland [had] been only very modestly successful".[90] Responding to a similar offer during the same period, the assistant commissioner for Berea stated that "although he [had] communicated [the offer] to all the chiefs in the district, there had been no response whatever".[91]

The BaSotho also knew that the white settlers envied their country and had persisted in agitating for it to be opened to white settlement. Their country was an autonomous, though not independent, "native" territory administered through hereditary chiefs. The chiefs prohibited land alienation resolutely. Basutoland, therefore, offended the sensibilities of neighbouring white settlers and thwarted their demands for land and labour.

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Mozambique and South Africa, c. 1860-1910 (Johannesburg, 1994); Jeeves, "Control of Migratory Labour". Jeeves, "Over-reach".P. Richardson and J.J. Van Helten, "Labour in the South African Gold Mining Industry, 1886-1914", in Marks & Rathbone, Industrialization and Social Change, 77-98; also various evidence to the South African Native Affairs Commission in South African Native Affairs Commission, 1903-5, 4 vols (Cape Town, 1905); also Report of the Transvaal Labour Commission, Together with Minority Report: Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence (Johannesburg, 1903).

[89]L.N.A., S7/1/3/8, Donovan to assistant commissioner, Mafeteng, 15 July 1892.

[90]Ibid., resident commissioner to assistant commissioner, Mafeteng, 27 July 1892.

[91]Ibid., S7/1/1/6, assistant commissioner, Berea, to resident commissioner, 24 December 1892.

The imperial policy of retaining tribalism and rule by hereditary chiefs also threatened white settler interests. While the frontier of conquest and dispossession was advancing, white settlers had come to identify tribalism and chieftainship as the locus of African resistance. Accordingly, they became militant advocates for the destruction of tribalism and chiefly rule.[92]

The exasperation of white settlers reached its peak in the years immediately preceding the rinderpest. It was aired in the press. White settlers agitated for Basutoland to be opened to white settlement and for the destruction of tribalism. "A Wasted country" announced the heading of an article on the first page of a Free State daily newspaper:

> The more the present stage of Basutoland is considered, the stronger is the conviction forced upon one that it is in reality a wasted country. Thousands and thousands of acres of magnificent soil are lying idle, and thousands of acres are only partially cultivated by the native in the roughest and most meagre style. Were all those great stretches of meadowland fully cultivated, grain sufficient to supply the whole of South Africa would assuredly be produced.[93]

In 1895, the settler press was vehemently castigating the imperial government's policy of "indirect rule". It asserted that it was "doing incalculable harm to all sections of the Basutos".[94] It also condemned the policy of governing the country through the chiefs as "officialdom jog-trot".[95]

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[92]For a more detailed discussion of these notions, see I.T. Evans, "The Political Economy of a State Apparatus: The Department of Native Affairs in the Transition from Segregation to Apartheid in South Africa, unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1986; for a discussion of the implementation of these notions in the early boer republics of the Free State and Transvaal, see M. Mamdani, Citizen and Subject, 91-2.

[93]The Express, 22 January 1897.

[94]Cape Mercury, 27 June 1895; see also Wynberg Times, 22 June 1896 and Cape Times, 17 July 1895.

[95]Cape Times, 17 July 1895.

Against this background, it is understandable why many BaSotho saw sinister motives in the rinderpest phenomenon. That local Europeans failed to view these reactions in a wider context is puzzling. They were hardly a generation removed from the tumult occasioned by the European epidemics of the nineteenth century. Ranger has offered a useful explanation to assist in understanding the complexities of the colonial mentality. He observed that colonial officials suffered from a constant feeling of incapacity to understand their colonised subjects and to fathom the impact of the colonial system on them. While times were normal, and the "native" appeared to be under control and behaving the way he was supposed to, the colonial administrator could convince himself that he knew his "native" well, believing that the native was quite simple. Once you understood him, it would be simple to control him. The colonised, in his turn, acted in a manner that appeared to confirm this knowledge by playing "the native" he was supposed to be.[96] During a crisis, however, it no longer suited Africans to play the "native", no longer benefited him to continue to conceal his real nature, and the impact of colonial pressures on him.

This might explain why most occasions of African expression of discontent led to military pacification, followed by a commission to enquire into the motives of the rebellion and to explore further the "native" psychology.[97] In such circumstances, colonial officials felt despondently that their control of the "native" had slipped, and that regaining it required an enquiry into his psyche.

This seems to have been the predicament of imperial officials in Basutoland in the aftermath of the Makhaola disturbance. The legitimacy of imperial rule and the need

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[96]Ranger, "From Humanism to the Science of Man: Colonialism in Africa and the Understanding of Alien Societies", Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 26 (1976), 115-142.

[97]C.Achebe, Morning Yet On Creation Day (London, 1973), especially, 5; see also e.g. similar colonial response to the Shona-Ndebele and Tswana uprisings of 1896, in Ranger, Revolt; Saker and Aldridge, "The Origins".

to affirm its authority in the region remained of paramount importance. This was especially necessary following the damage inflicted on imperial prestige by the Jameson Raid.

A prime concern was the border dispute with the Cape colony. A crisis on the borders challenged the main responsibility of the imperial government in the country – that of securing the Basutoland borders.[98] The government could achieve this only through strenuously avoiding an incident that might expose the imperial authorities' inability to "preserve order and keep engagements to neighbouring states and thus manifesting [our] impotence to [our neighbouring] states."[99] A disturbance on the BaSotho border thus caused an international embarrassment. Failing to bring the culpable individuals to justice would jeopardise imperial prestige.

A second concern was the mishandling of a colonial officer. "In intimidating and touching the person or property of an officer," Lagden wrote to Lerotholi, "those guilty of it were guilty of acts of violence towards me as representing the High Commissioner and towards the Queen's government".[100] So few and isolated were colonial officials throughout the country that they constantly felt insecure, especially during a period of crisis and general uneasiness. An attack on one sent shock waves through the ranks of the local colonial elite.

Lagden was anxious that the disturbance signalled a rebellion against imperial rule. Such an uprising by a strong, well-armed, and quasi-independent nation boded ill for the imperial presence in the country. It would confirm the persistent denunciation of imperial rule of Basutoland by the settler press. It would further justify the constant

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[98]C.O. 48/510, original draft by Sir Hercules Robinson, attached to correspondence between Derby and law officers, 2 January 1884

[99]Ibid., 17/225, high commissioner to resident commissioner, 16 December 1897.

[100]L.N.A., S8/2/2/5, resident commissioner to paramount chief, 23 December 1896.

clamour from neighbouring settler states for pacification of the BaSotho and confiscation of their land. The Makhaola disturbance did draw negative coverage in the colonial press.[101] An editorial in the Star used the opportunity of the disturbance to advocate for the reannexation of "this patch of territory" to the Cape Colony.[102]

The imperial administration, however, had to be seen by the BaSotho to be dealing impartially with this border dispute. Its authority and prestige among the BaSotho depended on its ability to protect their country against foreign intrusion. "Whatever confidence on the part of the BaSotho has been established towards government," Lagden averred on a later, similar occasion, "has been mainly due to the fact that we have stood by their rights without respect to colour, as being subjects of the Queen".[103]

Careful decisions were therefore essential. In quelling the disturbance, imperial officials avoided the use of force. The absence of a military force in the country significantly reduced the available options. "Government", Lagden wrote despondently to the high commissioner during the anxious days of the disturbance, "has no force but public opinion with which to work and public opinion is liable to be misled either wilfully or accidentally. Government is neither armed nor protected".[104] Consequently, the imperial government pinned its hopes on a negotiated settlement.[105]

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[101]See e.g. Ibid., S5/14, resident commissioner to assistant commissioner , Mafeteng, undated, in response to assistant commissioner, Mafeteng, to resident commissioner, undated, but received on 18 January 1897; see also ibid., telegrams from Reid to Cape Times, The Advertiser, Cape Argus, and The Johannesburg Star, enclosed in resident commissioner to high commissioner, 22 January 1897.

[102]Star, 21 January 1897.

[103]Lagden Papers, Lagden to Milner, 20 December 1897.

[104]L.N.A., S5/14, resident commissioner to high commissioner, 16 January 1897.

[105]C.O. 417/224, minute by Earl Selbourne, 26 February 1897, on Rosmead to Chamberlain, 28 January 1897; also L.N.A., S5/24, resident commissioner to high commissioner, 16 January 1897

Lagden and the staff of the Colonial Office agreed that if they had to use force, they would need a massive military campaign to quell the prevailing "restlessness." They also saw that a small show of force would be ineffective, if it did not actually precipitate a rebellion.[106]

There were other considerations. At the turn of the century, Basutoland had come to take on some strategic significance in the region. It was situated in a strategic position that would aid British military movements in a conflict with the boer republics. The Colonial Office was aware of this advantage. The parliamentary under-secretary at the Colonial Office observed that "to have to smash the BaSotho would be simply disastrous. Their potential value on the flanks of the Orange Free-State is immense".[107]

Subsequent events during the South African War were to vindicate these sentiments. The BaSotho were to become a major asset to the British war-effort in four areas. Firstly, they provided the labour essential for the conduct of the war. Secondly, they7 became the essential backbone of the network of intelligence necessary for the successful operation of the war. Thirdly, they were the major suppliers of horses in a war whose entire mobility depended on remount horses. Lastly, the country offered refuge to British civilians and troop retreats during critical periods of the war.[108]

Furthermore, Lagden was aware that crushing the BaSotho would only underscore the acquisitive intentions of white colonists. Indeed, he blamed the latter for the sensational rumours that the BaSotho were at the head of an impending all-out African rebellion. Their purpose, he thought, was to incite the BaSotho to a rebellion

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[106]Ibid., S5/14, resident commissioner to high commissioner, 16 January 1897.

[107]C.0. 417/224, minute by Earl Selborne, 26 February 1897, on Rosmead to Chamberlain, 28 January 1897..

[108]L.N.A., S3/2/1/1-6, papers on the Anglo-Boer War.

that would justify their destruction, thus opening their country to white settlement.[109] Sentiments expressed in the press seemed to confirm this apprehension. After cataloguing periodic rumours of "native risings" so prevalent during successive Christmas seasons, including the Makhaola episode, a reporter from the Daily Express reminded his readers of a statement that a former governor of the Cape, Sir Benjamin d'Urban, had made: "as long as there is a native chief left in South Africa, so long will there be native wars".[110] A more sensational sentiment appeared in an editorial of the influential Transvaal newspaper, the Star. It justified the view that the prevalent African "restlessness", though "vexatious and regrettable, cannot be looked upon as an unmixed misfortune". It could be exploited to achieve the consolidation of the colonial enterprise and the firm subjugation of Africans.[111]

Therefore, the imperial administration relied on what had now become policy par excellence - using the authority of the paramount chief to quell the disturbance. Now, however, the government was in a quandary. The authority of the paramount chief was weak and wavering, requiring the support of the same imperial administration that sought to use it. What is more, the culprits were the paramount chief's own sons, and their excuse of acting on their father's instruction compounded the problem.

Lagden was anxious about the factionalism that the disturbance was creating. He already suspected that it had all the hallmarks of a disruptive dynastic factionalism. "Undoubtedly", he thought, "these three chiefs (Maama, Jonathan and Masupha) encouraged Lerotholi's sons to insubordination in order to weaken their father's position, secretly urging [sic] the rinderpest...as levers...".[112]

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[109]Lagden papers, Mss Afr.S. 210 (i), resident commissioner to high commissioner, 16 January 1897

[110]Daily Express, 2 December 1896.

[111]"Restive Natives", Star, 21 January 1897.

[112]Ibid., S5/14, resident commissioner to high commissioner, 16 January 1897.

Thus, he attempted a risky three-pronged strategy. He would use the only effective authority available – that of the paramount chief. Simultaneously, he would exploit existing dynastic rivalries to localise the scope of the disturbance. Finally, he would avoid pressing the latter strategy beyond the point where it would disturb the fragile political equilibrium.[113] Therefore, he leaned on the paramount chief, reminding him of his responsibility as "the chief policeman of the government", and of his role to maintain law and order.[114] He then tried the culprits at a full pitso attended by all the principal chiefs. This would enable him to avoid making a judgement himself. It would also rescue him from the odium of an unpopular decision. Furthermore, it would expose the "true facts" relating to the disturbance. He had reason to know that the paramount chief,

> whose mood of late had been very obstinate and surly had, in order to screen his sons and disguise their unruly conduct, withheld from the nation correspondence that had lately passed between us and so distorted it as to raise false and alarming issues in the native mind.[115]

The presence of other chiefly factions would also enable Lagden to manipulate the prevailing dynastic jealousies to his advantage.

Lagden also strove to avoid disturbing the existing equilibrium of power within the chiefly hierarchy. Although insisting on including the other chiefs in securing a verdict, he used a different strategy to decide a suitable sentence. For the latter, he summoned "an inner council of senior counsellors and some old chiefs," deliberately excluding any of the principal chiefs "whose presence might have lent colour of partiality."[116] After this council had recommended a sentence of imprisonment, Lagden displayed his magnanimity by waiving the sentence, considering it

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[113]Ibid.

[114]see, for example, Ibid., S8/2/2/5, resident commissioner to paramount chief, 25 December 1896

[115]Ibid., S5/14, resident commissioner to high commissioner, 16 January 1897..

[116]Ibid.

> the most judicious course to send [Makhaola] away with nothing more than a reprimand as it was essential to the balance of power not to weaken the paramount chief's faction further by any studied humiliation.[117]

For his part, Lerotholi typically saw the affair within the context of contemporary dynastic conflicts. Thus, his immediate strategy was three-pronged: to stand behind his sons, to redirect attention away from the affair, and to defuse factionalism. No sooner did the court fine his fugitive sons for their part in the disturbance, than Lerotholi, to Lagden's chagrin, restored them to their former positions. Justifying his actions, he asserted that since he believed that both he and the resident commissioner had pardoned them, "matters were now settled."[118]

Throughout, he attempted strenuously to frustrate Lagden's strategy of including the other chiefly factions to contain the disturbance.[119] Instead, he set up his own tribunal to try his sons for mishandling an imperial official. It consisted of his brothers and counsellors.[120] Simultaneously, he sought to deflect attention from the affair by reporting sensational rumours of menacing preparations in areas under the jurisdiction of those chiefs who contested his position as paramount chief. The other chiefs, in their turn, exploited the disturbance in pursuit of their own factional interests. Intending to discredit the paramount chief's faction in the eyes of the imperial administration, they most likely urged the young men on, even as they doggedly disavowed involvement in the disturbance.[121]

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[117]Ibid., resident commissioner to high commissioner, 22 February 1897.

[118]Ibid., S7/3/12, paramount chief to resident commissioner, 28 February 1897.

[119]Ibid., S7/3/12, paramount chief to resident commission, 30 December 1896.

[120]Ibid., S7/3/12, paramount chief to resident commissioner, 30 December 1896.

[121]E.g. ibid., Jonathan to resident commissioner, 14 January 1897; S4/1/4, resident commissioner's diary, 21 January 1897.

The rinderpest crisis, coupled with accompanying political disturbances, provides a convenient point of entry for understanding the complex processes of interaction between coloniser and colonised. In Basutoland, the British colonial presence was unusual - the BaSotho themselves had invited it. This complicated relations between the coloniser and the colonised; it masked behaviour that the rinderpest crisis helped to expose.

What emerges from the crisis brought on by the Makhaola disturbance is the weakness of both the local and the colonial states, and their mutual dependence. Both had to "walk the tight rope". They could best achieve this through what Marks, in explaining similar complex ambiguities in early twentieth century Natal, has called "the art of colonial misunderstanding." "The workings of the colonial misunderstanding," she has observed,

> mean that the words and actions of individuals are both deliberately and accidentally ambiguous, as the colonised don the mask of deference before their conquerors, and conquerors assume the garb of authority before the subjugated.[122]

Similarly, Lagden and Lerotholi misunderstood each other, "deliberately" or "accidentally". The Makhaola disturbance unleashed an extraordinary exchange of correspondence between the two, each blaming the other for the affair. Lerotholi persisted in asserting that he had ordered the cordon on the border on the "misunderstanding" that it had been required by the imperial administration itself.[123] Lagden, in turn, denied responsibility, denouncing the deployment of the cordon as "outrageous and "unwarrantable".[124] He further claimed that his instructions had been "misunderstood".

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[122]S. Marks, The Ambiguities of Dependence in South Africa: Class, Nationalism, and the State in Twentieth Century Natal (Braamfontein, 1986),

[123]L.N.A., S7/3/12, paramount chief to resident commissioner, 25, 26, 27, 28, 30 December 1896.

[124]Ibid., resident commissioner to paramount chief, 23 December 1896.

Only when Lagden threatened imperial abandonment of the country did Lerotholi yield, playing the only remaining card of submission and deference, blaming the entire affair on "misunderstanding". "I caused these children to make mistakes", he sought to assuage the resident commissioner "because I thought I am carrying out the orders given me, whereas I did not comprehend it".[125]

Even before its outbreak in Basutoland, rinderpest formed the backdrop to political restlessness. It also shook colonial officials out of their complacent belief that they knew the BaSotho well and had succeeded in winning their complete confidence and trust. The officials became aware of latent disaffection when they had believed that none existed. The Makhaola disturbance warned Lagden of the urgency of ascertaining if there was "any suppressed national movement against government, and if there was any change desired in the colonial status."[126]

At the pitso called to ascertain this feeling, the assembled chiefs and counsellors donned the mask of deference. They "unanimously" declared themselves well contented with the existing situation, disowned the conduct of Lerotholi's children and expressed their desire for peace.[127]

Despite their grievances, most BaSotho knew that they had to stand in good stead with the imperial administration, upon which the security of their country rested. Indeed, the best that the imperial administration could do in strengthening its policy of "masterly inactivity" was to threaten the withdrawal of imperial protection. This strategy always worked. "Why is it we are being killed so much by government,"

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[125]Ibid., S7/3/5, paramount chief to resident commissioner, 1 January 1897.

[126]Ibid., S5/14, resident commissioner to high commissioner, 16 January 1897.

[127]C.0. 417/224, minutes of pitso held at Maseru on 12 January 1897, encl. in Rosmead to Chamberlain, 28 January 1897.

panicked Lerotholi when the press began circulating rumours of the imminent termination of imperial rule in the country:

> What is our fault? This matter of the boys which the nation has nothing to do with, is it one for which the government can kill us for. Where I see that these matters have become serious is because I also see the newspapers say that we ought to be given over to the colonial people; what is the reason for government already wishes to abandon us? We are the people of the Queen, we are a peaceable people, we have no plan nor a single bad thought, we are only trusting to government.[128]

For the imperial government, then, the success of its administration in Basutoland, and the maintenance of its prestige in the region, depended on establishing and maintaining a working relationship with the local elite. It could best achieve this by walking the tight rope. In their turn, the BaSotho were caught in a similar quandary. Walking the tight rope and donning the mask was both essential for their survival, given the emerging colonial landscape, the closing frontier of white settlement, and the ambitions and schemes of white settlers.

While heightened tension, alarm and restlessness met the news of the approaching catastrophe, public responses changed when the panzootic began sweeping through the BaSotho herds. The initial response was to conceal its presence; this was followed by panic, cattle-owners fleeing with their infected herds.

The sight of many carcasses was gruesome and heartbreaking, shocking the cattle-owners. A missionary vividly described the sight:

> Along the way, we saw a most lamentable spectacle that one may imagine. In a certain place twice as big as our bedrooms, sixteen head of oxen lay dead in the stream. There was a little black calf, terribly lean and thin, sadly pulling itself among these decaying corpses. There were 66 dead animals many of which were fat bulls...How could such a spectacle not wreck the imagination of these poor Blacks...?[129]

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[128]L.N.A., 8/2/2/5, paramount chief to resident commissioner

[129]M. Dieterlen, 14 July, Journal des Missions, 1897, 597.

There is some evidence that some lost their minds while others committed suicide. When asked if she remembered the rinderpest, an informant exclaimed:

> How can I not? The man, who set up our initiation lodge lost so many cattle during the rinderpest, he fled from the village in fright and was never heard of.[130]

Other informants remembered being told stories of relatives who had lapsed into temporary insanity, returning to the village after recovery.[131] Many tried to alleviate distress by setting out to enjoy their last days' contentment. Gluttony, alcoholism and conviviality were options. The 1897 harvest brought an abundant sorghum crop, most of it finding its way to the brewing pot. "The harvest is beautiful", a missionary exclaimed despondently, "they drink too much joala [local Sotho beer]; they dance, amuse and degrade themselves".[132]

Churchyards were desecrated as BaSotho beer flowed during baptismal feasts. When Lerotholi informed the resident commissioner of the upcoming baptismal feast of his second son, Griffith, Lagden "prayed" that "your sons and enemies may not poison you with drink". The paramount chief responded revealingly:

> I find that it is not well that I should go, as your words have intimidated me, when you say that my sons may give me drink and also my enemies...Now on account of this word of yours I am no longer going because I hear that there is plenty of beer coming from Nkuebe's, etc. Now I do not like to be mentioned as having been present in such drunkenness...and my name will be spoilt and so be disgraced.[133]

He did attend the occasion, with predictable consequences.

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[130]Interview with 'Matsekoa Motleleng, Thabang, Mokhotlong, 18 May 1978.

[131]Public interview with five informants at 'Mamazibuko, Butha-Buther, 21 to 28 April 1978.

[132]Journal des missions, 1897, 599-600.

[133]L.N.A., S7/3/14, paramount chief to resident commissioner, 19 November 1897.

3.1: A Tragic scene during the rinderpest outbreak
(Courtesy of Onderstepoort Veterinary Library)

The BaSotho shared this Epicurean response with other African societies in Southern Africa.[134] The remark of the acting magistrate of East Griqualand captured the essence of the prevailing wisdom observed everywhere: "Let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die."[135] Here, again, historical parallels with societies separated by space and time are striking. Quite contrary to the prejudicial comments

[134]See, e.g., L.M.S., Box 53, Jacket B, H. Williams, Molepolole 12 October 1896; U.S.P.G., vol. B, letter of Rev. Markham, Ipolela Mission, Natal, 30 June 1897; Ibid., letter of 31 December 1897; G.42-98, report from Tsolo, 127; Ibid., 121.

[135]Ibid., 121.

of contemporary Europeans, who identified this reaction with African "barbarism", this response was common for people facing such crisis. Boccaccio attests it in **The Decameron**, describing public responses to the Black Death in fourteenth-century Florence:

> Others...held that plenty of drinking and enjoyment, singing and free living and the gratification of the appetite in every possible way, letting the devil take the hindmost, was the best preventative of such a malady; and as far as they could, they suited the action to the word. Day and night, they went from one tavern to another, drinking and carousing unrestrainedly. At the least inkling of something that suited them, they ran wild in other people's houses, and there was no one to prevent them, for everyone had abandoned all responsibility for his belongings as well as for himself, considering his days numbered....[136]

Historians have also shown that this response was common in similar situations regardless of culture or historical epoch. During the Black Death in the medieval western and Mediterranean world, Renouard has observed a similar pattern: people "giving themselves over to sensual pleasures free of care", and abandoning themselves to "debauchery, gluttonously satisfying all their appetites". He concluded that the crisis of the Black Death caused a "wave of immorality [which] shook the entire west".[137]

While the rinderpest drove some BaSotho in this direction, it propelled others to the opposite one, towards spiritual means of consolation and escape. Christianised BaSotho were steeped in the Christian eschatological tradition that viewed disease as an expression of the wrath of the Almighty. In this tradition, an epidemic was a divine scourge, a retribution for the sins of humankind. Repentance and prayer were therefore the appropriate and prime recourse. They remind us of the public

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[136]G. Boccaccio, The Decameron, trans. F. Winwar (New York, 1955), xxv-xxvi

[137]Y. Renouard, "The Black Death as a Major Event in World History", in Bowsky (ed) Black Death, 23-34; also E. Carpenter, "The Plague as a Recurrent Phenonenon", in ibid., 35-7.

processions in Catholic Europe, and public fasts and sermons in post-Reformation Protestant countries during epidemics.[138] "They resolved to forsake their vices", wrote a noted historian, J.F.C. Hecker, in 1832, about the profound sense of contrition that seized Christians during the Plague, "to make restitution for past offences, before they were summoned hence, to seek reconciliation with their Maker, and to avert, by self-chastisement, the punishment due to their former sins".[139]

The same themes permeated religious discourse and church sermons on the rinderpest in Basutoland. Well ahead of the outbreak of the disease, Christian missionaries had tried to urge a spiritual reawakening, using the looming panzootic as a spur. On the one hand, they invested in such a revival the potential for averting the wrath of the Almighty who, in gratitude, would deliver the nation from the approaching doom. Paradoxically, were divine intervention to spare the BaSotho the imminent crisis,

> their pride and their satisfaction would not have any limits. They would plunge more in the practical materialism and animalistic enjoyment constituting the essence of paganism.[140]

The sermons were appropriate to the day, distinguished by their apocalyptic flavour. Predictably, the most popular was the commentary on the Letters of St. Paul portending the end of the world and the Second Coming of the Messiah. "St. Paul says," exhorted the local missionary paper, "once these signs are manifest, be vigilant,

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[138]For providential interpretations of epidemics and disease generally, see K. Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic (London, 1971), ch. 4; for specific countries and regions, see B. Bennassar, Recherches sur les grandes epidemimies dan le nord de l'Espagne a la fin du XVI siecle (Paris, 1969); G. Calvi, "A Metaphor for Social Exchange: The Florentine Plague of 1630," Representation, 13 (1986), 140; Carpenter, Une ville devant la peste: Orvieto et la peste noire de 1348 (Paris, 1962), 155; Slack, Impact of Plague, 229.

[139]J.F.C. Hecker, The Epidemics of the Middle Ages (trans, Babington, B.G.), 3rd ed. (London, 1859).

[140]Journal des Missions, 1897, 18.

for the end is at hand".[141] At a ceremony dedicating a new church, a MoSotho lay preacher exhorted the congregation thus:

> It is hard to believe what one does not see. One believes only what one can see. These days we have been constantly warned about the advent of the dread disease. Everybody, however, has been making fun out of these exhortations and many continue to purchase cows and more cows. It is the same even unto God's judgement before which each and everyone will have to stand at the end of our ephemeral lives. Long have the messengers of God's will been urging us to prepare for the judgement day through retribution, conversion and belief. None, however, has taken heed. Even unto this call heathens refuse to be exhorted and they make fun. Will they believe, then, when they have been condemned to eternal hell just as they will believe the warnings about the cattle disease when they witness their own cattle dying. Was it not so even in the days of Noah? People around him saw him build the ark. They, however, continued in their worldly pleasures: drank, made merry, took wives and divorced until doom's day arrived. Will this exhortation now be heeded? Shall we persist in resisting the calling of Jesus Christ? If with the cattle plague we had no means of preparedness owing to the lack of any medical cure, with God's calling there is little excuse. The opportunities have been abundant, and His messengers have persistently and patiently exhorted us.[142]

Another popular theme of sermons seems to have been the commentary on Christ's counsel on the most secure repository for BaSotho's wealth. "For many," exhorted the same Evangelist:

> their herds were their ultimate source of happiness. They had, as it were, locked up their hearts in their cattle posts. Yet today, woe unto those who stored their treasures on earth where rinderpest could get them for they have lost everything they possessed. Blessed be those who stored their treasures in heaven, where rinderpest will never find them, for they have everlasting happiness.

These proclamations did strike a chord in the minds of a people whose indigenous modes of explanation seemed to be dying with their diseased animals. An apparent resurgence of spirituality occurred when the dreaded disease first appeared.

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[141] Leselinyana, 1 July 1897.

[142] Ibid., 25 July 1897.

Missionaries did not hesitate to affirm a general awakening. The Anglican missionary at Hlotse observed that the rinderpest was bringing "larger congregations, especially of heathens" to the churches, "Sunday after Sunday, than [he had] ever known before". He further wondered if this was "a glimpse of the silver lining of the dark clouds which are lingering over us."[143] The French missionaries, in their turn, reported "numerous" conversions.[144]

This heightened religiosity displayed by the BaSotho was another manifestation of the resigned response to the rinderpest crisis throughout South Africa. All over, missionaries claimed that they witnessing an unprecedented attendance at church services. Despite the black cloud hanging over their converts, many missionaries saw "many a bright ray [piercing] the cloud", as Rev. Williams, of the London Missionary Society in the Bechuanaland Protectorate, did:

> and looking on the past year, I can unhesitatingly say that from the standpoint of our work it has been the highest, happiest and most successful since I have been here.[145]

From the Cape territories, missionaries made similar claims of Christian revivals. Rev. J.H. Bone at Grahamstown marvelled at the unprecedented amount of offerings made at his church despite impoverishment all around. Rev. S.W. Cox confirmed this impression, remarking that despite his converts passing through a time of great scarcity of food, "the offerings of the people have been far larger during the last six months than ever before". [146] A similar tendency has been observed among the

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[143]U.S.P.G., letters received, 1897, Rev. J. Widdicombe, Hlotse, 30 November 1896.

[144]Journal des Missions, 1897; For similar responses of African societies in Southern Africa, see, e.g. U.S.P.G., annual reports, vol. 2, 1898; also E. Unterhalter, "Religious Change in Nquthu District of Zululand in the Nineteenth Century", History Seminar Paper, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1976.

[145]L.M.S., annual reports, Box 2, Folder 2.

[146]U.S.P.G., annual reports, 1898, vol. 2

African communities of Zululand. At all Christian services, especially baptism, large congregations, especially of non-believers, attended.[147]

While some looked to Christianity, others turned to indigenous religion. Dieterlen noted this tendency:

> It appears that we are wrong to expect any religious awakening following this plague. Through a human eye, this pest awakens all the instincts of paganism, which were dormant...[148]

The celebration of circumcision feasts accompanied this "awakening of paganism". Chiefs Bereng and Masupha lavishly celebrated such occasions during the height of the panzootic.[149] Despite his disgust, Dieterlen captured the current mood: "At this moment", he vexed, "everybody seems to make circumcision feasts...about 148 young people have passed there, not far from here".[150] Writing a few years later, a historian of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, observed that "at this time, there was a great revival of old heathen customs in Basutoland - the circumcision school and all the various forms of witchcraft".[151]

This resurgence of indigenous religiosity during a time of social crisis, however, was a complex syncretism between indigenous and Christian beliefs. Without a secure religious appeal and source of consolation, many hapless BaSotho found themselves flipping back and forth between contesting religions or combining them in a mixed blend. Thus, amid the bewilderment, "wonderful resurrection cases" were widely

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[147]Unterhalter, "Religious Change in the Nqutu District".

[148]Journal des Missions, 1897, 599.

[149]L.N.A., S7/3/13, Bereng to resident commissioner, 5 July 1897.

[150]Journal des Missions, 599.

[151] C.F. Pascor, Two Hundred Years of the S.P.G.: An Historical Account of the S.P.G. in Foreign Parts, 1801-1900, vol. 1 (London, 1901), 327.

reported.[152] In one such case, people whispered about an Englishman who died, rose again on the fifth day, went to heaven and then returned to earth. He was rumoured to be preaching that:

> after dying, I went to heaven but found the door closed by millions of bulls that we [the English] have killed by the pest, and God sends me to say that the only way to open the door of heaven is to urge the whites to pity the Blacks by stopping the rinderpest.[153]

The devastating drought that followed the rinderpest was popularly linked to the murrain. Some claimed that the absence of rain was due to the death of cattle. Before ascending to heaven, a popular story spread, the dying cattle consumed all the water from the lakes.

Belief in these resurrection tales increased as they seemed to receive confirmation from all over southern Africa. Tales came from Umzimvubu in East Griqualand. They alleged that a woman who died rose again. "During her sojourn in heaven", the legend professed:

> 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] contained locusts "with horses' teeth".[154]

Another woman was rumoured to have "popped out of the grave". She also visited heaven from where she was sent back to inform the "natives" that after the rinderpest a disease would follow among humans. To prevent it, "natives" were urged to inoculate themselves with bile extracted from infants sacrificed from each "kraal".[155]

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[152]Cape Times, 23 October 1897.

[153]Journal des Missions, 1897, 599-600.

[154]Cape Times, 23 October 1897.

[155]Ibid.

These fables were partly responsible for the widespread anti-foreign sentiment that prevailed. There was a reluctance to engage in commercial transactions with Europeans. "They buy neither salt nor sugar in the shops", observed a European missionary in Basutoland, "saying that everything is poisoned."[156] In August 1897, white traders experienced a drastic shortage in the supply of BaSotho grain and a slump in trade. A Free State farmer wrote despondently "from Basutoland I get reports that the natives...are holding on to their mealies". He, however, had grasped only part of the reason: "The niggers are saying, 'hang your markets, we may require our mealies ourselves'."[157]

Finally, with their cattle dead, the BaSotho settled down to a mood of resigned fatalism. It was manifested in constraint, tolerance and fortitude. This disposition bred a remarkable sense of self-blame and contrition. The paramount chief failed to arrive at the annual pitso of 1897 because he had learnt that attendants would blame the chiefs for the loss of cattle. Abashed, he remained at a nearby village, reportedly "drunk".[158] Despite his absence, speakers rose in turn to thank imperial officers and to place the blame for the national catastrophe entirely on the BaSotho: "Our cattle are dead through our own stupidity", was the typical expression of contrition:

> We cannot blame the government. I thank the government. Government has tried its best, anyone can see that government is caring for us like a parent for its child.... Although my cattle are dead, I thank the government. I see that it is not deceiving us.[159]

This mood of resigned fatalism that the BaSotho displayed was prevalent among African communities throughout South Africa. After the initial alarm had abated, the

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[156]Journal des Missions, 1897, 600.

[157]The Express, 3 August 1897.

[158]L.N.A., S4/1/4, resident commissioner's diaries, entry for 21 October 1897.

[159]Ibid., S11/3, speech of Ntho, pitso of 21 October 1897.

final response was resignation. Contemporaries noted this striking attitude of calm and fortitude with which most African communities bore their losses. As a missionary paper acknowledged, "the seeming complacency with which many natives bowed their heads to their losses", was "a matter of much comment".[160] These comments are unanimous and repetitive that we might only scrape off the dust from the top of the available sources by randomly selecting some of them:

> It was something remarkable to see the quiet resigned manner in which they accepted the rinderpest visitation.[161]
>
> The natives accepted their losses bravely, and when the ploughing season came, cultivated large areas with such oxen as they had, horses and kaffir hoes.[162]
>
> A careful perusal of the reports of the Inspectors of Native Locations seems to show that notwithstanding drawbacks and losses during the past year, from the effects of drought, rinderpest and locusts, the natives of this district have generally held their own while in some respects they have shown a considerable amount of grit, perseverance and resource in their endeavour to combat these evils.[163]
>
> The Bathlaping bear hunger and privations with equanimity...[164]
>
> They bear their troubles resignedly and cheerfully, the heathens, indeed, take it as a sort of fatalism.[165]
>
> So far as can be judged from outward appearance, the people go as before, treating their losses most philosophically."[166]

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[160] Christian Express, xxvii, 328, 1 October 1897

[161] U.S.P.G., vol. 2, report by Rev. Charles Taberer, 31 December 1898.

[162] G.42-98, 1, 33.

[163] G.31-'99, 40

[164] G.31-'99, report for Mafeking, 67.

[165] U.S.P.G., vol. B, report of Rev. B. Markhan, Ipolela, 30 June 1897.

[166] Natal Departmental Reports, 1898, BB 12.

> Indeed, it is generally admitted these misfortunes, coming one on top of the whole, were met by them with singular fortitude and forbearance.[167]
>
> Yet, through it all, the natives of both Natal and Zululand maintained an attitude of uncomplaining calm. They submitted to their losses with stoical equanimity, and they prepared, as their neighbours did, to repair their losses and to cope with misfortune.[168]

The pattern of BaSotho's responses to the rinderpest fits well that observed in cross-cultural studies of social reaction to dramatic epidemics in the past.[169] The first phase was that of alarm reaction. It was manifested in flight, scapegoating and political unrest. When relief failed to come, response moved into a second phase - the stage of confronting the crisis and attempting to control it. During this phase, people employed familiar methods for fighting the epidemic, drawing from the normal repertoire of activities. When these failed to stop the epidemic, or cure the disease, they used extraordinary means of treatment, drawn from outside the normal response to disease. These included using various preventive and curative agents whose therapeutic value was often unknown. They also tried other alternatives of relief, including religiosity and mystical approaches. The final stage was that of acceptance of, and resignation to, the crisis.

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[167]J.A. Stuart, A History of the Zulu Rebellion, 1906 (London, 1913), 92-3.

[168]Sir John Robinson, A Life Time in South Africa (London, 1900), 319-20.

[169] H. Seyle, The Stress of Life (New York, 1956); G. Risse, "Epidemics and History: Ecological Perspectives and Social Responses", in Fee & Fox (eds.), Aids: The Burdens of History, 33-66.

# CHAPTER 5

## CONSEQUENCES AND AFTERMATH

The effects of rinderpest began impinging before the outbreak of the panzootic. Premature and ill-advised precautions by neighbouring states paralysed trade and commerce. Restrictions on ox-wagon transport, military cordons sanitaires, quarantine measures, fumigation, disinfection, and isolation disrupted the transportation of goods. Unable to reach markets outside their country BaSotho producers remained with the unsatisfactory alternative of having to sell to unscrupulous local traders at low prices. Soon, however, these traders themselves became reluctant to buy produce because the closure of borders had shut off roads to markets.[1] The effects of these precautions on BaSotho trade were severe. The resident commissioner kept urging the high commissioner to prevail on the Cape government to relax their restrictions. These restrictions, he cautioned, were "causing much mercantile distress to traders as well as inconveniences to their supporting firms in the Cape Colony".[2]

Authorities, however, stiffened. these restrictions When the panzootic finally appeared in the country in March 1897, stringent quarantine measures upset normal trade transactions. In an attempt to bolster its own anti-rinderpest regulations, the neighbouring Free State government suspended the issuing of passes to BaSotho. When it reissued them in June 1897, it did so under strict conditions, placing armed guards on the border with Basutoland.[3] Free State border guards frequently fired at BaSotho who

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[1]Ibid., S3/25/1/14, annual report, 1897; ibid., S5/13, resident commissioner to high commissioner, 8 October 1896, encl. copy of "protest by the traders and European inhabitants of Quthing against the actions of the Cape Colonial government in summarily closing the Telle Drift".

[2]Ibid., S5/15, resident commissioner to high commissioner, 26 May 1897, also same, 28 January 9 February 1897.

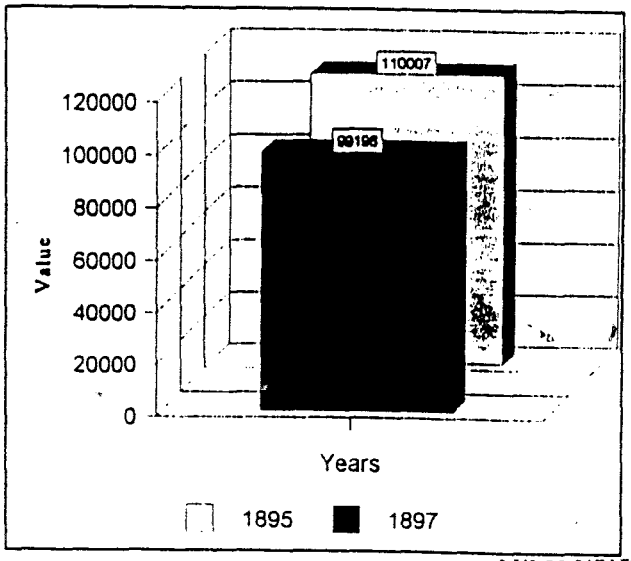
[3]Ibid., S8/3/7, resident commissioner to Messers Bunett Ebdeen Co., 12 May 1897.

attempted to visit border stores without passes.[4] The Cape government, in its turn, prohibited traders from transporting produce from southern Basutoland. By May 1897 the resident commissioner was complaining that restrictions were now "harsher than before",[5] trade having almost ceased.[6]

Within Basutoland, itself, internal traffic collapsed as district chiefs took heed of the caution that when Athens cries Sparta should not smile. Chiefs of those districts whose turn of infection was yet to come, took the initiative to isolate their areas and to prohibit traffic coming from those districts that were in the throes of infection.[7]

Consequently, the value of agricultural produce exported from Basutoland fell in 1897 compared with the last normal year in 1895.[8]

**5.1: Value (in pounds) of agricultural produce (wheat, mealies and Millet) exported: 1895 and 1897**




Ibid., S8/3/7, resident commissioner to messers Bunnet Ebdeen Co., 16 November 1896.

[5]Ibid., S5/14, resident commissioner to high commissioner, 26 May 1897.

[6]Friend, 28 May 1897.

[7]E.g. L.N.A., S7/3/12, chief Masupha to resident commissioner, 27 April 1897.

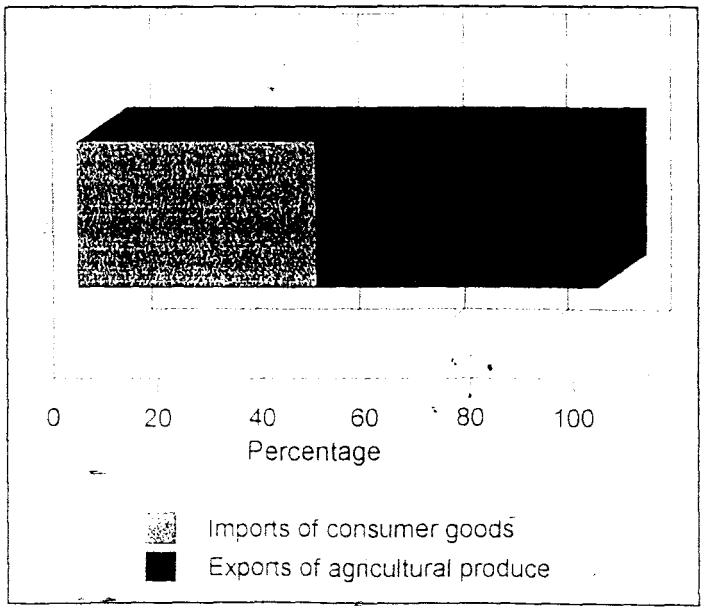
[8]Ibid., S3/25/1/12 and S3/25/1/14, annual reports, 1895 and 1897; also Friend, 6 July 1897.

The export figures for 1897 might seem encouraging. Most of the export, however, was stock local traders had accumulated when the borders were closed and the transport of produce to markets was restricted. The traders also exported all their stock when neighbouring territories reopened roads and borders. This deprived the country of surpluses for use in the lean years ahead.

The BaSotho also benefited from the belated arrival of the panzootic in their country. They cultivated the main export crop of wheat between April and June in the lowlands and between August and September in the mountain region before the panzootic arrived to kill their oxen. Thus, they could dominate the grain market temporarily while other sources of supply were being devastated by the panzootic. Prices of produce were also consequently high.[9]

Most of the cash earned from exports, however, was used to buy commodity goods, thus weakening the ability to survive the bleaker years ahead. A comparison of imports and total exports of agricultural produce, including wool and mohair, reveals a thin margin in the balance of payments:

**5.2: Comparison (in pounds) of imports and exports: 1897**




[9]Ibid., S3/25/1/14, annual report, year ended 30 June 1897.

The already worrying situation worsened in the two succeeding years as the effects of rinderpest were felt. The absence of ploughing cattle drastically reduced the capacity to produce. Touring the country early in 1898, the newly appointed high commissioner, Sir Alfred Milner, reported passing through a countryside clothed in lush pasture, resulting from the absence of cattle to graze it. He also passed through vast tracts of uncultivated fields, the result of the absence of cattle to plough. He noted the "smaller amount of cultivation, especially of wheat, the people having no cattle to plough with".[10]

The absence of draught animals limited the scale of cultivated acreage. Other factors exacerbated the prevailing difficulties. Owing to a general dearth of food, human energy was at its lowest ebb just when the method of cultivation required more labour. The disastrous effects of a bad harvest, especially wheat crops, worsened the already bleak prospects for the year 1898. It followed a devastating drought "of which no one remembered having seen the equal".[11] Many believed that the dying cattle, before ascending to the ancestors, consumed all the water from lakes. They also posited that the skinning of the dead cattle without eating the meat outraged the ancestors.[12]

Before the results of the drought were evident in the poor harvest, the Chair of the Chamber of Commerce was already bewailing the likely prospects:

> All their reserves store having perished during the late droughts, the chances are that wheat culture will to a great extent cease for a year or two. Wheat is the principal purchasing power of the natives as it is grown for trade only and in good years represents business exchange amounting to £100,000.[13]

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[10]C.O. 417/248, A. Milner, "Notes on Journey to Berea and Leribe", in Milner to Chamberlain, 25 May 1898.

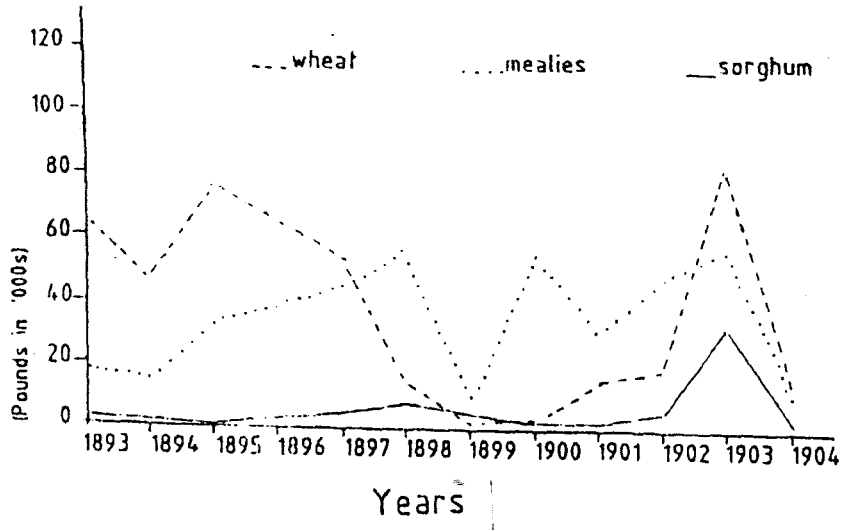
[11]Christian Express, xxviii, 336, 1 June 1898, 85, report of the annual missionary conference of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society.

[12]Leselinyana, 20 August 1898.

[13]L.N.A., S7/7/20, chairman, Chamber of Commerce, to Govt. Secretary, 3 March 1898; also L.N.A., S5/15, resident commissioner to high commissioner, 12 March 1898.

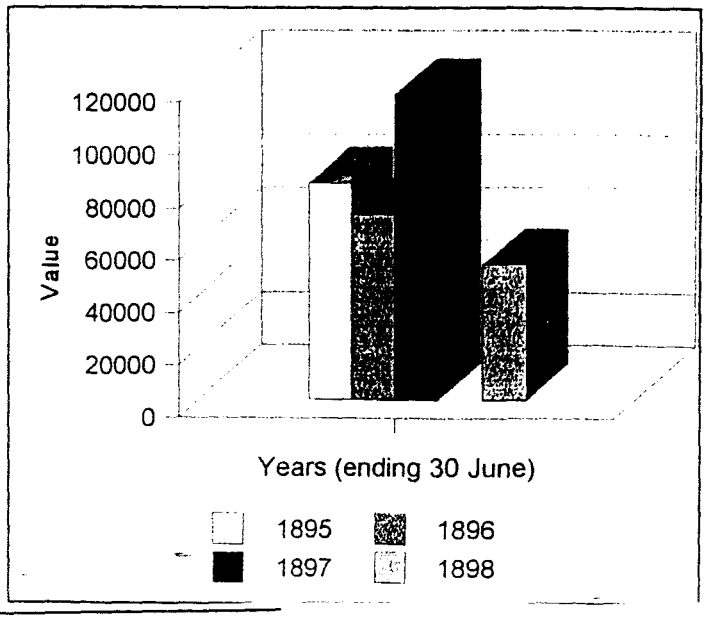
Export statistics confirmed his predictions. The wheat crop failed in all districts. The value of wheat exports declined, reaching a nadir in 1899, when they collapsed:[14]

**5.3: Value (in pounds) of exports: 1893-1904**




The severe shortage of cash, which BaSotho earned from the sale of their meagre produce, was reflected in the dramatic drop in the amount of dutiable goods imported from the principal trading partner, the Free State in 1898:[15]

**5.4: Value (in pounds) of dutiable goods imported from the Free State: 1895-98**




[14]Ibid., S3/25/1/12, S3/25/1/13, S3/25/1/14, S3/25/1/15, S3/25/1/16, S3/25/1/17, annual reports, 1894, 1895, 1896, 1897, 1898 and 1899, respectively.

[15]L.N.A., S3/25/1/13, S3/25/1/14, S3/25/1/15 and S3/25/1/16, annual reports, 1895, 1896, 1897 and 1898, respectively.

The closing year of the century opened with no promise of better times. The drought of the previous year continued unbroken throughout 1899, the southern districts suffering the most. Observers described the drought in southern Basutoland as "deplorable", with crops "entirely burnt up".[16] Only Leribe and Berea could supply the less fortunate parts of the country with grain. By September 1898, two months into the ploughing season, no rain had arrived and the situation was "getting more serious everyday".[17]

BaSotho suffered the impact of these calamities in 1899 when, to the shortage of draught animals was added the disastrous consequences of three successive poor harvests. The wheat crop, from which BaSotho earned their cash, collapsed, and many people lost even their seed reserve. In February 1899, a correspondent of a Free State paper was reporting "a rather unusual occurrence" taking place in Maseru, the colonial capital. "Large quantities of wheat", it stated, "(had) been sold to Maseru traders by Dutch farmers, an incident almost unheard of up to the present".[18] So threatening were the prospects of the following year that both the imperial government and the Chamber of Commerce intervened to shore up the ailing rural economy. They distributed between 5,000 and 6,000 bags of wheat seed on loan.[19]

The overall decline in the value of dutiable goods imported reflected the shortage of cash as the following chart shows:[201]:

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[16]Friend, 28 February 1899.

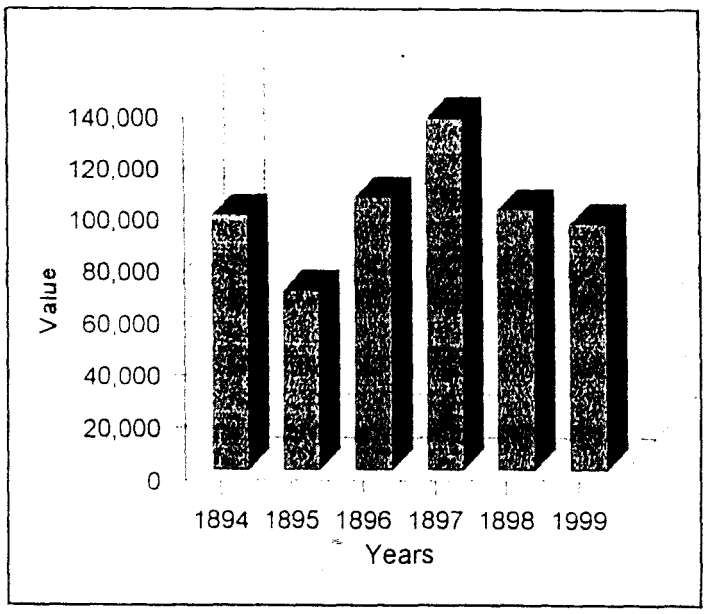
[17]Ibid, 16 September 1898

[18]Ibid., 28 February 1899.

[19]Ibid.,25 November 1899, speech of chairman, Chamber of Commerce, annual meeting, 1898.

[20] Ibid., S3/25/1/12, S3/25/1/13, S3/25/1/14, S3/25/1/15, S3/25/1/16, S3/25/1/17, annual reports, 1894, 1895, 1896, 1897, 1898 and 1899, respectively.

**5.5: Value (in pound Sterling) of dutiable goods imported: 1894-1899**




As elsewhere in southern Africa, the BaSotho suffered the same effects of the consequent dramatic escalation in the price of goods. The price of every commodity rose of surviving cattle, of sheep, goats and fowls, of all animal products including milk and meat, and of all produce. Transport rates trebled, milk disappeared and meat became very scarce and dear. A sheep that used to cost 5/- now fetched £1.[21] Slaughter cattle themselves rose in value, from £2.6s in March 1897, to £7-9 in Basutoland[22] and £15 in Johannesburg by October 1897.[23] Free State farmers exploited the current escalation of

[21]Friend, 17 January 1899.

[22]L.N.A., S3/1/5/8/5, assistant commissioner, Mafeteng, to government secretary, 18 September 1897.

[23]Star, 7 October 1897, 6.

prices. They sold calves to the BaSotho at £15 per head.[24] Prices of agricultural produce also rose steeply:[25]

**5.6: Comparison of produce prices, 1897 and 1898**

| PRODUCT | 1897 | 1898 |
|---|---|---|
| Cattle | £2.10 | £6.10 |
| Wheat | 15s | 35s |
| Mealies | 6s | 20s |
| Sorghum | 8s | 20s |

In March 1899, a Maseru trader advertised a sale of livestock at his shop to alleviate the effects of the high ruling prices. His sale prices, however, did little to assuage prospective customers:[26]

**5.7: Sale Prices, 1899**

| LIVESTOCK | SALE PRICE |
|---|---|
| Oxen | £9.10 |
| Cows and Calves | £8 - £8.15 |
| Slaughter cows | £6.10 - £7.10 |
| Hammers | 15s – 18s |
| Ewes | 10s – 12s |

A serious dearth prevailed.[27] In September 1898 a Free State newspaper was observing that "Basotho [were] on the verge of starvation". The grim hunger, the report continued,

[24]Diamond Field Advertiser, 12 November 1898, 14.

[25]L.N.A., S3/25/1/14 and S3/25/1/15, annual reports, reports for Cornet Spruit, 30 June 1897 and Mohaleshoek, June 1898; also Friend, 17 January 1899, "Basutoland Retrospect".

[26]Friend, 21 March 1899.

[27]Ibid., 21 March 1899.

was driving many BaSotho into the sheep kraals of white farmers in the Free State.[28] Others were said to be relieving hunger by "greedily devouring emaciated carcasses of dead horses".[29] Still, others were subsisting on roots and herbs.[30]

The paramount chief himself was going through difficulties. Unlike his more disadvantaged subjects, however, he could use his position to secure an advance payment of his allowance from the government.[31] His problems increased when he had to take responsibility for burying many family members who died in 1897 and 1898, and to support their widows and offspring. His aunt, Senate, died in June 1897, followed in uncanny succession by the death of his late father's chief counsellor, Ramabilikoe, in June 1898, his brother, Bereng, in December 1898, and uncle, chief Mopeli.[32] His resources strained to the limit, Lerotholi had to petition the resident commissioner to help him buy coffins to bury Bereng and Mopeli.

The rinderpest entirely ruined chief Bereng. He had resolutely opposed inoculation, and his people suffered the same fate as they could not oppose their chief and have their cattle treated. When Bereng died in December 1898, his brother, the paramount chief, had to mobilise a sethaba-thaba (a national contribution campaign) both to meet his debts and to support his family.[33] The nation had to suspend the custom of mourning for a week as it could not afford to observe such rituals during such bad times.[34]

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[28]Ibid., 30 September 1898.

[29]Ibid., 21 October 1898.

[30]L.N.A., S5/17, resident commissioner to high commissioner, 30 November 1898.

[31]Ibid., S7/3/14, paramount chief to resident commissioner, 30 November 1897.

[32]Ibid.; also S4/1 resident commissioner's diaries, entries for 12 June 1897, 16 June 1898.

[33]Ibid., S7/3/14, paramount chief to resident commissioner, 8 and 10 December 1898; Ibid., S4/1, resident commissioner's diaries, entries for 7 and 10 December 1898

[34]Friend, 16 December 1898.

Still worse was the situation in Berea, which endured the worst brunt of the panzootic. Chief Masupha, thanks to his resolute opposition to inoculation, was ruined. In May 1898, he was asking that payment of the hut tax be postponed while his young men went to the labour centres to raise cash. This was the first time the entire hut-tax depended on wages earned at labour centres. In time this practice would persist. It involved labour agents paying BaSotho labour in advance, to secure the payment of the hut-tax. The main condition was for the chief to supply the mines with a specific number of labourers while mine management paid the full hut-tax. The practice undermined the struggles of migrants to maintain control of their labour.[35] Impoverished by the almost entire decimation of his cattle wealth, Masupha was unable to sustain his final resistance in December 1898. He paid the fine of two hundred head of cattle, imposed for his part in the "rebellion", in sheep, goats, horses and money, as he had no cattle left. He died an impoverished and broken man in July 1899, leaving his people on the verge of starvation.[36]

The combined effect of rinderpest and drought brought on outbreaks of human disease. The most common diseases related to hunger, starvation, loss of resistance, and attempts to ward off hunger. A common disease was famine oedema. Its unmistakable symptom was swollen limbs, a common condition in times of food shortage.[37] Other diseases included diarrhoea, dysentery, measles, meningitis, pneumonia, scurvy, smallpox, typhoid and venereal disease.[38] The outbreak of some of these diseases was a result of

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[35]L.N.A.., S4/1, resident commissioner's diaries, entries for 21 May and 12 December 1898.

[36]Friend, 4 August 1899; L.N.A., S3/25/1/17, annual reports, 1899.

[37]A. Keys et al., The Biology of Human Starvation, 2 vols. (Mineapolis, 1950), ii, "The Edema Problem".

[38]For outbreaks of these diseases in situations of food shortage, see, among others, A. Berry, Famine Food and the Process of Adaptation to Extreme Food Shortages (Brighton, 1979); for widespread outbreaks of these diseases in other regions in South Africa during this period and for the same reasons, see B.B.N.A., G.42-'98, summaries of reports, 4, 7, reports for East London, 23, Komgha, 43, chief magistrate of Griqualand East, 121, Matatiele, 133, Umzimkhulu, 136, Mount Ayliff, 139.

the loss of resistance to infection owing to malnutrition; that of others, however, was directly related to the very strategies to stave off hunger and destitution. Diarrhoea and dysentery were due to eating badly prepared meat from cattle that had died of the rinderpest, drinking water polluted by germs from carcasses of rinderpest-infected cattle, and subsisting on wild and other famine foods

The more vulnerable members of the community - babies, weaned children, women, the very old and the disabled - were the most severely affected. [39] These sections of the community hovered between life and death. Of course the fate of babies depended on, and reflected, the state of health of their mothers. Without enough food to feed them, mothers would not have enough milk for their babies. The weaned children, however, suffered the most as they depended entirely on cow's milk. This essential item of their diet had now disappeared. The crisis was so severe that the spouse of the Anglican missionary at Mohaleshoek was forced to leave the country "to bring our little son to England, it being quite impossible to obtain fresh milk and food suitable for a young child".[40] Children who were not so lucky contracted diarrhoea, dysentery, pulmonary disorders, smallpox and famine oedema.[41]

The very old, like the children, became vulnerable to diseases peculiar to decline in nutritional status, leading to loss of resistance to infection. Among the aged, pulmonary diseases, especially influenza, became common and fatal. Conditions were ripe for human epidemics to proliferate. Most threatening was the exposure of humans to

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[39]For studies of how famine and food shortages reveal patterns of distribution within the family and the degree to which such crises affect family solidarity, see, among others, D.B. Jelliffe and P. Jelliffe, "The Effects of Starvation on the Functions of the Family and of Society", in G. Blix, Y. Hofvander, Bo Valghist (eds), Famine: A Symposium Dealing with Nutrition and Relief Operations in Times of Disaster (Stockholm, 1971; D.J. Campbell and D.D. Treanter, "Strategies for Coping with Food Consumption Shortages in the Mandara Mountain Region of North Cameroon", Social Science and Medicine, xvi (1982), 2117-27.

[40]Letter of Mrs. Reading, Bloemfontein Mission Quarterly, 25 October 1897, 48.

[41]"The Rinderpest", bid., 148-150; Report of the annual missionary conference of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society, in Christian Express, xxviii, no. 336, 1 June 1898, 85-87.

infection from decaying carcasses strewn over the countryside, in riverbeds, pools, streams and water pits. Travellers to the country were reporting that "the whole country is but a charnel-house (sic) of dead rinderpest oxen".[42] The odour was unbearable. Travelling through the countryside, Dieterlen described how they had to "plug [their] nostrils and tried hard to hold our horses which were reluctant to walk" past decaying carcasses.[43] His wife found that "air infected by this disgusting smell of these carcasses, decomposing in the sun" made it impossible for one to breathe "since the air [is] polluted".[44]

Burying these carcasses or disposing of them in other ways was a mammoth task. Often, dead cattle had to wait long until they could be buried.[45] It was difficult to enforce the proclamation requiring owners of cattle to dispose of their cattle's carcasses. The few police officers in the country were unequal to the task of enforcing such a proclamation. Besides, the entire police force was engaged with high priority work related to inoculation and attempting to stop the disease spreading. Left to themselves, owners of dead cattle perceived no advantage in burying the carcasses – they preferred leaving them to the vultures. Those who wished to bury the carcasses soon proved unequal to such a task, as herds died too fast for burial. The sight of such numerous carcasses, strewn all over the countryside, was gruesome, and shocked would-be-undertakers, especially bereaved owners of dead cattle.

The task of burial was arduous, and required large teams of labour. People had to dig the graves to the required depth through ground hardened by long periods of drought. They also had to carry the carcasses away from where they lay, often near water sources, to avoid polluting water supplies. Attempts to have the chiefs mobilise communal labour to

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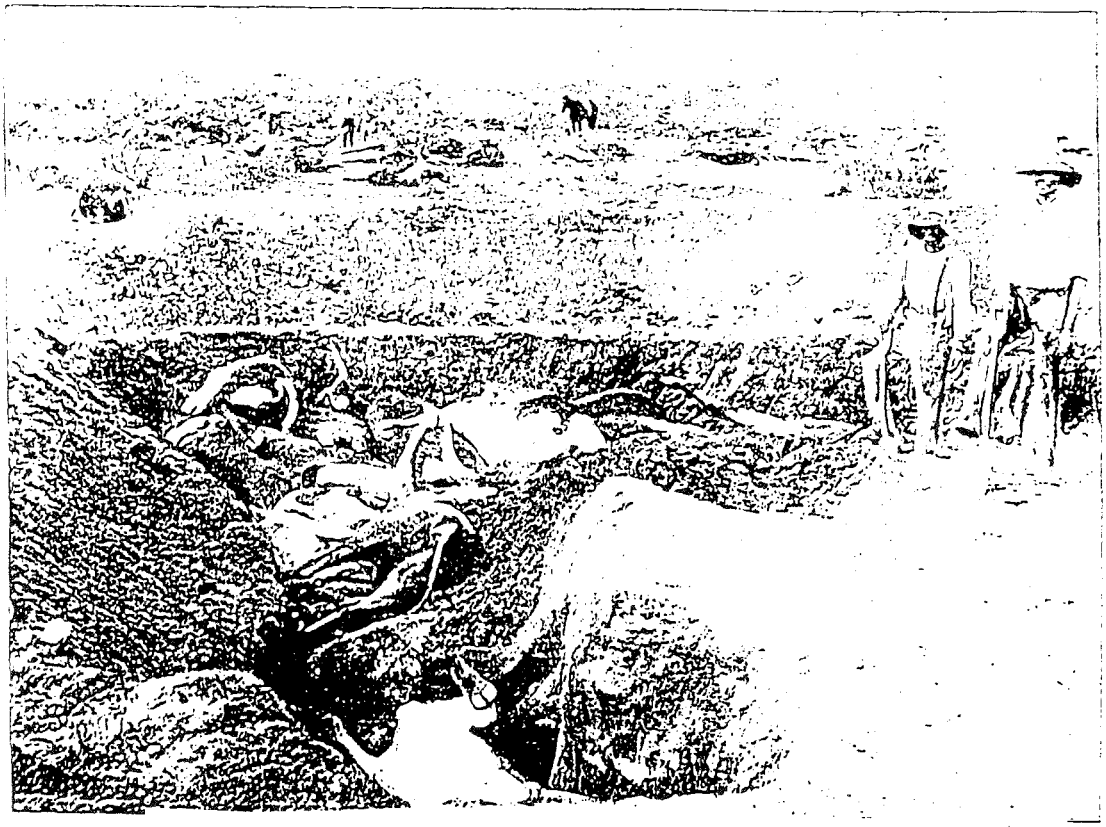
[42]Friend, 1 October 1897.

[43]Letter of Rev. Dieterlen, 15 July 1897, Journal des Missions, 1897, 597.

[44]Ibid , "Lesotho: Rinderpest and its Consequences", 667.

[45]Ibid.

undertake the task were only temporarily successful. Colonial erosion of chiefly authority undermined this effort of efficacy, especially during a crisis that led to the progressive breakdown of community support.



**5.8: The burial of a herd of cattle that have been shot**
(Courtesy of Onderstepoort Veterinary Library)

**5.9: The burial of a herd of cattle that have died of rinderpest**
(Courtesy of Onderstepoort Veterinary Library)

The process of burying the carcasses was itself intricate. Each carcass had to be buried in quicklime, in a grave dug at least three feet deep. The grave was to be prepared at a spot which did not drain into a neighbouring watercourse to avoid seepage of germs into the water supply. It also had to be fenced, or enclosed by other means, to isolate it from healthy animals grazing nearby. The task of burning the carcasses could best be achieved by letting them decompose and dry, during which period they had to be quarantined, or covered in some manner.

Even these elaborate procedures were not secure enough. It was found that burying carcasses at this depth and spreading coal ash and carbolic acid over the grave still spread the disease to animals grazing over and near the grave. Consequently, the government passed a regulation to increase the depth to six feet, or, preferably, to burn the carcasses.[46]

Even when carcasses were eventually disposed of in some way, humans were still exposed to infection. This occurred through feeding on infected and decaying meat; it could also happen through the pollution of water sources by germs seeping from the graves of dead cattle. Both drought and heavy rains compounded an already volatile situation. Scarcity of water during the drought increased the concentration of bacteria. Conversely heavy rains washed pollutants into sources of water supply.

The condition of the aged and disabled hardly emerges from the sources. This fact, itself, should confirm Sen's theory of "entitlement", displaying social inequalities revealed by the crisis and revealing the class basis of suffering in it. According to this theory, the vulnerability of particular social groups to famine will depend on their degree of access to and control over vital food resources, or on their "entitlement". "Entitlement" is defined as "the set of alternative commodity bundles that a person can command in a society using the totality of rights and opportunities that he or she faces". An individual's

[46]G.82-'96, Vryburg Rinderpest Conference, speech of T.J. Krogh, Transvaal delegate, 20.

"exchange entitlement" will vary according to his or her occupation and place in the network of social, economic and legal (we should add, family) relationships. [47] At the micro-level of the family, the food shortage unleashed by the rinderpest must have revealed patterns of distribution within the family and the degree to which the crisis affected family solidarity.[48]

In normal times, access to resources varied according to the prevalent ownership structure of society and position of each class, gender, and generation, even individual, to it. Periods of critical food shortages exacerbated this pattern, at worst, and reflected it, at best. In "the struggle for scanty food",[49] the aged and the infirm would have been the sections of the community, or members of the family, more likely to receive less nutritious foods. Moreover, the old and infirm might have been abandoned as the able-bodied people went in search of food. The severe shortages of 1897, 1898 and 1899 caused significant human movements. "At Letsie's I found that many people had removed", observed Lerotholi, "the same at Mojela's only ruins are visible, just as I kept informing you when they were scattering through hunger".[50] Missionaries also confirmed this pattern. They complained that "the great scarcity of food in the country

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[47]A.K. Sen, Poverty and Famine: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation (Oxford, 1981); Sen, "The Battle to get Food", New Society, 13 October, 1983; for a successful use of Sen's theory of "entitlement", see, among others, P. Greenough, Prosperity and Misery in Modern Bengal: The Famine of 1943-44 (Oxford, 1982); A.K. Sen, "Starvation and Exchange Entitlement: A General Approach and Its Applications to the Great Bengal Famine", Cambridge Journal of Economics, 1 (1977), 33-59; L.A. Tilly, "Food Entitlement, Famine and Conflict", Journal of Interdisciplinary History, xiv (1983), 333-349; W.L. Torry, "Anthropological Perspectives on Climate Change", in R.S. Chen, E. Boulding, and S.H. Schneider (eds.), Social science Research and Climate Change: An Interdisciplinary Appraisal (Boston, 1983), 77-114; For the application of the same theory, albeit critically, on an african case, see M. Vaughan, "Famine and Family Relations: 1949 in Nyasaland", Past and Present, 108 (1985), 177-205.

[48]Jelliffe & Jelliffe, "The Effects of Starvation on the Functions of the Family and of Society; Campbell & Treanter, "Strategies for Coping with Food Consumption Shortages in the Mandara Mountain Region of North Cameroon", 2117-27.

[49] Sen, "The Battle to get food".

[50]L.N.A., S7/3/14, paramount chief to resident commissioner, 18 March 1899.

has resulted in a general scattering of our people, who have been compelled to go away to work for money".[51] Old age and infirmity weakened the ability of the aged and infirm to engage in strategies of survival. Among the aged, pulmonary diseases, especially influenza, became common and often fatal.[52]

The historical evidence is typically thin on the experiences of women, not only as wives, but also in their various economic, familial and social roles in this crisis. This lacuna in the contemporary evidence is perplexing, given the universal astonishment previously professed by Europeans at the sight of African women working in the fields. Always bastions of rural production even when circumstances were normal; they must have borne the greater burden of the multifarious strategies for surviving this crisis. Without the cattle that had been responsible for bringing male labour more abundantly into agricultural production originally, the demand for the labour of women must have peaked in the aftermath of the rinderpest.

The ability of the BaSotho to continue agricultural production without draught animals evinced the enhanced role of female labour in strategies adopted to cushion the impact of the rinderpest. They achieved this mainly by cultivating their fields with the traditional hoe, the tool of production that was most effective in female hands. Females had used it before the introduction of the ox-drawn plough, thus acquiring proficiency in wielding it. Women already dominated agricultural labour, and the rinderpest merely helped to re-entrench women's labour in cultivation. "The method they adopt is a primitive one", commented an observers "the whole stad, men, women and children, turn out armed with picks, and, standing in a long line, they, to the tune of a swinging Basotho air, till the ground".[53]

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[51]U.S.P.G. annual reports, vol. 2. 1898.

[52]Friend, 8 July 1897.

[53]Friend, 16 November 1897,. 3.

As men sought to restock their kraals by migrating to labour centres, they left women wholly responsible for the production of grains and for homesteads generally. No evidence was found suggesting that the rinderpest crisis forced women to join their male counterparts as migrants.[54] Thus, females remained at home, enduring the full strain of the resultant distress and bearing the greater onus of rural recovery.

There is hardly any evidence on how women, especially those without male support - the unmarried, widowed, disabled, discarded, among them - coped with the distress resulting from the murrain. They would certainly have fared worse. They had inferior "entitlement" to the available food and its production in this male dominated society. They were also restricted by ideological mechanisms of control and regulation. Their restricted mobility and socialised docility would also have precluded women from engaging in more daring strategies available to their male counterparts.[55] Males could engage in migrancy as a strategy of survival in these critical times. They could also

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[54]For scattered evidence of this occurring elsewhere in the region, see, e.g. B.B.N.A., G.31-'99, reports for Herbert, 27, Taung, 65. This, however, seems to have occurred in those areas where females already participated in migrancy, especially among the Southern Tswana communities. See, e.g., C.M. Cockerton, "Less a Barrier, More a Line: The Migration of Bechuanaland Women in South Africa: 1850-1930", Journal of Historical Geography, 22, 3 (1996), 291-307.

[55]That gender relations, especially within the family, are essentially power relations is now an established perspective in the abundant literature on gender relations, see e.g. M.W. Osmond and B. Thorme, "Ferminist Theories: The Social Construction of Gender in Families and Society", in P.G. Boss et. al. (eds.), Source Book of Family Theories and Methods: A Contextual Approach (New York, 1993), 591-623; on power contestations between the genders see generally, among others, R.G. Parker and J.H. Gagmon (eds.), Conceiving Sexuality: Approaches to Sex Research in a Post Modern World (New York, 1995); P. Harvey and P. Gow, Sex and Violence: Issues in Representation and Experience (New York, 1994); for Africa, see, among others, T. Barnes, "The Fight for Control of African Women's Mobility in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1900-1939", Signs, 17 (1992), 586-608; M. Chanock, Law, Custom and Social Order: The Colonial Experience in Malawi and Zambia (Cambridge, 1985); M. Lovett, " "She thinks she's like a Man": Marriage and [De]Constructing Gender Identity in Colonial Buha, Western Tanzania, 1943-1960", Canadian Journal of African Studies, 30, i (1996), 52-68; E. Schmidt, "Negotiated Spaces and Contested Terrain: Men, Women, and the Law in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1890-1939", Journal of Southern African Studies, 16, iv (1990), 622-48; for gender differences in access to means of production, see, among others, F. Mackenzie, "Gender and Land Rights in Murang'a District, Kenya", Journal of Peasant Studies, 13, 4 (1990), 609-43; N. Kabeer, "Gender Dimensions of Rural Poverty: Analysis from Bangladesh", 18, 2 (1991), 241-62.

escape the prevailing rural crisis even if temporarily, owing to their greater mobility. They could stay at their work places, where, although not resplendent by any means, the food was at least available.

The South African War, breaking out in October 1899, compounded the BaSotho food crisis. Its effects were ambiguous. It did offer the BaSotho a temporary opportunity to cushion the immediate hardships of the rinderpest and the accompanying drought, which they astutely exploited.[56] Besides wartime demand for, and inflated prices for, produce and livestock, the war created an insatiable labour market for military workers at inflated wages. BaSotho could thus acquire cash to recoup some of their losses and to display a facade of relative prosperity.[57]

When they could not acquire enough stock by honest means, BaSotho exploited the confusion of war by raiding across the border, returning with teams of boer cattle. They argued that "they were stealing from those in rebellion against the Queen".[58] Assistant commissioners reported extensive raids into border regions, asserting that cattle were being "stolen right and left from across the border".[59] Boer farmers inundated imperial officials in the country with many affidavits making claims for stolen stock at the end of the war.[60]

Many Free State farmers, fearing requisitioning by the British military, had negotiated with friendly BaSotho chiefs to keep their cattle during the war. Much of this stock did

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[56]For a general discussion of the experiences of Africans in the War, see especially P. Warwick, Black People and the South African War, 1899-1902 (London, 1983).

[57]L.N.A., S3/2, papers on Basutoland and the Anglo-Boer War.

[58]e.g., The Journal, 25 January 1900.

[59]e.g. L.N.A., S3/25/1/17, annual reports, 1900, report of assistant commissioner, Leribe.

[60]Ibid., S3/2/6/1, "papers with reference to complaints of Ficksburg farmers as to stock "stolen" from them being in possession of Leribe natives".

not return to owners after the cessation of hostilities. This was because the offending chiefs were loath to reveal their treacherous dealings with the British enemy during the war. Desperate for cattle after the rinderpest catastrophe, many BaSotho who had boer cattle in their safekeeping claimed that the stock had since died, and compensated the owners with horses.[61]

The war, however, caused commercial and productive insecurity and disruption. It closed the market for BaSotho produce. The military commandeering of available wagons disrupted trade and the marketing of BaSotho grain. By 1901, thousands of bags of grain were unsold awaiting transport.[62] The high military need for animal transport inflated the price of livestock, especially oxen and horses. Thus, merchants were reluctant to purchase grain when the trade in livestock offered them such lucrative rewards.

Many BaSotho sold their remaining stock to a buoyant market, setting back further the long-term regeneration of their herds. Others acquired cattle through bartering horses and small stock and through raiding boer cattle. These frantic efforts to restock, however, introduced equine and bovine diseases. This series of stock disasters opened yet another chapter in the continuing story of escalating rural deterioration in the twentieth century. A panzootic of rinderpest returned towards the end of hostilities. It appeared in Maseru in May 1901 and then spread throughout the country by September, killing an estimated 1,500 cattle.[63] It also accompanied a virulent form of pleuropneumonia that resulted from the reckless movement of stock during the war. To

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[61]Ibid.

[62]L.N.A., S3/25/1/18, annual report, 1901.

[63]Ibid., S3/1/4/6, "Rinderpest Outbreak in Basutoland, 1901"; also Ibid., S3/1/5/8, miscellaneous rinderpest papers.

complete the pattern of the onslaught on livestock, scab and glanders broke out among horses, killing about 1,000 animals.[64]

The influx of European and African refugees from the war into the country also stretched resources. At the end of the war, estimates put the number of African and loyal Afrikaner refugees in the country at 12,000 and 2,000 respectively.[65] In September 1900 "nearly all English residents in Ladybrand [were] in refuge in Maseru, British residents of Wepener [were] at Mafeteng, British residents from Ficksburg [were] seeking refuge at Hlotse" in Basutoland.[66] These refugees brought their stock with them. Those who remained in the Free State still sent their stock to Basutoland for safekeeping. Free State boers, too, in their bid to evade requisitioning by the British army, sent their stock across the border into Basutoland, placing them under BaSotho custody. Besides spreading equine and bovine disease, this unregulated influx of livestock caused extensive damage to pasture and cultivated land. It also led to acute overstocking.[67]

The cessation of hostilities in mid-1902 ended the period of relative economic buoyancy and ushered in the post-war recession. The prices of produce plummeted while those of consumer goods soared.[68] In part, the deflation in the price of grain followed a glut of the market. Tons of accumulated grain that could not be marketed during the war were now sold.[69] Thus, the significant rise in the volume of grain exported from Basutoland in 1902 and 1903 did not reflect any newly found prosperity. It represented the marketing

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[64]C.O., 417/1328, Milner to Chamberlain, 1 June 1902; also L.N.A., S5/22, report of A. Theiler and G. Turner.

[65]L.N.A., S3/2/2/1, return of refugees and stock, 1901-02.

[66]C.O., 879/70, Lagden to Milner, 9 September 1900, in Milner to Chamberlain, 12 September 1900.

[67]L.N.A., S3/25/1/18, annual report, 1901.

[68]Ibid., S3/25/1/19, annual report, 1902.

[69]Ibid., S3/25/1/18, annual report, 1901; The Journal, 9 October 1900.

of accumulated stocks. After the war, convoys of wagons were arranged to transport the accumulated grain. Basutoland became the main supplier of grain to the defeated boer farmers after the war. The significant drop in the overall volume of exports in 1904 showed that the wartime boom was a temporary relief.

The success or failure of coping strategies was critical to the impact of these ecological and pestilential traumas. As many evaluations of past famines have convincingly shown, coping mechanisms are the key to preventing a food shortage from deteriorating into famine.[70] As we have seen, these strategies had weakened as the century ended.[71] The result was the loss of "environmental control",[72] an ability to manipulate the environment to deal with recurrent ecological threats.

The very vulnerability of the country to a disease of Central Asian origin, and the rapidity with which it reached the country, testifies to the extent of Basutoland's integration into the wider regional, even world, economy. Restriction imposed on trade-dislocated trade and commerce, as we have seen.

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[70]See, especially, J.H. Ausubel and A.K. Biswas (eds.), Climatic Constraints and Human Activity (Oxford, 1980); W. Dando, The Geography of Famine (London, 1980); R. Garcia, Drought and Man (London, 1981); P. Minnis, Social Adaptation to Food Stress: A Prehistoric Southwestern Example (Chicago, 1985); J.R.K. Robson (ed.), Famine: Its Causes, Effects and Management (London, 1981); P. Timmerman, Vulnerability, Resilience and the Collapse of Societies: A Review of Models and Possible Applications (Toronto, 1981), 17-36; G.J. Van Apeldoorn, Perspectives on Drought and Famine in Nigeria (London, 1981); P. Webb & J. Von Braun, Famine and Food Security in Ethiopia: Lessons for Africa (New York, 1994); T.M. Wrigley, M.J. Ingram, and F. Farmer (eds.), Climate and History: Studies in Past Climates and their Impact on Man (Cambridge, 1981).

[71] See 69-79 above.

[72]J. Giblin, The Politics of Environmental Control in Northeast Tanzania, 1840-1940 (Philadelphia, 1992) 8-10; also J. Giblin, "The Precolonial Politics of Disease Control", in G. Maddox, J. Giblin and I.N. Kimambo (eds.), Custodians of the Land" Ecology and Culture in the History of Tanzania (London, 1996).

The rinderpest also exposed and exacerbated the weaknesses of BaSotho's coping mechanisms. Although they had reaped an abundant harvest in 1895, BaSotho had exhausted their reserves when the long drought began in 1896 and when the panzootic struck early 1897. They thus struggled to tide over the combined effects of rinderpest and the accompanying drought. They had had to sell most of their surpluses to meet their tax obligations and to purchase consumer goods. Those surpluses had been sold at the deflated price of 4/6 per muid because the large harvest had glutted the market. In the following lean year, as the drought took its toll, the price of a muid of mealies had escalated to 17/6.[73] Without cash, people were now forced typically to arrange for credit; thus entangling themselves in a web of indebtedness just as their herds began to die of the rinderpest. A typical example was one Lepapa who said he "[had] no food and wants me to let him some 22 bags of kaffir corn. He has three wives and a numerous family who he says have nothing to eat. He did not plough as he had lost all his oxen from rinderpest prior to the ploughing season".[74]

Those still with some cattle sold them to purchase grain, thus reducing their productive capacity both during and after the crisis. Many tried to benefit from the unprecedented inflation in the price of cattle and cattle products and sold their surviving cattle at the high prices then ruling. The rise in the quantity of cattle exported was not dramatic. It was, however, unprecedented especially when considering that owners would have sold most of their cattle internally to local traders in exchange for grain. Thus, cattle sales rose from £942 in 1897, to £3,958 in 1898, to £14,091 in 1899.[75] The paramount chief himself revealed that he was participating in this risky strategy of survival. Pleading with the resident commissioner for an advance payment of his annual allowance, he stated that he needed the money "to buy myself some calves from people who are selling

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[73]See, e.g., L.N.A., S3/25/1/12 and S3/25/1/13, reports for Mafeteng, 1894-5 and 1895-6.

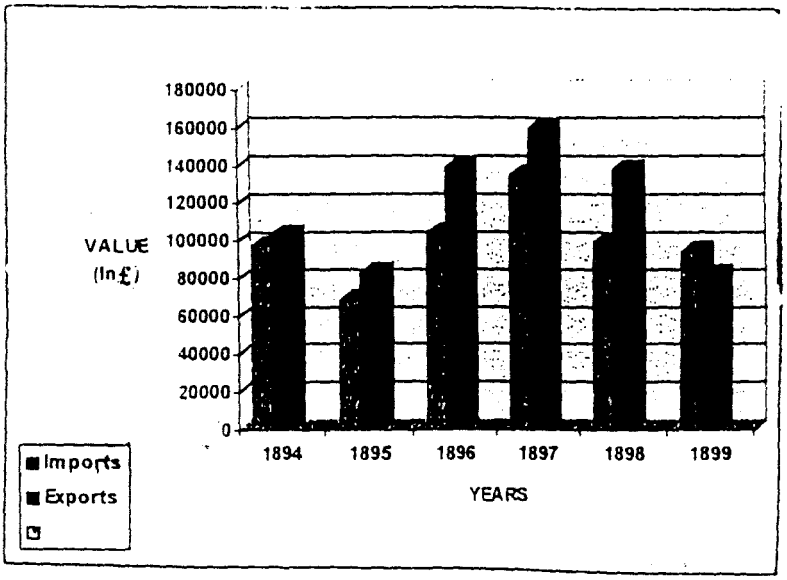
[74]Ibid., L1/1/7, Charles Steven (trader in Ficksburg) to assistant commissioner, Leribe, 27 April 1898.

[75]Ibid., S3/25/1/14, S3/25/1/15, S3/25/1/16, annual reports, 1897, 1898 and 1899.

calves who are preparing themselves for the pound hut-tax. All my cattle have died. What remained I exchanged for grain".[76]

Selling livestock, or using it as security, was a great risk, especially during a meagre grain harvest. As the number of sellers of livestock increased, the price of livestock collapsed. Given that the price of grains rose dramatically during a time of scarcity, the exchange rate of livestock to grains would usually have worked against the livestock seller.[77]

The persisting thin margin in the value of imports against that of exports even during these critical years reveals the extent of commercialisation and its effects in increasing the vulnerability of BaSotho households:[78]




**5.10: Comparison of value (in Pound Sterling) of dutiable goods imported and agricultural produce exported: 1894-1899**

[76]Ibid., S7/3/14, paramount chief to resident commissioner, 30 November 1897.

[77]These consequences seem widespread, see, e.g. M. Jameson, "Famines in the Greek World", in P. Garnsey and C.R. Whittaker (eds), Trade and Famine in Classical Antiquity (Cambridge, 1983); Van Apeldoorn, Perspectives, 45, 69; T.D. Hankins, "Responses to Drought in Sukumaland, Tanzania, in G.F. White (ed.), Natural Hazards: Local, National, Global (Oxford, 1974), 98-104.

[78]Ibid., S3/25/1/12, S3/25/1/13, S3/25/1/14, S3/25/1/15, S3/25/1/16, S3/25/1/17, annual reports, 1894, 1895, 1896, 1897, 1898 and 1899, respectively.

The BaSotho did attempt, albeit feebly, to control the fruits of their labour amid the shortages of these critical years. In 1897, for example, they "held on to their mealies" temporarily, telling local traders that they might "require [their] mealies [them] selves". At the height of the scarcity of 1899, the paramount chief, with the support of other chiefs, ordered a temporary boycott of shops, prohibiting any sale of grain and purchase of European merchandise from the traders.[79]

Relentless claims made by the colonial state on what was left of BaSotho grain, or the meagre cash they did earn from its sale, further undermined capacity to cope with the crisis. Amid general scarcity, BaSotho were still required to pay the hut-tax. In the critical year 1898, the revenue, mostly comprising the hut-tax, exceeded that of any previous year. All assistant commissioners, barring Berea, reported themselves satisfied with the ability of BaSotho to pay the hut-tax even amid adversities.[80] The resident commissioner, who, with the high commissioner, had been considering doubling the hut-tax, was exhilarated. "It is satisfactory", he enthused in his letter to the high commissioner, "to find that in spite of these calamities, the revenue collected exceeded that of any previous year".[81]

This apparent ability of BaSotho to meet their obligations amid disaster emboldened the colonial state to increase its demands farther. It now decided to double the hut-tax.[82] Encouraged by Lagden that BaSotho could well afford the increased hut-tax, the high commissioner, Sir Alfred Milner visited the country in May 1898. His purpose was to make an on-the-spot evaluation of whether BaSotho were self-reliant and able to pay an

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[79]Ibid., S6/5, paramount chief to resident commissioner, 11 June 1899.

[80]Ibid., S3/25/1/15, annual reports, reports from districts.

[81]C.O. 417/248, Milner to Chamberlain, 20 June 1898, enclosing resident commissioner to high commissioner, 11 June 1898; also, L.N.A., S3/25/1/15, annual report, 1898.

[82]Ibid., Milner to Chamberlain, 20 September 1898

increased tax.[83] Throughout his extensive tour of the country, Milner admitted travelling through countryside denuded of cattle and torched by drought. Yet, he expressed himself satisfied with the state of the BaSotho economy. He claimed that "the people themselves showed no signs of want whatsoever". He also regarded the decimation of cattle as "perhaps rather an apparent than a real calamity as the country was much overstocked".[84] Remarkably, Milner was so contented with the general economic outlook that he was able to announce his intention to double the hut-tax. He strongly urged the Colonial Office to make a final decision on the proposal, arguing that BaSotho could pay a doubled tax.[85]

Nor would the BaSotho themselves contradict Milner's conclusions at the next pitso when they discussed his announcement to double the hut-tax. Speakers did show disbelief at the announcement. We know, however, that colonial functionaries had coached influential speakers to support the *fait accompli*. Milner had conspired for a consensus. He suggested to Lagden that it would be "politic to let these arguments come, as far as possible, from native speakers":

> Native speakers, who need not be reported, can say, and think **will** say, if you give them the tip: look here, Basutho, let us be independent of the Cape. We want to manage our own affairs with the Queen's govt. alone over us. But if the Cape govt. keeps on having to pay for us, it will want to govern us.[86]

Colonial officials had also prodded some chiefs to support the decision. "I think you should try and coach the friendly chiefs", Milner suggested, "and more especially, I

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[83]Bodlean Library, Oxford, Milner Papers, Ms. Milner 220.

[84]C.O. 417/248, A. Milner, "Notes on Journey to Berea and Leribe", in Milner to Chamberlain, 25 May 1898.

[85]Ibid., 417/228, Milner to Chamberlain, 25 May 1898.

[86]Milner Papers, Ms. Milner dept. 221, Milner to Lagden, 2 October 1898.

think you should have a good talk with Jonathan. Flatter him about his great power and his loyalty".[87]

A careful examination of the minutes of the pitso confirms that this conspiracy succeeded. Speakers did Milner's bidding. The paramount chief set the tone, declaring that the matter of doubling the hut-tax was not for further discussion, as it was an order of the high commissioner. He assured the assembled delegates that he had succeeded in persuading the high commissioner to defer the increase till the next year, because of the prevailing scarcity of food. His son and heir, Letsie, followed. He proclaimed that he could not oppose the decision as the hut-tax was "our sleep and we sit under the shadow of it". He urged the pitso to obey the order as "our fathers have the right to make us do what they please". Thomas Setlaka, never a partisan of the chiefs, now proclaimed that the common people had no right to speak as "the chiefs have already prayed about the hut-tax".[88]

Out of eighty-three chiefs, headmen, counsellors and "several thousand people" who attended the pitso, only seventeen spoke. Of these, only eight expressed discontent. The fact that chiefs were the first to speak was itself against established protocol, and it deterred candid criticism. As chief Maama reproached:

> This is not according to custom. Why I say this is because the resident commissioner speaks first, then our elder brothers, then the people. Will it not appear as if the people after the chiefs have spoken, are speaking against the law? Why chief do you speak first? We are afraid to speak after you.[89]

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[87]Ibid.

[88]L.N.A., S11/3, speeches of Lerotholi, Letsienyana and Thomas Setlaka, pitso of 27 October 1898.

[89]Ibid., speech of chief Maama.

Thus, the pitso ended without allowing delegates to discuss the full extent of the nation's distress. Subsequent public pressure on the paramount chief, however, spurred him to urge imperial officials to see sense. The country, he pleaded, was going through a critical food shortage; cattle were dead and those who possessed smaller stock had sold them all to purchase grain; it was "quite plain that some people will die". In November he met the resident commissioner and earnestly repeated the bleak situation. People were eating herbs and had no milk as the cattle were dead. He was certain that some people would be dying of starvation unless offered relief as no stock remained.[90] Accordingly, the imperial administration deferred doubling the hut-tax to 1899. As Lagden was astute enough to know, "raising the tax on an impoverished people would prejudice the case for ever".[91]

Other factors combined to undermine the capacity to cope with the crisis. Colonial incorporation and circumscription of the country within colonial boundaries enhanced colonial control of human movements. The requirement to obtain a pass to move across boundaries restricted exploitation of the extensive network of commercial and reciprocal contacts throughout the region that the BaSotho state had constructed over the decades.[92] It thus undermined a major coping mechanism of exploiting interregional exchange and symbiotic relations across microenvironments to cushion the effects of localised food shortages.

The ubiquitous suspicion that the BaSotho were the main conspirators in a rumoured preparation for a combined African rebellion against colonial regimes increased the vigilance of imperial officials and of the authorities in neighbouring states. Officials

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[90]Ibid., S6/5, paramount chief to resident commissioner, 10 October 1898; ibid., S4/1/5, resident commissioner's diaries, entries for 29 and 30 November 1898.

[91]Milner Papers, Ms Milner dept. 221, Milner to Lagden, 14 August 1898.

[92]For the development of regional trade involving the BaSotho and their African neighbours, including those farther afield, see Eldredge, A South African Kingdom, 19-27, 150-51, and 117-19 for local trade networks.

infested the country with agents who spied on the arrival and movements in the country of any foreign African traveller. Early in 1898 paramount chief Lerotholi, his ire aroused, enumerated many occasions on which imperial officials and settler and colonial newspapers had accused him of "communicating with foreigners". "Why", he asked, "is it that when a person of any country rebels against government that my name is always in the middle?"[93]

The effects of decades of mission ideology, commercialisation and colonial legislation had also combined to undermine social ties and corrode redistributive and reciprocal relationships. They had pulled yet another prop from underneath the fragile structure of BaSotho's subsistence security. In the aftermath of the rinderpest, patrons could not sustain their communities. Instead, chiefs used their own privileged positions to petition imperial officials, traders and missionaries for their own assistance and relief. This was true whether it was the paramount chief himself entreating the resident commissioner to advance his share of the hut-tax,[94] or the minor chief, Jeremiah Job, who entreated with the resident commissioner thus:

> Although I have no right, I cry to you chief, I say that hunger has entered into your servant's scherm, chief also my father's wife who is left with us she too is hungering, and now we are crying to you our chiefs, our fathers are dead, and we have remained in your hands you chiefs you our resident commissioner.[95]

Colonial officials, traders and missionaries, however, had little interest in sustaining relationships of kinship or clientage. Lagden's response to the paramount chief's plea for help is revealing: "I have no money to buy food for the nation", he quipped, and "I

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[93]L.N.A., S6/5, paramount chief to resident commissioner, 31 March 1898.

[94]Ibid., S7/3/14, paramount chief to resident commissioner, 30 November 1897.

[95]Ibid., S6/5, Jeremiah Job to resident commissioner, 5 December 1898.

recommend that people who are hungry should seek work and earn money to buy grain".[96]

Despite this bleak picture, the BaSotho did rise to the challenge. The mental and physical resilience of the BaSotho amid the massive decimation of their herds baffled contemporary European observers. Even Lagden, disappointed by their failure to do more to keep the panzootic at bay, still felt compelled to "pay tribute to the fortitude with which [BaSotho] endured their losses".[97] Europeans from every occupation admired BaSotho resilience, praising them for their "notorious [sic] industry". "They are capable of adapting themselves to their difficulties [of drought, locusts and rinderpest]".[98]

The BaSotho set about doing their best in the circumstances. Many exploited the advantage of the belated outbreak of the panzootic to do most of their ploughing.[99] Many resorted to hoe cultivation. This seems to have ensured more intensive agriculture, certainly in the short term, and higher value attached to the product. Hoe cultivation also encouraged adult participation in agriculture rather than the existing practice of depending on young boys to hold the plough. The hard labour with the hoe also enhanced the value of the product.

Without cattle, and always with the threat of drought, the BaSotho chose to intensify their energy growing familiar crops and those that could resist drought. The sorghum vulgare (Mabele) was the most popular. BaSotho peasants were familiar with the staple crop that they had previously cultivated with the hoe. Sorghum was also more resistant to drought and less vulnerable to locusts. So plentiful was the sorghum harvest in 1898

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[96]Ibid., resident commissioner to paramount chief, 9 November 1898.

[97]L.N.A. S11/3, speech of resident commissioner, pitso of 21 October 1897.

[98]Diamond Fields Advertiser, 5 November 1898, 14.

[99]Star, 9 January 1897.

that the BaSotho could not store the surplus, which instead found its way to the brewing pots. The reason, as we have seen, was that many bewildered people took to drink. "At this moment, people are afraid to withstand affliction", observed Rev. Pascal, "they do not know where they are going, they instead swim in the joala (beer) because the harvests have been magnificent from our side..."[100]

They also intensified maize production. Maize cultivation does not require as much labour and technology as wheat cultivation. The maize crop also has a higher yield, and people chose to grow maize when the scarcity of draught oxen rendered large scale ploughing difficult. Maize was also versatile, especially during a general food shortage. People could eat it while green. This convenience helped to tide over the peasants until the sorghum harvest. People could also use it to make various forms of food - whole, crushed, stamped, or ground. Maize also came second to wheat as a marketable grain, especially in the mining compounds where it fetched high prices.

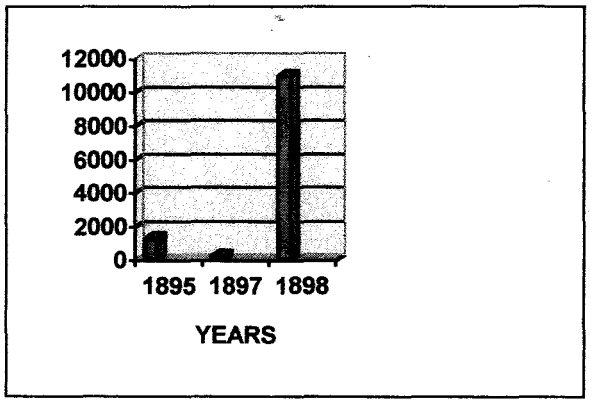
Those who had horses and donkeys trained and harnessed them, using them as substitute draught animals. The steep rise in the purchasing price of these animals reflects the high premium they had acquired. The imperial administration assisted by distributing simplified forms of horse harnesses on loan.[101] Many who still had a span of oxen helped those who had lost all. Like every crisis, the rinderpest brought out both the best and the worst in human attitudes. Families and kin assisted one another, family networks of reciprocity extending further than the extended family and including other local households. Many of those whose cattle survived were indebted to those whose cattle had died, for the bile the latter contributed had saved the cattle of the former. They now returned the favour by helping to plough the fields of those who had saved their cattle. The long established practice of lihalefote (half-cropping) was extended. It involved those who had saved a span or two ploughing for those who had lost all, and dividing the

[100]Letter of Rev. I. Pascal, 14 August 1897, Journal des Missions, 1897, 600.

[101]L.N.A., S/3/25/1/15, annual reports, report of government secretary, 1898.

harvest proportionally. Even boer farmers in the Free State who had saved a span or two of oxen came to the rescue and helped their BaSotho neighbours with ploughing their fields.[102]

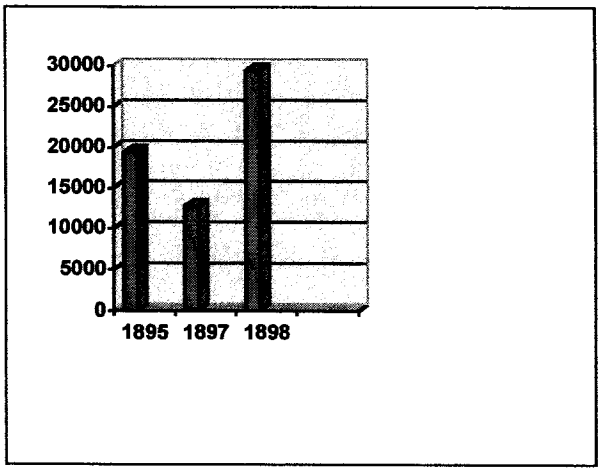
Moreover, industrious efforts to rebuild herds started almost immediately. With their cattle dead and their capacity to earn cash simultaneously weakened by the collapse of their cash-earning wheat crop, the BaSotho sold what they did have. This included wool, mohair and the hides of the dead cattle that they had carefully preserved for the hard times ahead. The value of miscellaneous goods, wool and mohair exported from the country rose steeply in 1898, undoubtedly because of the high sales of hides of the dead animals, as the following chart shows:[103]




**5.11: Value (in Pounds) of Miscellaneous Exports**

[102]Friend, 1 October 1897.

[103]Ibid., S3/25/1/11, S3/25/1/12, S3/25/1/14, S3/25/1/15, S3/25/1/16, annual reports, 1894, 1895, 1897, 1898, 1899.




**5.12: Value of Wool and Mohair Exports.**

Restocking occurred at an impressive rate. Determined to replenish their kraals, the BaSotho resolutely refused to part, at any price, with their breeding stock. Instead, they conducted a booming business with Free State farmers, exchanging their surviving and "salted" bullocks for calves and heifers. At the end of 1898, a Free State newspaper was observing that "Basutoland [was] alive with cattle buyers" whose preference for a cash transaction failed to "find favour with the Basotho". The latter, the report continued, "prefers trading perhaps a fat ox for two small animals, eighteen months to two years old. The ox may be worth £10 or more, and the calves perhaps £3 per head, yet the Basotho will prefer the calves to the money".[104] The main aim was to regenerate their wealth in cattle. Exchanging their bullocks for calves enabled the BaSotho to rebuild their herds rapidly. On such a scale was this barter conducted that some sections within the mercantile community worried about its effects on the cattle economy of the Free State. Some felt moved to call upon the Free State government to prohibit exportation of any stock for the next ten years.[105]

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[104]Friend, 29 November 1898.

[105]Diamond Fields Advertiser, 5 November 1898, 14.

The BaSotho shared this resourcefulness with other African communities in South Africa. Through South Africa, the striking pattern is that of resilience. Many ploughed their fields before the outbreak of the disease, using every available contraption to turn over the soil[106] Most resorted to the traditional hoe to cultivate their fields.[107]. With the rinderpest and the drought menacing them, African peasants preferred to intensify their energy growing crops that could resist drought. Replicating the BaSotho preference, they concentrated on cultivating sorghum and the sweet potato. The latter could be crushed into a juice that resembled and almost tasted like milk. Thus prepared, it could feed the babies and children who were now deprived of this essential part of their diet. In some areas of Natal, the sweet potato became the staple food, upstaging sorghum.[108]

With cows dead, milk and meat could only be obtained from smaller stock, especially goats and sheep. The escalation in their value reflected the rise in demand for these animals. In the Cape, the price of goats ranged from 20/- to 30/- each early in 1898.[109] Many Africans, partly disappointed in the collapse of their investment in cattle, or unable to afford reinvesting in them, preferred to invest in smaller stock, mainly sheep, goats and pigs, even poultry. [110]

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[106]Cape Archives, C.M.T. 3/100, rinderpest report for Idutywa, 7 November 1897; also Agricultural Journal, xi, 11, 25 November 1897, 606.; G.42-'98, report for Keiskammahoek, 41; Ibid., . report for Willowvale, 88.; ibid., report for Butterworth, 79; P.M.O 249, rinderpest report for Nqamakwe.

[107]G.42-98, report for Keiskamahoek, 41; ibid., report for Bizana, 105.; Agricultural Journal, xii, 8, 1898; successive numbers of the Natal Agricultural Journal, 1898 and 1899; Natal Departmental Reports, 1898, 1899; G.31-'99, reports for Engcobo, 88, Butterworth, 79, Willowvale, 82, Mount Fletcher, 109.

[108]Natal Agricultural Journal, 26 May 1898; ibid., 119 June 1898; ibid., 23 June 1898; ibid, 9 July 1898; ibid., 22 July 1898; ibid., 10 November 1898; Natal Departmental Reports, 1898. B.42, BB.20.

[109]G.42-'98, report for East London, 23.

[110]See e.g. Natal Departmental Reports, 1898, B.30; also Statistical Year Book, Natal, 1900.

Like the BaSotho, many African communities exploited the opportunities offered by the South African War to rebuild herds. They sold their produce at inflated wartime prices, enlisted in war operations at remunerative wages, and sold their horses at war prices. Africans could thus acquire cash for recouping their losses.[111]

Nor did all BaSotho cattle die. Throughout its trajectory, rinderpest was a singularly virulent panzootic, spreading easily and rapidly through herds that had never been exposed to infection. In outbreaks where intervention did not come, at worst, or was rudimentary, at best, mortality rates exceeded 90 per cent.[112] This explains the carnage that was the inevitable sequel of the trajectory of the panzootic north of the Zambezi. The virus, however, is also antigenically stable, provoking a secure lifelong immunity in survivors against later infection. Recovered animals transfer antibodies passively to their sucking young, giving them effective protection.[113] The rate of mortality, therefore, depended on the success of intervention. The BaSotho benefited from the belated arrival of the panzootic after Koch's immunisation method had been discovered and its efficacy tested. They had also popularly embraced immunisation after initial suspicions had abated. They were thus able to save a sizeable national herd.

The precise rates of mortality and survival are, however, hard to tell. Official records that no one contested, estimated that half the national herd survived.[114] Of the inoculated animals, close on two-thirds were said to have survived.[115] Various factors render it difficult to test the accuracy of this estimate. We depend entirely on statistics produced

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[111]For a more detailed discussion of the experiences of Africans in the war, see P. Warwick, Black People and the South African War, 1899-1902 (London, 1983).

[112]Henning, Animal Diseases, 418.

[113]G.R. Scott, "Rinderpest", in Advances in Veterinary Science 9 (1964), 120-1.

[114]Lagden's Papers, Mss Af.S. 211, Box 3/1; Agricultural Journal, xii, I (January 1898), 636.

[115]L.N.A., S3/1/5/8, "Report on an Outbreak of Disease among Cattle in the Orange River Colony and Basutoland, supposed to be Rinderpest".

by imperial officials. These are unreliable because imperial officials in Basutoland championed Koch's remedy. Therefore, they most probably overestimated its efficacy and underestimated the mortality level.

To gain an impression of relative loss, we need to compare these statistics against a referral standard, especially the size of the bovine population before the outbreak of the disease. The last national census was taken in 1891, six years before the outbreak of rinderpest. Meanwhile, successive bouts of drought, including an outbreak of endemic foot and mouth disease in 1892, must have significantly reduced the 1891 figure.

The next census was taken in 1904, after another panzootic of rinderpest had hit the country in 1902. It also followed the economic disruptions of the South African War, 1899-1903. The war had a contradictory impact on the national herd. The BaSotho exploited it to rebuild their herds. We do not, therefore, know what proportion of the 1904 bovine population represented newly acquired stock. Frantic efforts to rebuild depleted stocks, however, introduced other cattle diseases. The 1904 figures, therefore, included losses that were not related to the 1896-8 panzootic.

The census figures are themselves not entirely reliable. Determining the efficiency with which the censuses were conducted is difficult. Like other pastoral and colonised societies, the BaSotho tended to evade colonial censuses, especially the counting of their bovine stock. "One never knows by how much the Mosotho fortune rises", vexed a missionary working among them, "he can never say the exact number of his herd for reasons of escaping jealousies and misfortunes".[116] This apprehension would be more pronounced during the epizootic, especially one in which cattle-owners ascribed the origin of the panzootic to the same people who now wished to know the size of their herd. Further, as the extensive comparative studies of epidemics in the western world have shown, the emergencies that epidemics created almost everywhere inevitably

[116]H. Dieterlen, "Lesotho: Rinderpest and its Consequences", Journal des Missions, 1897, 669.

justified massive state intervention in civil society.[117] The same was true with rinderpest. Africans felt the glare of the colonial eye as it penetrated deep into their private lives. They felt it violating their beliefs, eating and drinking habits, all their cultural norms. They detested especially its violation of their sacrosanct bank in cattle, which was now, more than ever, exposed to intense scrutiny.

This reluctance to reveal the size of the herd was partly responsible for the aversion of some cattle owners to have their cattle immunised. An essential requirement when applying for immunisation was to reveal the quantity of one's stock. Even cattle owners who clamoured for inoculation found this condition disagreeable, and employed every subterfuge to evade it.[118]

The statistics were collected after the outbreak of the disease, the aim being to determine the rate of mortality among both inoculated and uninoculated herds. By then, many animals were already dead. Owners who had their cattle immunised also had every motive to exaggerate their losses. Once inoculation was introduced, the service had to be offered free of charge to encourage cattle-owners to have their cattle treated. Others refused to allow government enumerators to count their remaining herds, or deliberately falsified the information. The reason was that they suspected that the colonial government would claim compensation by imposing an additional tax, or commandeering their remaining stock.[119]

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[117]The literature is too extensive to attempt to list here. Important studies, however, include J. Biraben, Les Hommes et la Peste en France et dans les Pays europeens et mediterraneaus, vol. 2 (Paris, 1975-76); W. Bowsky, "The Impact of the Black Death upon Sienese Government and Society", Speculum, 39 (1964), 1-34; A.G. Carmichael, "Plague Legislation in the Italian Renaissance", Bulletin of the History of Medicine, 57 (1983), 508-525; C.M. Cipola, Fighting the Plague in seventeenth-century Italy (Madison, 1981); Evans, "Epidemics and Revolutions"; Flinn, "Plague in Europe"; B. Luckin, "States and Epidemic Threats", Bulletin of the Society for the Social History of Medicine, xxxiv (1984), 25-7; McGrew, Russia and the Cholera; P. Slack, The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart England (London, 1985).

[118]H. Dieterlen, "Rinderpest and its Consequences", Journal des Missions, 1897, 667.

[119]"The Rinderpest in South Africa", ibid., 17.

Thus, we should use official statistics as a drunken person should lamp poles, for illumination and not support. They estimated that 50 per cent of the national herd died of the rinderpest.[120] Official figures, however, represented mortality rates among inoculated herds. Knowing mortality rates among uninoculated herds is virtually impossible. Still, using the 1891 and 1904 census figures, only for illumination, the official estimates of mortality levels seem consistent with an average mortality of just over 40 per cent.[121]

**5.13: Comparative returns of cattle for 1891 and 1804**

| DISTRICT | 1891 | 1904 | DECREASE | PERCENT SURVIVAL | PERCENT LOSS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| LERIBE | 67176 | 35938 | 31238 | 53 | 47 |
| BEREA | 48373 | 18995 | 29378 | 39 | 61 |
| MASERU | 62508 | 42162 | 20346 | 67 | 33 |
| MAFETENG | 64198 | 43415 | 21783 | 66 | 34 |
| MOHALES' HOEK | 46502 | 31265 | 15237 | 67 | 33 |
| QUTHING | 34177 | 21472 | 12705 | 63 | 37 |

The 1891 figures, of course, represented cattle numbers six years before the outbreak of thepanzootic. By 1897, the cattle population would have been higher. Similarly, the 1904 figures were those of the cattle population six years after the rinderpest swept through the herds. They, thus, represented cattle numbers after six years of rapid restocking.

[120]Lagden Papers, Mss Afr. S. 211.

[121]L.N.A., S1/1, census returns, 1891-1904.

Mortality in some districts was higher than in others. Predictably, Berea was the most devastated district, losing more than two-thirds of its bovine population. This district paid heavily for the reluctance of its principal chief to permit immunisation. Chief Masupha resisted colonial intervention and prohibited his people from immunising their herds. Hardly a month after rinderpest appeared in Berea, more than five thousand cattle were dead, and the final toll was to exceed 50 per cent.[122] By the next census of 1904, cattle numbers in Berea were still far behind reaching half the level they had been before the rinderpest, in the previous census of 1891. Those in other districts had already passed the mid-point:[123]

Basutoland certainly suffered less severely than other territories in Southern Africa where rates of mortality soared to 95 per cent, as we have seen.[124] This, however, is not to detract from the "Wall Street Crash" that the epizootic occasioned. This collapse in the BaSotho banking system was a major shock. The country had lost much of its capital in one crash. Happening just when people needed their cattle as security to mitigate the effects of other contemporaneous ecological disasters, even the decimation of half of the national herd was an unprecedented catastrophe.

Aggregated totals on a national scale tell us little about individual losses at the village level. The rate of mortality was uneven. Some wards suffered more than others did. We might expect the same pattern at the village and individual levels. Some villages, families, or individuals may have escaped relatively unscathed, while others were totally ruined. There is an almost total lack of evidence on losses at the microcosmic level. Veterinary surgeon Armstrong's observation gives us a rare glimpse of a total calamity at a village he visited in the Mohaleshoek district. "Out of 149 cattle", he bewailed, "148 had died". "I counted", he continues, "seven carcasses within twenty yards of the door of

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[122]Ibid., S3/25/1/14, annual report, 30 August, 1897

[123]Ibid.,

[124]See 26-33 above.

one hut"[125] And so, some lost all their cattle, most a large proportion. Others, however, miraculously escaped unscathed. The latter provided relief to those who lost the most, through reciprocal exchange, gifts, loans and hire

No catastrophe is ever entirely without some positive results. Even the massive depopulation caused by the Black Death in fourteenth-century Europe has been credited to have led to some gains in per capita income.[126] As the BaSotho said:, Tsietsi e tsoala molemo (adversity breeds opportunity). The reduction of the bovine population through rinderpest decreased the pressure on available grazing, enabling the pastures to recover. The remaining herds thus thrived exceptionally well, sustaining double calving within a year. The reports of the assistant commissioners for 1898 consistently testified to the excellent conditions of the pastures and surviving stock.[127]

Thus, besides buying calves from Free State farmers, who had succeeded in saving most of their stock, the BaSotho also depended on natural regeneration. Calves had a higher survival rate than adult stock because rinderpest spread more effectively through communal grazing. Calves would normally have remained at home when the adult cows went out to graze, thus giving them greater protection against infection. Moreover, witnessing their cattle die at pastures, cattle-owners took special precautions to ensure the survival of their calves; upon the latter rested the hope of rebuilding herds.

Despite the austere control imperial officials exercised on contacts with African trading partners, still the BaSotho conducted clandestine deals. In the wake of rinderpest, the chiefs had an unusual share of entertaining foreign dignitaries. In mid-March 1899, Chief Sebele of the BaKwena in the Bechuanaland Protectorate arrived at the Paramount

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[125]L.N.A. S3/1/5/8, Armstrong to Resident commissioner, 28 May 1897

[126]M.M. Postan, Medieval Agriculture and General Problems (Cambridge, 1973)

[127]L.N.A., S3/25/1/15, annual reports, 1898.

Chief's village.[128] Though the latter concealed the purpose of the visit, evidence on earlier BaSotho-BaKwena contacts suggests that the delegation had most probably come to negotiate exchanging BaSotho horses for BaKwena cattle.[129] Although themselves ruined by the decimation of their herds, the BaKwena rapidly rebuilt their herds by acquiring them from Lewanika, whose people's herds had evaded the panzootic.[130]

A Zulu delegation, headed by a son of a principal headman, visited Chief Jonathan in April 1899. Ostensibly, the delegation had come to "see the sons of chief Moshesh and also Basutoland".[131] Through ubiquitous spies, Lagden learnt that it had a more important mission - to survey the prospects of trading Zulu cattle for BaSotho horses.[132] At the end of May, a subsequent Zulu delegation left Leribe with 100 horses exchanged for double that number of cattle.[133]

Like most communities experiencing food shortages,[134] the BaSotho also used their time-honoured method of hiring themselves out in the various South African labour markets. Here they could earn cash to support their families, to pay for grain seed

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[128]L.N.A., S4/1/6, resident commissioner's diaries, entry for 16 March 1899.

[129]P. Phoofolo, "BaSotho Diplomatic Conduct in the Nineteenth Century", Paper presented to Mohlomi Seminars, Department of History, National University of Lesotho, 16 March 1978.

[130]G. Prins, The Hidden Hippopotamus:Reappraisal in African History: The Early Colonial Experience in Western Zambia (Cambridge, 1980), 85-7; St. H. Gibbons, "Marotseland and the Tribes of the Upper Zambezi", Proceedings of the Royal Institute, 10 May 1898, 271.

[131]L.N.A., S6/5, Jonathan to resident commissioner, 25 April 1899.

[132]Lagden Diaries, entry for 25 April.

[133]L.N.A., S4/1/6, resident commissioner's diaries, entry for 16 May 1899.

[134]See, for example, labour movements after the Scottish potato famines of 1836-1850, including literature on the subject, in C.W. Withers, "Destitution and Migration: Labour Mobility and Relief from Famine in Highland Scotland, 1836-1850", Journal of Historical Geography, 14, 2 (1988), 128-150; also S.C. Watkins and J. Menken, "Famine in Historical Perspective", Population and Development Review, 11, iv (1985), 647-675.

distributed by the imperial administration as part of the relief scheme, to meet their hut-tax obligation, and to rebuild their stock. This strategy to tide over hunger, however, was strictly regulated by the colonial state. Passes were granted only to those who had paid their hut-tax for the current year.[135] Ability to pay, however, depended on the state of the harvest. When the harvest was meagre, the only alternative was to earn cash at the labour centres. At successive pitsos, speakers urged authorities to relax the pass laws. At the 1898 pitso to discuss the increase of the tax, especially, speakers desperately protested: "We have nothing to pay our tax with", implored one:

> and when we ask for a pass we are asked if we have paid and reply no chief, but we are going to look for money. If govt. allows us passes we will go and look for money and return and pay our tax. I see this lion will eat us as we have no where to fly to. Chiefs, slacken the passes for us.[136]

Restrictions on human movement during the rinderpest crisis also undermined this option to tide over hunger through migrancy. Recruitment of labour from Basutoland virtually stopped from February 1897 because travelling through the neighbouring Free State and the Cape borders was restricted.[137] Thus, labour recruitment from Basutoland virtually stopped from February 1897. When the moratorium was lifted only 11,788 passes were issued in 1897 compared with 28,000 in the previous year[138]

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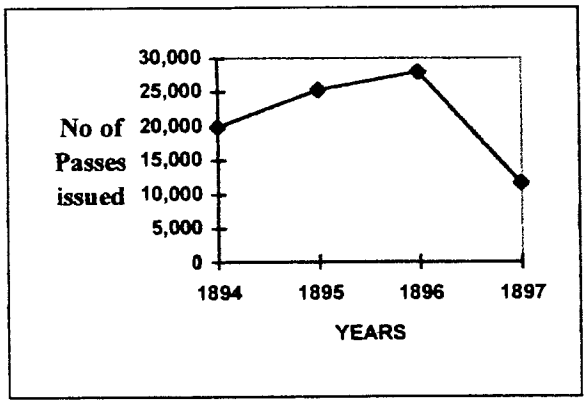
[135]L.N.A., S2/1, resident commissioner's circular, no. 152, 27 July 1884.

[136]Ibid., S11/3, speech of Sekhofa, pitso of 27 October 1898; also ibid., speech of Matlapeng.

[137]L.N.A., S7/7/19, M.M. Duncan (Ladybrand), to resident commissioner, 6 February 1897; ibid., S3/25/1/14, annual reports.

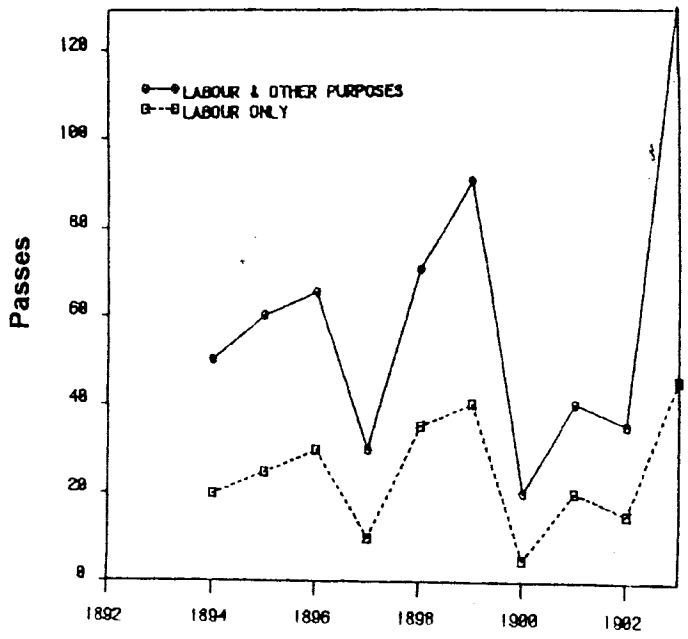
[138]Ibid., S3/25/1/14, annual report, 1897.

**5.15: Number of Passes Issued: 1894-7[139]**




The pattern of migrancy returned to its pre-rinderpest status when traffic resumed early in 1898. Numbers of migrants rose steadily until they fell precipitously when the South African War began in 1899 as the following graph shows:[140]

**5.16: Numbers of Labour Passes (in 1000's) issued – 1894-1902**




[139] Report of the Transvaal Labour Commislsion, 1904, 296.

[140] Ibid., S3/25/1/12, S3/25/1/13, S3/25/1/14, S3/25/1/15, S3/25/1/16, S3/25/1/17, S3/25/1/18, S3/25/1/18, S3/25/1/19, S3/25/1/20, annual reports, 1894, 1895, 1896, 1897, 1898, 1899, 1900, 1901 and 1902, respectively.

While there clearly was an upward trend in the volume of labour migrancy, the pattern does not suggest a dramatic exodus. Basutoland experienced an unprecedented invasion by an army of recruiters and labour touts who descended on the countryside in the wake of the rinderpest. Throughout July 1897, twenty recruiting agents from the Rand mines and another twenty from the Jagersfontein mines were in the country recruiting earnestly. Agents on the spot competed for BaSotho labourers, with a barrage of letters arriving daily from the Chamber of Mines requesting labourers.[141] The resident commissioner's office was flooded with repeated and urgent requests for BaSotho labourers. The following examples are taken randomly.

In June 1898, a Mr. P.J. Botha of the Rand mines attempted a deal with the resident Commissioner and chiefs. He requested an exclusive monopoly for three years to recruit 1,000 BaSotho labourers per week. He would pay each 45 to 70/- per month with food. The next day, the government secretary received a request from a recruiting agency, Charles Beck & Co. Mine managers in Johannesburg. The Company urgently needed "boys from Basutoland". It promised to defray railage and rations expenses and to pay "good wages". At the end of the month, representatives of J.B. Robinson Mining Company were at Morija to conduct on-the-spot negotiations with the paramount chief.[142]

The scramble for labourers continued unabated throughout the year. In November 1898, one Bosman, representing the Jagersfontein mines, offered attractive terms to potential labourers. The company would pay each £1.5 per month with "good food and good treating". It would also pay their hut-tax in advance. Two days earlier, the resident commissioner had received a request from a correspondent of the Chamber of Mines

[141]South african Mining Journal, vi, 307, August 31 1897, 1005.

[142]L.N.A., S7/7/20, Botha to resident commissioner, 3 June 1898; ibid., Charles Beck & Co. to Sloley, 4 June 1898; ibid., Ernest Lowe to resident commissioner, 22 June 1898.

newspaper, The Standard and Diggers News. He sought permission to visit the country to investigate the plight of the people and its relation to the provision of labour.[143]

This blitz on the country, however, did not secure labour in any significant numbers. The disdain of BaSotho workers for the gold mines, especially, persisted even in the wake of rinderpest. Thwarted, the Chamber of Mines whimpered that despite "several" attempts to recruit BaSotho miners in mid 1897, it failed. It entertained hopes that recruiting prospects would improve after the BaSotho had completed ploughing their fields. Between July and October 1897, only 162 BaSotho labourers had arrived at the Rand mines, and 120 between November and the end of the year.[144] The year 1898 brought little hope that expectations of an improvement in the supply of labour would be fulfilled. By June, the executive of the Chamber of Mines was vexing that "no natives are arriving from Swaziland and very few from the Cape Colony and **Basutoland**".[145] Basutoland did not even feature in the next report of the Chamber,..[146]

Reluctance to go to the reef mines was so pronounced that the Basutoland Chamber of Commerce recommended appointing a government agent in Johannesburg. He would:

> assist the Basotho labourers with advice, see, justice done to them, so as to avoid harsh treatment...thus perhaps causing larger numbers to seek labour on the mines, and enhance thereby receipts of both the government and the trading community.[147]

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[143]Ibid., J. Bosman to resident commissioner, 17 November, 1898; .J.C. Mackenzie to resident commissioner, 18 November 1898.

[144]South African Mining Journal, vii, 326, 1 January 1898

[145]Ibid., vii, 350, 18 June 1898.

[146]Ibid., vii, 368. 22 October. 1898.

[147]Ibid., S7/7/20. G.R. Hobson (chairman of the Basutoland Chamber of Commerce) to Government Secretary, 19 November 1898.

The Chamber also expressed its disapproval of the prevailing scramble for BaSotho labourers by "a large number of labour agents now endeavouring to obtain BaSotho labourers".[148]

In the wake of the death of their cattle, many BaSotho stayed at home, rather than rushing to distant labour centres. Here, they engaged in overseeing the process of recovery. The immediate pressure on migrants was to obtain the bare necessities of life, and to rebuild their own, or family, herds. They could achieve this through combining productive labour in their fields and targeted migrancy. As we have seen, many exploited the advantage of the belated outbreak of the panzootic to do most of their ploughing. They also worked across the border on Free State farms, where payment was mostly in stock.

BaSotho were accustomed to working on neighbouring white farms, and their efforts to cope with the rinderpest catastrophe confirms that this pattern had persevered as the nineteenth century ended.[149] They especially favoured farm work now that they had to be closer home to participate in rebuilding their lives. The farms were close to their homes. The labour performed there was familiar. Moreover, an entire family could settle on the farm where the organization of labour would have optimum benefit to the squatter family. The husband would plough the white landlord's lands; his wife would help with domestic work while also doing the hoeing, reaping and threshing. Boys would herd the landlord's stock with those belonging to their families, while the young females would help their mothers in domestic and agricultural work. Even young males of serviceable age could spend the period of low labour intensity away on the mines and return during peak agricultural periods to help their parents on the

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[148]Ibid.

[149]For the early development of this pattern and its development, see Kimble, "Towards and Understanding of the Political Economy of Lesotho", especially 162-191; Eldredge, A South African Kingdom, 188-9.

farms, especially with ploughing and harvesting..[150]

True, white farmers also lost heavily from the rinderpest. Their losses, however, were invariably lower than those of their African counterparts. For example, estimates of cattle losses in the Cape, which excluded losses among Africans, put the mortality rate at 35 per cent,[151] while those for areas with predominantly African settlements varied between 80 and 100 per cent. This was partly because African-owned cattle were usually pastured communally which assisted in spreading the rinderpest among African cattle. White farmers also tended to be more receptive to inoculation, once the prophylactic showed signs of success. In a colonial and racial setting, Africans were averse to inoculation, suspecting that the colonial officials who administered it had malevolent intentions, as we have seen. White farmers also received massive state aid to salvage their cattle and to recover from their losses.[152]

Thus, many BaSotho took up farm and domestic work on the Free State farms to replenish their kraals and to be near their homes to oversee strategies of recovery from the rinderpest catastrophe. The 1898-9 statistics of passes issued to labourers from Basutoland reveal that the bulk of BaSotho migrants worked on nearby farms:

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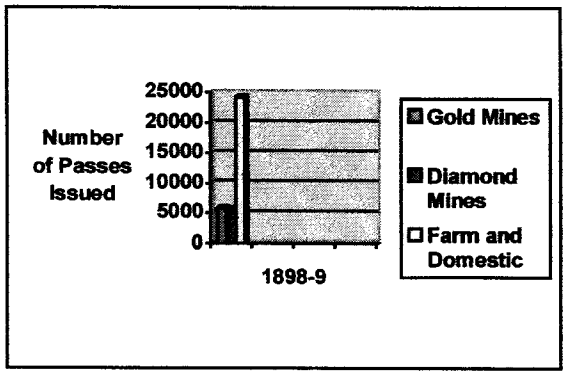
[150]For studies on labour tenancy and sharecropping on white farms, see T. Keegan, "The Share-Cropping Economy on the South African Highveld in the early Twentieth Century", Journal of Peasant Studies, 2/3 (1983), 201-225; Keegan, "Trade, Accumulation and Impoverishment: Mercantile Capital and the Economic Transformation of Lesotho and the Conquered Territory, 1870-1970", Journal of Southern African Studies, 12, 2 (1986), 196-216; Keegan, Rural Transformation in Industrialising South Africa: The Southern Highveld to 1914 (Johannesburg, 1986); M.L. Morris, "The Development of Capitalism in South African Agriculture: Class Struggle in the Country-side", Economy and Society, 5, iii (1976), 292-343; S. Trapido, "Landlord and Tenant in a Colonial Economy: The Transvaal, 1880-1910", Journal of Southern African Studies, 5, I (1978), 26-58; C. Van Onselen, The Seed is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine, A South African Sharecropper, 1894-1985 (Cape Town, 1996).

[151]G.72-'98, Rinderpest Statistics for the Cape of Good Hope, 1896,7 and 8.

[152]See e.g. Cape of Good Hope Select Parliamentary Committee Reports and Special Reports to Parliament, A1-'97, Special Committee Report on Agricultural Distress, June 1898; ibid., A22-'98, Special Committee Report of Agricultural Distress, December 1898.




**4.16: Category of Labour Migration from Basutoland: 1898-9.**

We can confirm the impression that the rinderpest failed to unleash the labour boon that had been predicted[153] by taking a short *detour* to examine how other African communities in South Africa responded to labour demands immediately after the epizootic. Using his earlier experience in how Africans responded to similar pestilential and ecological crises, the editor of an Eastern Cape newspaper led the way for the pessimists who doubted the rinderpest's power to unleash a labour bonanza:

> Many people are of the opinion that the loss of cattle will not be such a great evil as is anticipated, if it will be the means of inducing more of the natives to go out to work, but in the light of the experience of past "bad times" amongst them, we question whether any hardship they may now have to face justifies this opinion.[154]

[153]See pages 37-39.

[154]Umtata Herald, 20 November 1897

Most reports soon began confirming his doubts. They bewailed the scarcity of labour from their districts of jurisdiction, a "reverse of what might have been expected after the ravages of rinderpest."[155]

Chief Khama of the BamaNgwato prohibited labour recruitment from his country during 1896-7. This was despite the miserable state of the food supply among his People. Instead, he encouraged his people to work internally and to engage in constructing the Mafeking-Bulawayo railway line. He went further to turn down attractive offers for the supply of his men to labour centres.[156] In former British Bechuanaland reports singled out only the divisions of Taung and Mafeking as providing more labourers to the Kimberley diamond mines than had been the pattern before.[157] From the Cape colony proper, only the divisions of Glen Grey, Herschel and King Williamstown reported any significant change in the efflux of migrants in 1897-8.[158]

Pessimism about the power of the rinderpest to unleash labour increased as the impact of the disease and accompanying climatic disasters began to impinge. Undoubtedly, some districts did experience an increase in the numbers of migrants.[159] Most district officials, however, either dispensed with reporting on the subject, or expressed

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[155]G.31.-'99, 1897, report for Ngqeleni, 101; see also all other reports from Bechuanaland Protectorate, the Cape colony proper, the Transkeian Territories and Griqualand East; also Natal and Zululand, in Natal Departmental Reports, 1899.

[156]Q.N. Parsons "The Economic History of Khama's Country in Botswana, 1844-1930", in R. Palmer & N. Parsons, The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa (London, 1977), 126-7.

[157]Ibid., reports for Mafeking and Taung, 69-70, 71.

[158]G.42-'98, Blue Book, 1898, reports for Glen Grey, Herschel and King Williamstown and Herschel, 28, 34, and 38, respectively.

[159]e.g. G.31-'99, Blue Book, 1899, for the Cape Colony proper, see reports for Atherton, 27, Sterkspruit, 29, Komgha, 39, Uitenhage, 47; for British Bechuanaland, see report for Vryburg, 60, Kuruman, 64, Taung, 65,

disappointment. For example, the magistrate of the Transkeian district of Umzimkhulu complained that

> the necessity of going out to work and earning money, one would think must be keenly felt by all the natives since their heavy losses by rinderpest, **but it really does not appear to be so**".

Out of an estimated total population of 32,500 people in the district, only 2,695 left to seek work during the year, "instead of, what might be expected under the circumstances, say three times that number".[160]

Despite living near the diamond diggings, and "crying out for the past two years that they [were] starving", the inhabitants of the Barkly West "native" locations continued to evade recruitment.[161] The numbers of labour passes issued to African living in the Bolotwa location in Glen Grey actually shrunk in 1898-9. Similarly, the civil commissioner of the Kimberley division continued to complain of the scarcity of labour in the diggings.[162]

The 1898 annual reports of colonial officials qualified their impressions of the enhanced volume of migrancy. They stressed migrants' independence in deciding the destination of, and the method of selling, their labour. The reef gold mines continued to be unpopular. This was after an army of recruiters and touts had invaded the countryside in unprecedented numbers and vigour to gather the expected fruits of the rinderpest,[163] desperate migrants. Africans of the Glen Grey division exhibited a "marked disinclination to proceed to the Transvaal mines". Only 127 out of a total of 1,464 left to seek employment outside the district. Those in King Williamstown

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[160]G.3'99, Blue Book, 1899, report for Umzimkhulu, 114.

[161]ibid., report for Barkly West, 11.

[162]Ibid. report for Bolotwa and Kimberley, 24 and 31, respectively; also report of protector of natives, Kimberley, 34.

[163]Jeeves, "Control of Migratory Labour on the South African gold Mines"."Over-reach", 393-412.

division showed "a strong preference for Cape Town". For their turn, the BaThlaping of Bechuanaland would "not on any consideration go to Johannesburg, or the Free State mines." [164] In the Transkeian district of Nqamakwe that gave the largest number of migrants in 1898, "hardly any" went there".[165]

The rinderpest almost wiped out the entire Swazi herd. The Transvaal government exploited this disaster to assist the labour starved gold mining industry.[166] It promptly imposed, and enforced, an annual hut-tax of £2.12.6 per hut, and a poll tax. To pay these exactions, the Swazi were forced to seek work in the Transvaal. Still, the efflux was hesitant and halting. The Swazi ruling class continued to struggle to control it. the young men, in their turn, continued to enter, and exit, the labour market on their terms. To achieve this, the Swazi king, Bhunu, decided to contract with a single labour recruiting company, Mathias Johannes Jacobus Grobler. Under this scheme, the company would pay him ten shillings per each Swazi recruited.[167] Swazi migrants, themselves, seem to have played truant with the reef mining management, leaving the mines sooner than they had arrived.[168]

Natal and Zululand sent the lowest number of migrants to the reef mines in 1898 and 1899. Neither did the Zulu supply of labour satisfy the internal demand on the farms of Natal colonists. Amid the rinderpest, the colony's legislature introduced and debated a "Native Labour Bill" in 1898. It sought strategies to improve the supply of

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[164]ibid., 28, 38, 71.

[165]G.31-'99, Blue Book, 1899, 77.

[166]For the marriage of convenience between mine owners and the Transvaal government in this period, see, Harries, Work, Culture, and Identity, 129-137.

[167]F. Mashasha, "The Road to Colonialism: Concessions and the Collapse of Swazi Independence: 1875-1926", unpublished Ph.D thesis, Oxford University (1977).

[168]South African Mining Journal, vi, 306, 14 August 1897.

labour to local farms.[169] From nearby Zululand, very few migrants went to distant markets "compared to thousands in former years" [170]Many preferred to go across the border to Natal.[171] Commenting on this pattern, a correspondent of a mining journal admitted

> that the rinderpest, drought, locusts and half a score of curses are bearing hardly on natives, and are turning their thoughts from the labour by which they earn luxuries to that home labour by which they gain their necessities by the sweat of their brows, all this is trite enough...[172]

Even Africans in the Transvaal failed to supply the mines with enough labourers. This was despite the bleak prospects for food supply in this territory. The northern Transvaal was perhaps the most devastated by the panzootic and accompanying drought. Here, a devastating drought preceded the rinderpest, resulting in unprecedented famine. Monsieur Creux, a resident missionary, gave a stark report of the miserable condition of Africans:

> The famine has become terrible. The native women pick up the grains of maize that fall from the mouth of post mules. A sack of maize rose from eight to twelve shillings to eight pounds.

Dr. Liengule confirmed his impressions, noting that "The blacks are dying by hundreds; whole villages are deserted..."[173] The harvest of 1897 was a complete failure owing to the devastating drought of the previous year. Africans reaped very little millet and mealies. There was no famine breaker as the early frost nipped the corn when it was in flower, thus destroying the Afrikaner crop of oats, wheat and

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[169]Colony of Natal, Debates of the Legislative Assembly, 2nd Parliament, 1898, 646-50, 657-69, 673-79, 724-28, 733-4.

[170]Natal Departmental Reports, 1898, BB.9

[171]Ibid.

[172]South African Mining Journal, vi, 306, 14 August 1897.

[173]Christian Express, xxvii, 323, 1 May, 1897.

barley. The drought persisted through the ploughing season, rendering cultivation impossible. Mealies, where available, cost a forbidding price of £4.10 per 200-lb. bag in towns. In the outlying areas, the price rocketed to £6-8 per bag.[174] Starvation set in. Small pox and other deficiency diseases played havoc with the lives of people who had lost resistance to infection owing to hunger.[175]

Yet even amid such dire distress, labour from this source was still elusive. "Nothing came of" attempts to mount relief through encouraging young men from the region to go to the reef mines, as the mouthpiece of the Chamber of Mines vexed.[176] Even those contemporaries who did not stand to gain directly from the flow of labour from the starving Transvaal African communities bewailed the prevalent scarcity of labour. The Transvaal's newly appointed veterinary surgeon, Arnold Theiler, felt that he could sustain his sympathy for the starving populace of northern Transvaal "if only they would work in the gold mines where work [was] available".[177] His spouse, Emma, was more blunt, observing that "Kaffirs prefer to lead idle lives instead of going to Johannesburg to work in the mines that almost had to close because of the lack of black labour".[178]

The broad outline of the story that the statistics tell is that the reef mines continued to depend on traditional sources of labour, from East Coast territories - especially from

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[174]M.S.S. 330, Weaving to Hartley, 21 Nov. 1897.

[175]Kahl, "Die Fieberepidemic in Transvaal", Die Evangelichen Missionen, 3, 1897, 23739; P Rosset, "Valdezia la famine", Bulletin de la Mission Suisse Romande, 11, 127 (1896), 98-99; H. Berthoud and E. Creux, "La detresse au Transvaal", ibid., 11, 132 (1897), 230-34; E. Creux, "La detresse au Transvaal", ibid., 11, 131 (1897), 304-5.

[176]South African Mining Journal, vi, 299, June 20 1897 "Annual Report of the Association of Mines", 812.

[177]Johannesburg Public Library, S Store 920, letters of Sir Arnold Theiler, 25 December 1896.

[178]Ibid., Emma Theiler, 11 December 1896.

Mozambique,[179] with an insignificant participation of other territories, especially Basutoland. Early in 1899, the Chamber of Mines tabulated the percentage and origin of its entire labour compliment in the previous year. The inescapable conclusion is that the migrants from the East Coast and the Transvaal's northern districts far outstripped those from other territories in South Africa, especially Basutoland.[180] :

**5.17: Territorial Origin of African Labourers under the Transvaal Chamber of Mines, 1898**

| AREA OF ORIGIN | PERCENT |
|---|---|
| EAST COAST TERRITORIES | 60.2 |
| NORTHERN DISTRICTS | 23.38 |
| BASUTOLAND AND CAPE COLONY | 11.12 |
| ZULULAND AND NATAL | .95 |

The ambivalent effects of the South African War restrict us from taking a longer view of the extent of the catastrophe in Basutoland, or elsewhere in South Africa. On balance, however, the rinderpest clearly stopped short of precipitating a major famine. Its effects, exacerbated by the long drought, stopped at creating a critical food shortage. As an authority on modern famine has cogently observed, the margin between famine and food shortage is blurred; "Criteria do not exist to measure the degree of hunger, emaciation or elevation of death rates serving to differentiate famine from shortage".[181] The best that

[179]Harries, Work, Culture, and Identity, 109.

[180]South African Mining Journal, viii, 382, 28 January 1899, 319; also ibid ,ii, 323, 11 December 1897; vii, 325, 25 December 1897; vii, 326, 1 January 1898.

[181]M.K. Bennet, "Famine", International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, vol. 5 (1968), 322-6

we might do, then, is to construct a continuum of food crisis, leading from mild shortages to disastrous famine.

Without definitive and precise contemporary evidence, the place occupied by the food crisis resulting from rinderpest in Basutoland on this continuum might emerge from a closer examination of the responses of the victims in their attempts to survive the catastrophe. This, in turn, might especially consider categories of food consumed to relieve the resultant food shortages. Roughly speaking, we can identify five categories, in descending order of desirability from both the consumer's point of view and that of the larger society. We deem that the graver the shortage, the less desirable was the food consumed.

The first category included food that closely approximated that normally consumed, such as goat's milk for cow's milk. The second was imitation food, such as porridge or vegetable or fruit juice for milk. Lower down the scale were inferior cereals not normally consumed (for whatever reason). Then came irregular foods, including edible grasses. Last resort non-food followed, including roots and barks. Last, and most desperate, was eating human flesh.

Starting from the last, and extreme, response, the rinderpest clearly did not drive the BaSotho to the final resort of eating others to stay alive. Had that happened, contemporary sources, especially those generated by missionaries and the neurotic settler press, would have been vocal. Nor did popular stories of cannibalism, prone to flare in such critical times and often apocryphal, emerge. Some sections of the community did come close to eating irregular foods like edible grasses and wild herbs, although such practices were apparently limited.[182] Consumption of imitation foods, however, was

[182]L.N.A., S6/5, paramount chief to resident commissioner, 10 October 1898; ibid., S4/1/5, resident commissioner's diaries, entries for 29 and 30 November 1898; ibid., S11/3, pitso of 27 October 1898, speech of Khomoaleburu.

common during the crisis. Many, for example, substituted milk with seqhaqhabola - a relish of fermented porridge made from mealies.[183]

What was the impact of the panzootic on social and political relations? Many expected that it would radically disrupt social and political relations by decimating the crucial medium that determined these relations. Missionaries, especially, hailed the rinderpest as a Godsend, for it would transform all those social institutions that they had assailed with limited success. "Drop the rinderpest in the herds of Lesotho", commented one missionary who claimed to have eavesdropped on the ominous laments of hapless BaSotho, "no more cattle, no more marriages, how shall we marry?"[184]

Chiefs and elders also feared the likely impact of the panzootic on the prevailing social and class relations. Epidemics usually impinge upon these relations. A pertinent example is the Black Death in Europe. In the countryside, the plague dislocated the nobility and it aggravated social divisions in the towns. The result, as Renouard has noted, was to "intensify the hostility between the ruined nobility and peasantry in the countryside, and between the rich bourgeoisie and the miserable proletariat in the cities".[185]

There were fears that the epizootic would also free subordinated sectors of the society from gerontocratic and patriarchal domination. Elders also deprecated the likely effects of the critical food shortages restructuring gender and generational relations.[186] Yet, the

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[183]T.M. Orpen, "The Diet of Native Labourers", Paper read at Salisbury, Rhodesia, 25 April 1902.

[184]Dieterlen, H., "La Peste Bovine au sud de l'Afrique", Journal Des Missions Evangeliques (Hereafter, J.M.E., 1897, pp. 15-16.

[185]Renouard, "The Black Death", in Bowsky (ed.) Black Death, 32.

[186]For emerging studies on how African famines have affected social, especially gender relations, see, J. Giblin, "Famine and Social Change"; Maddox, "Gender and Famine"; T. Sunseri, "Famine and Wild Pigs: Gender Struggles and the Outbreak of the Maji-Maji War in Uzaram (Tanzania), Journal of African History, 38, 2 (1997), 235-59; Vaughan, "Famine Analysis and Family relations".

rinderpest seems hardly to have brought a significant and enduring shift in social status or class relations. Nor does it seem to have affected generational and gender relations to any conspicuous and enduring degree.

The wielders of power seem to have acted swiftly to adapt the pliant social institutions and to minimise serious challenge to their status in the prevailing pattern of social relations. The necessary adjustments were, therefore, relatively smooth. Already before the full impact of the rinderpest impinged, a speaker at the annual pitso urged the assembly to start the alternative strategy of maintaining bohali through "the custom of giving stones as pledges instead of cattle".[187] Later, and with approximately half the national cattle dead, the paramount chief resolutely refused any tempering with the bohali institution: "With regard to the people, if they can be married as they choose, to this I cannot consent. If the marriage is by cattle or in church, let the will be mine".[188]

The chiefly hierarchy seems to have remained intact. No noticeable or sustained challenge from the subordinate sectors of the society, especially younger generations of wage earners and females, seems to have occurred. Chiefs and the elders seem to have continued to exert their influence over younger migrants, even claiming part of the fruits of their labour. The pattern of labour migrancy after the rinderpest is itself blurry, warning us against assuming the apparently obvious conclusion that the younger generation exclusively benefited from this strategy of rebuilding herds.

Although it respected no social gradations, the rinderpest both beggared the poor and impoverished the affluent. Some large cattle owners did lose almost everything Those who were affluent before would have been the more anxious to earn cash to restock. The sources do not hint at the likelihood that people who previously did not have to participate in the labour market increasingly entered it. There is the example of the

[187]L.N.A., S11/3, pitso of 21 October 1897, speech of Ntsekele.

[188]Ibid., pitso of 27 October 1898, speech of Lerotholi.

famed MoSotho author, Thomas Mofolo. Born in 1877, he had never entered the labour market. In 1894, he had enrolled at the missionary native teacher training college at Morija. In 1898, however, he had to abandon his studies "on account of the rinderpest", and was forced to go to "work amongst the white people".[189]

Thus, those who had previously had little cause to participate in the labour market, now found their choices narrowed. Correspondingly, the decimation of the few herds belonging to those who were not well off before the rinderpest impoverished them. While the formerly wealthy had at least the capacity and a wider range of strategies to recoup, many less affluent would have swelled the category of those who were compelled by sheer necessity to leave in search of work.

We might discern a spectrum of migrancy within the same community. At the one extreme were those who had already become migrant labourers, out of necessity, and to whom rinderpest merely meant a regularisation of their migrancy. Up the scale were those who used migrant labour discretionary, but were now forced to go out of dire necessity. On the other extreme were those who, despite the crises of the closing decades of the century, including the rinderpest, continued to avoid migrancy.

The gendered bias of the historical sources impedes information on the impact of the rinderpest on gender relations. At best, however, its impact was contributory rather than causative. The loss of the resource that subordinated women to men did weaken the latter to some extent. It did help to consolidate power struggles between genders and generations. The increasing trend of women and the younger generation to seek independence from patriarchal and gerontocratic control, however, had begun before the rinderpest, and the effects of the panzootic probably exacerbated it.[190] The opening

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[189]G.H. Franz, "The Literature of Lesotho", Bantu Studies, 4 (1935), 168.

[190]S. Burman, "Fighting a Two-Pronged Attack: The Changing Legal Status of Women in Cape-Ruled Basutoland, 1872-1884", in Walker (ed.), Women and Gender in South Africa; Eldredge, "Women in Production"; Kimble, "Runaway Wives"; Phoofolo, "Kea Nyala".

decades of the twentieth century did witness the intensification of gender and generational struggles.[191] While the rinderpest might have exacerbated these ongoing tensions, neither did it cause nor trigger them.

Predictably, difficulties did arise in deploying strategies that attempted to cushion the effects of the rinderpest on existing social relations. For example, elders and chiefs attempted to maintain bohali intact through a system of indebtedness. "We notice to our consternation" observed an exasperated European missionary, "that these days those who are arranging marriages count cows in absentia promising delivery when and if they re-stock sometimes in the future. In other words, they are marrying on credit".[192] The following month, this system of indebtedness had developed sufficiently well enough to be extensively described:

> Do you know what they do today? A certain person comes to ask for a hand of somebody's daughter for himself or for his son and they go together to the kraal. The kraal is empty and does not even contain dung, except dry. However, that does not matter. In this kraal the spouse brings ten pebble stones which he says represent ten oxen; it is a debt of honour, which will be paid when there is cattle again in the kraals. Then ten stones are not enough. The daughter of a certain somebody is beautiful, and it is necessary to pay fifteen or twenty cattle. The spouse then gravely consults his friends and his parents who had remained aside and then, after a lot of debating, brings gravely five more stones which he places besides the others at the foot of the girl's father or uncle. The

[191]P. Bonner, "Desirable or Undesirable BaSotho Women?: Liquor, Prostitution and the Migration of Basotho Women to the Rand, 1920-45", in Walker (ed.), Women and Gender in South Africa; M. Epprecht, "Women's Conservatism and the Politics of Gender in Lesotho", Journal of African History, 36, 1 (1995), 29-56; M. Epprecht, "Gender and History in Southern Africa: A Lesotho 'Metanarrative'", Canadian Journal of African Studies, 30, 2 (1996), 183-213; E. Gordon, "An Analysis of the Impact of Labour Migration on the Lives of Women in Lesotho", Journal of Development Studies, xvii (1981); Guy, "Wage Employment of Rural Basotho Women: A Case Study", South African Labour Bulletin, vi (1980); Kimble, "Runaway Wives"; G.M. Malahleha, "Liquor Brewing: A Cottage Industry in Lesotho Shebeens", Journal of Eastern African Research and Development, 15 (1985), 45-55; T. Maloka, "Khomo Lia Oela: Canteens, Brothels and Labour Migrancy in Colonial Lesotho, 1900-1940", Journal of African History, 38, 1 (1997), 101-23; C. Murray, Families Divided: The Impact of Migrant Labour in Lesotho (Cambridge, 1981).

[192]Leselinyana, 1 July 1897.

> father is still not satisfied. Two more stones, small ones, meaning young two-year old oxen, plus one or two sheep and a blanket, and finally the affair is settled...[193]

Would-be-spouses and their parents, however, contested these attempts. A daily newspaper reported in November 1898 that "young members are in love with the new marriage law providing for parties to marry at the magistrate's office for half-a-crown due to the scarcity of cattle". "But", it continued, "the chiefs and married men do not see it at all. They prefer taking 10 or 20 oxen, just by way of solatium, when they give the hand of one of their daughters in marriage".[194]

Even so, the remarkable manner in which the society adjusted to the crisis by invoking custom emerges more strikingly. Thus, the rinderpest crisis revealed the remarkable resilience of BaSotho social institutions. Part of the reason is that in Basutoland colonial legislation undermining the conventions of "customary" law had not been enacted with the same vigour as had happened elsewhere. Comparison with Natal is salient. Here colonial legislation had done the most in undermining or distorting the otherwise flexible conventions of customary law in favour of the traditional wielders of power.[195] The

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[193]Journal des Missions, 1897, 671-2.

[194]Friend, 8 November 1898, 3.

[195]In this connection, see J.M. Allman; "Of 'Spinsters':, 'Concubines' and 'wicked' Women": Reflections on Gender and Social Change in Colonial Asante", Gender and History, 3, ii (1991), 176-189; H. Bradford, "Women, Gender and Colonialism: Rethinking the History of the British Cape Colony and its Frontier Zones, c.1806-70", Journal of African History, 37 (1996), 351-370; J. Bryfield, "Women, Marriage, Divorce and the Emerging Colonial state in Abeukuta (Nigeria), 1892-1904, Canadian Journal of African Studies, 30, i (1996), 32-51; M. Chanock, "Making Customary Law: Men, Women and Courts in Colonial Northern Rhodesia", in M. Hay and M. Wright (eds.), African Women and the Law: Historical Perspectives (Boston, 1982); Chanock, Law, Custom and Social Order: The Colonial Experience in Malawi and Zambia (Cambridge, 1985); M. Lynn, "Law and Imperial Expansion: The Niger Delta Courts of Equity, c.1850-95", Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, xxiii, i (1995), 54-78; L. Manicom, "Ruling Relations: Rethinking State and Gender in South African History", Journal of African History, 33 (1992), 441-65; K. Mann and R. Roberts (eds.), Law in Colonial Africa (Portsmouth and New Jersey, 1991; Schmidt, "Negotiated Spaces; Schmidt, "Patriarchy, Capitalism and the Colonial State in Zimbabwe", Signs, 16 (1991), 732-56

colonial administration, with the best of intentions but the worst of misconceptions, regulated African marriages by a code that specified that all lobola had to be paid before the marriage was consummated. It also fixed an admissible amount. With cattle decimated by the rinderpest, these rigid conditions of contracting marriages offered a brief opportunity for young women and men to exploit crucial contradictions in customary and colonial law. They simply cohabited and started families. To stem the tide, some elders of would-be-brides made concessions, consenting to have their daughters married on an instalment basis or on a mere promise of future payment. Bewildered, colonial officials and missionaries in Natal bewailed the "moral decay" thus unleashed. It was displayed in excessive adultery, premarital pregnancies and single parenthood.[196]

Yet, as remarkable as this resilience was among the BaSotho, it soon became obvious that invoking custom to cushion the impact of disaster had become anomalous in the altered social context of the times. For example, even as the strategy of indebtedness was deployed, a missionary observer predicted the outcome:

> What's going to happen? Will the debt ever be paid? The liquidation of this debt will surely take a very long time, long enough to infuriate the girls' father who will go to the courts. The chiefs then shall be over busy with endless recriminations; quarrels will endure forever; there will be divorces, for, in case of non-payment of the fixed sum, the girl's father takes back his daughter with her children.[197]

The quittance of the debt has indeed taken a long time.[198] Litigation became common as bride's fathers and guardians soon dragged their sons-in-law to the courts to claim the quittance of the debt. A study of BaSotho family law has found that "within the sphere of family law, it can be stated without fear of contradiction that bohali claims constitute the

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[196]Natal Departmental Reports, 1898, reports for Nqutu, BB. 16, Escort, BB. 32; J. Stuart, A History of the Zulu Rebellion, 1906 (London, 1913), 92-3; Report of the South African Native Affairs Commission, 1903-5 (Cape Town, 1905), questions 18,448, 18,576, 20,795, 20,805, 21,022, 25,691, 26, 008, 26,011, 26,509, 26,872, 28,098.

[197]Journal des Missions, 1897, 671-2.

[198]Interview with informants.

largest proportion of court cases. Bohali is a never ending source of litigation."[199] This litigiousness, however, was not a product of the rinderpest crisis alone, nor did the crisis trigger it. The BaSotho penchant for litigation, especially the increasing incidence of family law disputes, was a result of their changing economy and the distortions of their social relations. As Chanock has noted, understanding these processes has been easier for historians than for the people they affected. "Both subjectively and objectively", he continues, "people found themselves engaged in conflicts not with economic forces, not just with white colonial government, **but with each other**". (Emphasis in the original):

> The disputes with which colonial courts and village courts found themselves dealing were, in increasing numbers, new conflicts caused by new demands being made of old relationships, or caused by the formation of new relationships which people tried to regulate with concepts and claims appropriate to a passing social formation.[200]

The rinderpest merely accentuated these disputes and this process. It revealed both the remarkable social resilience and the fundamental contradictions that had found their way into the society by the closing decades of the century. When custom was invoked to cushion the greater impact of crisis, it was "no longer at ease" in the altered circumstances of the time.

Some time in 1898, the rinderpest faded from the BaSotho countryside. It never reappeared except when it flared in small pockets of the country in 1901, amid the raging South African War.[201] It also re-infected Bechuanaland, Transvaal and Natal simultaneously. The disease lingered on in the latter province and in South West Africa {Namibia} until 1905. Then the entire southern Africa was cleared of the murrain. Rinderpest has kept on re-emerging in Equatorial Africa, especially in East Africa.[202]

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[199]S. Poulter, Basutho Family Law and Litigation (London, 1978).

[200]Chanock, Law, Custom and Social Order, 12-13, 22.

[201]Sir Frederick Smith, A Veterinary History of the War In South Africa (London, 1919).

[202]C.E. Gray, Rinderpest in East Africa (London, 1917); D. Hutcheon, "Rinderpest in South Africa: A Short Description of its History, General Characteristics and Methods of

The 1896-8 outbreak of rinderpest proved to be a temporary setback. Society did not collapse and recovery was quick. It did not alter the economic, social and political landscape of Basutoland to any significant and enduring degree. It is doubtful if it began any new trends in the history of Basutoland. It certainly did quicken those already in process. The more disruptive villains were the later economic and environmental disasters of the first third of the twentieth century and beyond. They included progressive ecological deterioration,[203] the 1929 depression and the catastrophic drought of 1932-3.

This assessment of the historical significance of the rinderpest, however, holds true only with the advantage of hindsight. The universal and intense attention that the rinderpest received alone identifies the murrain as having been an unprecedented crisis. For many, the end of the world had seemed imminent. This was especially the case as the outbreak of the murrain climaxed two decades of exceptional ecological, economic, political and social upheavals throughout South Africa, even beyond. The demise of the bastion of the society' economy and its social and political stability brought no good to those whose cattle died. It also did little to comfort or secure those whose animals survived but lived in fear of the disease appearing among their herds.

For these reasons, the rinderpest brought to the BaSotho, and everyone around them, an anxious and a distorted perspective on life. Here lies the panzootic's main claim to historical significance. It revealed and compounded contemporary social processes, shedding more light on already familiar historical themes of this period. Through it, we have discerned the concerns of the BaSotho that, though under the surface in "normal" times, came to the forefront under epizootic conditions. We have also illuminated the

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Treatment" (Unpublished Pamphlet, Cape Town, 1902); R.W. Mettam, "A Short History of Rinderpest with special Reference to Africa", The Uganda Journal, 5 (1937), 22-26; also successive issues of the Bulletin of Epizootic Diseases in Africa.

[203]K. Showers and G.M. Malahleha, "Oral Evidence in Historical Environmental Impact Assessment", Journal of Southern African Studies, 18, 2 (1992), 276-96.

nooks and crannies of the society during a fluid and tempestuous period of its history. Like all epidemics, the rinderpest occurred at several social levels. It served as a "natural sampling device, [a] mirror held up to society in which more general patterns of social values and attitudes appear in sharp relief".[204]

Social responses to the challenges posed by the rinderpest have given us valuable information about the texture of BaSotho society amid profound, albeit ambiguous, change. These responses give the most vivid insight into the times. Most striking, certainly, is their ubiquity and simultaneity throughout South Africa. They stamp the period of the late nineteenth century as a truly critical one in South Africa.

An additional methodological value of focusing on the epizootic is the comparative perspective it has offered. The sheer geographical scope of the rinderpest confers upon it the special historical significance of what Ladurie has called "the unification of the globe by disease".[205] This vantage point has enabled us to assess the wider significance of the study for other human communities in South Africa, even beyond. Hopefully, the study has also contributed modestly to the current desire to reintegrate an increasingly fragmented professional community.[206]

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[204]C.E. Rosenberg, "The Definition and Control of Disease: An Introduction", in Social Research, 55, 3 (1988), 327.

[205]Ladurie, "Un Concept: L'Unification Microbienne du Monde", Zeitschrift fur Geschichte (1973).

[206]See among others, B. Bailyn, "The Challenge of Modern Historiography", American Historical Review, lxxxvi (1982), 1-24; C. Degler, "In Pursuit of an American Dream", ibid., xcii (1987), 1-2; L. Versey, " The "New" Social History in the Context of American Historical Writing", Reviews in American History, 7 (1979), 1-12.

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