

Colonial initiatives and African response in the establishment of the dairy industry in the Bechuanaland Protectorate, 1930–1966

Lily Mafela

The dairy industry arose in Bechuanaland primarily as an alternative to beef production in response to South Africa's restrictions on the import of cattle from the Protectorate. African dairy producers were at a disadvantage compared to settler farmers due to the lack of government support for the infrastructure essential for highly perishable dairy produce. The decline of dairy production in the later colonial period can be attributed to the revival of beef exporting, which undercut the Administration's already limited interest. These events can be situated within the broader pattern of colonial underdevelopment.

When Bechuanaland was granted Protectorate status in 1885, it was clearly stated by the British High Commissioner, Sir Hercules Robinson, that Britain had no more interest in the territory than to prevent other foreign powers and filibusters from occupying it, doing as little in the way of administration as possible.¹ This non-committal attitude which Britain adopted towards the Bechuanaland Protectorate prevailed for the whole period of colonial rule in that territory and serves to explain the nature of the economic policies adopted towards the latter up to the granting of independence in 1966. Indeed this attitude is further highlighted by Colcolough and McCarthy's observation that:

At independence Botswana was worse off in terms of both social and directly productive infrastructure than any other ex-British territory in Africa. One consequence of these policies is that in the mid-1960s the per capita income of Botswana was one of the smallest in the world.²

Although Britain's administrative role was limited during the early years of Protectorate rule, the people of Bechuanaland were, however, required to pay for the costs involved in the extension of protection to their country. The imposition of Hut Tax in 1899 was the first of a series of tax levies to be imposed on the Africans in a bid to raise revenue to balance the administrative budget. The effects of these taxes have been widely documented and need not to be gone into much detail here. However, for the purpose of this paper, it is relevant that the colonial government began to levy taxes at an early stage without providing means of paying them.³ In 1919, an additional tax, the Native Tax, was levied on the Africans and throughout the colonial period up to 1965, these taxes made a large contribution to the general revenues of administration. With the introduction of these taxes, Africans began to look at cattle as a marketable commodity. Cattle and cattle products were to play an important role in the export-import commodity exchange in order first to raise the necessary tax levy, and later on as a simple response to capitalism which gained momentum during the twentieth century.

Britain's Colonial policy changed in the twentieth century with her growing need for raw materials and foodstuffs for the imperial market at the same time as offering

outlets for British investment.⁴ This general British Colonial economic policy resulted, subsequently, in a transformation of her dependencies which led to the underdevelopment of the latter. The injection of capitalism into the indigenous agricultural patterns destroyed their self-sufficiency, and thus widened and deepened the scope of commodity circulation.⁵ The Bechuanaland Protectorate was dragged into this pool of market relations in which Africans competed with Europeans on the basis of unfair market relations which rendered the former economically impotent. In the Bechuanaland Protectorate, the Agricultural Department was established in 1935 with a very serious shortage of staff—26 shared between this department and the Veterinary Department. Nearly all staff were engaged in disease control. Worse still, there were no staff training facilities locally and the colonial administration depended on Domboshava near Salisbury in Southern Rhodesia, and Fort Cox in the Ciskei, for the training of its Agricultural demonstrators.⁶

Very little was done during the early years of the Agricultural Department. This was a period of depression and the Colonial government was in difficulties to implement any economic development. However, the establishment of the Colonial Development Fund led to the appointment of the Pim Commission in 1930 and as a result of the Pim Commission's recommendations, the Protectorate government undertook agricultural projects in the various Reserves. African Agricultural shows, Experimental Stations and Demonstration Plot Schemes were duly introduced. However, research in this sector seems to indicate that these efforts by the colonial government were more of a curse than a blessing to the Protectorate.⁷ Instead, the attention of the colonial government was largely geared towards improving the Veterinary department. This department received most attention from the colonial administration for the greater part of colonial rule in the Bechuanaland Protectorate. In fact, this was primarily for the purpose of improving the cattle industry for export, which was considered economically more viable. Cattle exports were actually by far the largest income generator for most of the colonial period and because of this state of affairs, Colclough and McCarthy have observed that:

Cattle and cattle exports were the basis of both the settler and Tswana economies and a large part of the administration's domestic revenues was contingent upon the exports of cattle being maintained. Thus, the colonial government had a major incentive to reduce the incidence of cattle diseases in the Protectorate and this became the prime concern of the Veterinary department's activities.⁸

The Veterinary Department's efforts were largely geared towards improvement of cattle for export. As a result, an appreciable amount of work was carried out in this department so that by the late 1950s, veterinary cordon fences and quarantine camps had been set up in the larger part of the Protectorate. Most of the department's efforts and funds were directed towards disease fighting.⁹ Both Europeans and Africans were engaged in cattle export. Europeans bought and utilised better breeds towards this end. This was true in the case of European ranching schemes in the Maun area, and the white colonists' settlements in the Tuli Block, the Ghanzi and Lobatse Farms, where a range of imported animals comprising Sussex, Hereford, Aberdeen Angus, Shorthorn and Devon were utilised.¹⁰

On the African side, utilisation of imported breeds was so minimal as to be insignificant, because these animals needed special care, and the African population did not have sufficient knowledge and means of providing this; nor did the colonial administration have enough manpower to go around teaching about this.¹¹

Nevertheless the cattle industry survived as the major source for earning income, and markets for Bechuanaland Protectorate cattle existed in Southern Rhodesia, the Belgian Congo, and the Union of South Africa, the latter being the largest. The table below illustrates the number of cattle exported from the Bechuanaland Protectorate to the neighbouring markets from 1938 to 1948:

Table I

| <i>Year</i> | <i>number of cattle exported</i> |
|-------------|----------------------------------|
| 1938 | 21,510 |
| 1939 | 24,461 |
| 1940 | 33,928 |
| 1941 | 31,108 |
| 1942 | 43,933 |
| 1943 | 42,931 |
| 1944 | 35,157 |
| 1945 | 45,024 |
| 1946 | 46,994 |
| 1947 | 53,983 |
| 1948 | 42,403 |

Source: BNA V.1/5/2: Cattle Exports from Bechuanaland Protectorate to the neighbouring markets, 1938-1948.¹²

The occasional decline in cattle exports was due to the occurrences of drought and foot-and-mouth disease. The European farmers generally sold cattle independently to Johannesburg. Some of the African cattle-wners did the same, but for the greater part, the African sold his cattle in small parcels to the European trading concerns and to European farmers, well as to European traders, cattle speculators and farmers, and finally at stock sales which operated regularly in the southern part of the Protectorate. In 1924, the Bechuanaland Protectorate's largest cattle buyer, the Union of South Africa, imposed a weight embargo on the former's live cattle exports. This move was intensified in 1926. With cattle exports playing an important role in the colonial Bechuanaland economy, the Protectorate government felt obliged to do something about it, as the Chief Agricultural Officer, Russell England, said of dairying in 1932: "With the partial collapse of the beef market, [dairying provided] an alternative means of utilising cattle economically".¹³

The establishment of the dairy industry can thus be seen as some kind of a belated effort on the part of the colonial government to develop this sector of animal husbandry. The dairy industry was established in the early 1930s, basically as an alternative source of income in the face of the Union's closure of its cattle market to the Bechuanaland Protectorate. In 1933, Sir Alan Pim mentioned in his report on the economic position of Bechuanaland that dairying in some form or another appeared to be an economic necessity to the Protectorate.¹⁴ However, the dairy industry did not receive as much attention as was necessary to maintain its viability, especially among the African population mostly because of staff shortage, notwithstanding competition with the cattle industry. The dairy division was developed under a dairy expert and one assistant along with a number of dairy instructors, who, unfortunately, were not enough to warrant regular consultory visits. In the Northern section of the Protectorate, covering the Bamangwato and Tati Reserves, there were ten dairy instructors and two

learner dairy instructors. Furthermore, transport constraints were a major restraint on the circulation of these dairy instructors. The colonial government's pre-occupation with improvement of cattle for export led to neglect of other sectors of the economy.

A contributory factor to lack of colonial government interest in developing dairying may have been the nature of the latter industry, which is both expensive and capital-intensive as compared to cattle-raising for export. Ecologically, Botswana is not good for dairying and is thus very unproductive in terms of yield per beast. Dairying requires clean water and environment and is only viable for about four months a year because of seasonal effect on milk production. These factors, together with the colonial government's preference for the cattle industry for export reasons, had their toll on the development of the dairy industry in colonial Botswana. The second-hand treatment shown to some departments led to their failure to serve the purposes for which they were created. However, in spite of the neglect shown towards the dairy industry, developments were enough to bring about socio-economic distortion in the Protectorate and reduce the Protectorate to dependency through the export-import colonial economy. Like western capitalism elsewhere, it oriented the indigenous agricultural societies towards the production of a marketable commodity, linking their economic fate with the vagaries of the world market and connecting it with the fever curve of international price movements.¹⁵

In the 1930s in most of the British colonies, there was general overproduction of agricultural products. Thus the British government was not very keen to encourage development in arable agriculture. However, as with British colonial economic policy elsewhere, in Bechuanaland Britain still needed to maintain foodstuffs and raw materials for the home market, and in the process the colonial authorities paid little attention towards improving the lives of Africans in the Protectorate. The railway line which had been established since 1897 was instrumental in sucking capital from the peripheries to the South African sub-metropole and then to the metropole. Thus, British administration in the dependencies linked the metropolis to the colony. In the Bechuanaland case, the import-export system duly led to the latter's underdevelopment thus justifying Gunder-Frank's argument that the regions which are the most underdeveloped are the ones which had the closest ties to the metropolis in the past.¹⁶ This is what happened in Bechuanaland, through the operation of the dairy industry. The dairy industry in Bechuanaland had been established, like the arable Agriculture department, along the lines of a "dual policy", the essence of which was to subordinate the African economy to white colonists' enterprise. A similar policy which was implemented in Kenya is analysed by E. A. Brett in that context when he indicates that:

Metropolitan policy towards Kenya was fraught with contradictions from the outset, for instance, it encouraged two forms of agricultural production, peasant households and estates, which competed directly with each other.¹⁷

In the Bechuanaland Protectorate, the contradictions of this dual policy can best be analysed through examination of the dairying systems which were practised in the Protectorate from the late 1920s up to independence. This paper shall attempt to define the various dairying systems and make an analysis of which of these dairying systems was most popular among the Africans and why. The first dairying practice involved European practice or "dairy ranching". This was extensively practised in the Tuli block, the Lobatse and Gaborone blocks, and Ghanzi farms. This practice was even

more pronounced in the Lobatse blocks where the Boer settlers had arrived as early as 1904. Lobatse's proximity to both the South African market and the railway line gave these settlers, in particular, more advantage in marketing their products. According to P. T. Mgadla, in his work on the history and development of the town of Lobatse, dairying supplemented the abattoir, and this was even more so in the 1940s when the abattoir was closed;

In the 1940s, however, when the abattoir closed to slaughtering, dairying in Lobatse provided relief to the areas of African and European stockowners.¹⁸

The abattoir had started as a cheese and butter exporting dairy to Mafeking Creamery and to Durban.¹⁹ The dairy was, however, closed down in 1933 because of foot and mouth disease,²⁰ and in 1934, the Imperial Cold Storage Company received permission to erect an abattoir in Lobatse. On the one hand, Ghanzi farmers sent their milk to Gobabis Creamery and marketed the products through the South West African Dairy Industry Control Board to that country. On the other hand, the Tuli block farmers had, in the late 1920s, managed to get the colonial government to build a road along which they transported their dairy products to Debeeti (Dibete) railway station, then to Lobatse Creamery.²¹ In other parts of the Protectorate, as in the Bamangwato Reserve, Europeans established a chain of milk-buying cream depots. Thus the white colonists depended on African milk suppliers for their cream production.

During the 1934-5 season, Leonard Tarr started a chain of milk-buying cream depots in the Mahalapye-Palapye area. He did not own a ranch but depended on the African milk suppliers for milk and, in some cases, for cream. Essentially, this system worked in two ways. Mr. Tarr either bought cream from the suppliers, for whom he acted as middleman, or bought fresh milk, separated and exported it as his own, then paid the milk suppliers accordingly.²² The colonial authorities supported these activities by white colonists because they were a means of marketing a good grade of product to the Creamery and, at the same time, helped the "natives" financially.²³ This system of dairying was also followed by other white settlers like Schur in the Mmadinare-Bobonong area, Hassen in the Serowe area, and Hoare in both the Tsheshebe and Mmadinare-Bobonong areas.²⁴ These settlers were basically the sole owners of the milk-buying cream depots. For example, Leonard Tarr owned in all 32 milk-buying cream depots in the Mahalapye-Palapye area and constructed a road from Sefhare to Mahalapye to link his depots to railhead; while by the end of 1935, Hoare had established over 70 milk-buying depots in the Bamangwato Reserve and Tati area. Hoare served an area of 5,000 square miles. Over a thousand Africans supplied milk to his depots and in the process, abandoned their own premises.²⁵ This was a symptom of colonial government policy of encouraging European economic domination of African enterprise. Africans were discouraged from owning private dairies because "it was inadvisable to encourage the production of cream in individual dairies as apart from the capital outlay, the product was invariably of low quality".²⁶ Dr. Thornton, the Director of African Agriculture, went on to say in his report on dairying in 1938, that:

The chief factor of low grade cream at these native dairies is the small number of stock being milked. An insufficient quantity of cream is produced to warrant its being regularly exported to the creamery. In many cases, the cream is held for ten days to enable the can to be filled.²⁷

In most cases, African-produced cream ranked half a grade lower than European produced cream because the determining factor between a high grade and lower grade product was the amount of time cream spent in a depot before transportation to the creamery. In 1933, in his report, Pim noted that owing to the limits imposed by transport considerations, production was confined to the railway strip and did not extend beyond 30 miles on either side of the railway line.²⁸ Dairy products are also very perishable and require a close market. Thus, because of transportation problems, Africans either sold their milk to, and placed themselves at the mercy of, the European middleman, or risked the possibility of selling a low-grade product. In either case, the African lost in one way or another as Margery Perham observed in 1933 in her assessment of the economic conditions of the Africans of Bechuanaland Protectorate that:

their production is mostly of low grade; their internal communications are scanty; markets and ports are far away; and they are embedded among countries which compete with the same products and control the lines and conditions of export.²⁹

Thus, if anything, dairying did not seem to improve the economic conditions of the Africans in the Protectorate. The policy of the colonial authorities to subordinate African economy to European enterprise by promoting European dairying activities at the expense of African ones is highlighted by the fact that the administration did not do much in improving the transport infrastructure, or in providing any form of transport to alleviate the problems faced by Africans in the dairying enterprise. This then serves to explain why the European system of dairying continued. Africans travelled long distances on foot to take milk to the depots.³⁰ To the small stockowner, this system held more disadvantages than advantages. Many of them, by the time their cheques reached them, could only manage to pay the poll tax or the Tati Company levy for those living in the Tati Reserve.³¹ Thus, in most cases, hardly any investment could be made from milk returns. However, the big cattle owners, who in some cases ran their own dairies, did achieve substantial capital returns in a good year. For example, some of the big cattle owners who milked 200 cows a month could make up to £80 a month in cream returns.³² This, however, depended on climatic conditions, and returns could drop to as little as £30 to £25 a month. This second system of dairying was less popular because it only appealed to the big cattle owners. However, it gradually became less popular still, due to the colonial government's tendency to discourage it, so that some of the big cattle owners also supplied to the milk-buying depots and later on to the co-operative dairies.

Another system which also became less popular was that of African creameries used by owners and others. In this system the dairy owner allowed neighbours to use his equipment. Each producer's milk was held separately and there was nothing really co-operative in the dealings. This was gradually also displaced by the European-run milk-buying cream depots.

The development of the dairy industry came under attack by the Veterinary and Medical departments in the middle to the late 1930s. Correspondence between veterinary officials and the colonial government indicates that there was a strong feeling among the veterinary officials that the dairy industry was being developed to the detriment of the health of Africans, as the Acting Resident Commissioner said in his letter to the Government Secretary in 1935:

It is considered by the Principal Medical Officer that the absence of the normal milk consumption by natives is a cause of illness, more especially in children, and is one of the contributing causes of scurvy.³³

The magistrates were duly instructed to warn chiefs to ensure that a sufficient supply of milk be retained to enable children to get normal requirements. The argument brought forward by the Veterinary department was that instead of placing too much emphasis on dairying, the population should have been taught how to rear calves and practise proper methods, then dairying could have been introduced gradually. The described the existing dairying practice as "speculation in its worst form" for quick cash returns and long-term detriment to the cattle industry. This accusation has been strongly denied by African dairy suppliers, as well as one of the European milk buyers interviewed, Mr. Tarr, who pointed out that Africans only milked once a day and so there was enough milk for the children in the evening.³⁴ In spite of these campaigns waged by the Veterinary and Medical departments, the colonial government insisted on continuing with dairy operations, because the cattle industry was still disabled by the South African weight embargo. The tables below show the development of cream production in Bechuanaland from 1936 to 1940.

Table II

European cream production development

| <i>GRADE</i> | <i>1936</i> | <i>1937</i> | <i>1938</i> | <i>1939</i> | <i>1940</i> |
|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | <i>lbs</i> | <i>lbs</i> | <i>lbs</i> | <i>lbs</i> | <i>lbs</i> |
| First | 137,446 | 155,555 | 166,967 | 177,252 | 142,417 |
| Second | 28,640 | 30,873 | 58,659 | 51,074 | 55,214 |
| Third | 5,366 | 8,589 | 6,852 | 12,659 | 47,635 |
| Below | — | — | 9 | — | 1,763 |
| TOTAL | 171,452 | 195,017 | 232,487 | 240,985 | 247,029 |

Source: S 452/1 – Dairy Industry of Bechuanaland Protectorate: Confidential Reports on, 1940.³⁵

Table III

African cream production development

| <i>GRADE</i> | <i>1936</i> | <i>1937</i> | <i>1938</i> | <i>1939</i> | <i>1940</i> |
|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | <i>lbs</i> | <i>lbs</i> | <i>lbs</i> | <i>lbs</i> | <i>lbs</i> |
| First | 5,748 | 25,717 | 15,607 | 14,198 | 12,078 |
| Second | 4,100 | 16,121 | 17,639 | 25,786 | 30,530 |
| Third | 2,829 | 14,071 | 15,894 | 26,536 | 37,263 |
| Below | 2,175 | 346 | 898 | — | 9,439 |
| TOTAL | 14,852 | 36,255 | 50,038 | 66,520 | 89,310 |

Source: S 452/1 – Dairy Industry of Bechuanaland Protectorate: Confidential Reports on, 1940.³⁶

The tables for both European and African Cream Production Development show a gradual increase in cream production from 1936 to 1939, but in 1940 there is a noticeable decline. This can be accounted for by the fact that when the Tati Creamery assumed operations in January 1940, during the first two weeks the quantity of supplies of cream to the factory were insufficient for churning in the separate grades, so the cream was sent to Mafeking Creamery for churning.³⁷ In the early 1940s, the colonial administration embarked on a programme to modify the existing system of dairying "because there were not many Europeans engaged in the system of milk-buying cream depots, so that it became necessary to fall back on another system of dairying".³⁸ Archival sources seem to indicate that this was indeed the case because in 1941, out of the 160 European farm dairies, three were de-registered at the request of the owners concerned because they preferred to concentrate on beef production.³⁹ The new system of dairying was that of co-operative dairying. The move to implement this system should be analysed from the broader perspective of British war-policy at the time. Britain's war policy necessitated the systematic adjustment of colonial policy in the Protectorate, as stated by the High Commissioner in 1940:

The present policy of maintaining the production of foodstuffs and raw materials at the highest possible level should be continued and intensified. The object of this is to produce, if possible, a surplus which would enable us to send to the United Kingdom such things as are wanted there.⁴⁰

The dairy department promptly established co-operative dairies in the Francistown-Matsiloje area in order to increase the production of milk and dairy products to contribute towards the war effort. Wartime colonial policy was similar in most British dependencies in Africa. In Kenya, indigenous agriculture was developed under the auspices of the Swynnerton Plan.⁴¹ In the arable section of agriculture in Bechuanaland Protectorate, increased production was effected through the utilisation of the "war lands", which are discussed at length elsewhere.⁴² The first co-operative dairy was established in the Matsiloje area, outside Matsiloje Village, under the name of Matsiloje Co-operative Dairy. This was followed by the establishment, in the same area, of the Moroka Co-operative Dairy and Morotlole Co-operative Dairy.⁴³ Another co-operative dairy was established in Senyawe in the Bokalaka area. Co-operative membership was free and was only determined by one's capacity to supply milk, which in some cases was as little as one gallon.⁴⁴ The authorities envisaged that the advantage of this system was that:

If the natives were encouraged to co-operate, cream could be sent away regularly and this would be a marked improvement on the old method of individual native dairies.⁴⁵

During the early 1940s, an arrangement was made with Bulawayo creameries to open a pasteurising plant at Francistown, which came into operation under the auspices of Tati Creamery. The Co-operatives evidently benefited from the opening of this creamery. Milking was done, to a large extent, twice daily, in the morning and in the evening. The choice, however, was made by the individuals themselves, as to the frequency of their supplies. The dairies had a cooling system in which cream was kept until it was ready for transportation to Tati Creamery.⁴⁶ Tati Creamery served the Bamangwato Reserve and the Tati area. Milk suppliers to Matsiloje and Moroka dairies came from as far as Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), and many of these milked as many as 60-100 cows a day.⁴⁷ Oral evidence, which is backed by archival sources, indicates that no

exotic breeds were used for dairying purposes in co-operative concerns.⁴⁸ Oral sources maintain that their cattle produced high cream content milk, but unfortunately statistics on the cream content of the milk of Tswana cattle, as well as exotic breeds, are not readily available. However, Tswana-type cattle may have been preferred because they are less vulnerable to disease and endure drought more easily than exotic breeds.

When the co-operative dairies started operation, separating machines were lent to them by the government, and after a while, the co-operatives could purchase the machines through the co-operative committee members who each produced approximately 25–35 gallons of milk a day.⁴⁹ The factor perhaps serves to explain the higher milk yields realised by the smaller number of suppliers to these depots. There were not many suppliers, but the few who did, supplied a high yield of milk. The table below shows the summary of milk-purchases of the proprietary milk-buying cream depots and the three co-operative concerns.

Table IV

| <i>Owner of depot</i> | <i>no. of suppliers</i> | <i>gallons purchased</i> | <i>paid out (£-s-d)</i> |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| L. R. Tarr | 765 | 44,410 | 718-07-11 |
| L. Schur | 512 | 123,000 | 1708-17-1 |
| A.D. Clark | 118 | 33,935 | 559-00-10 |
| L.C. Sharp | 152 | 18,500 | 305-16-6 |
| A. Hassen | 60 | 7,259 | 113-08-5 |
| Matsiloje Co-op Dairy | 40 | 19,042 | 297-10-1 |
| Senyawo Co-op Dairy | 16 | 1,935 | 57-06-7 |
| Moroka Co-op Dairy | 18 | 4,410 | 74-07-0 |
| TOTALS | 1681 | 252,491 | 3834-14-5 |

Source: BNA S.451/1/1, Summary of Milk Purchases of the Proprietary milk-buying depots and the three Co-operative concerns; 1942.⁵⁰

The above table seems to indicate that co-operative dairying was a more viable economic project than individual dairying. Perhaps the fact that these co-operative concerns improved the income of a few at the expense of the majority of the suppliers indicates that this system contributed to the birth of a petty-bourgeois class and also promoted the existing undesirable social and economic inequalities, thus bearing testimony to Molebatsi's assertion that:

As long as the dairy industry was geared towards alleviating the lives of a handful of people at the expense of the majority, promotion of economic inequalities was bound to occur.⁵¹

However, despite the seemingly beneficial nature of dairying which the statistical tables above seem to imply, it could never bring the African producer onto an equal footing with his European counterpart, because the bourgeoisie of an underdeveloped country is a bourgeoisie in spirit only.⁵² In the Bechuanaland Protectorate, just as in other British colonies elsewhere, African economic enterprise only served to complement, and never competed with, its European counterpart. Thus, this class of people did not constitute a bourgeoisie in the true sense of the word. Even in the market and trade relations, Africans were never consulted as, for example, when Tati

Creamery was opened, in spite of the fact the its further operation depended on the continued operation of the milk-buying cream depots which were in essence maintained by African milk suppliers. The European settlers thus held paramount importance in Bechuanaland Protectorate as in the British dependencies elsewhere. As Wuschoff argues:

The strongest influence upon the colonial policy of any dependent area [resulted] from the presence of Europeans, particularly from those Europeans who settle in the dependencies.⁵³

Whether consciously or not, the British colonial economic policy in Bechuanaland Protectorate highlighted the interests of the white colonist settlers at the expense of those of the Africans. Thus, in general British colonial economic policy, African interests were often subordinated to European enterprise, and, lacking self-sufficiency, African economies were subjected to the economic needs of the metropolitan area. In Bechuanaland, the organisation of dairy exports was in white colonists' hands. Throughout their dairying days, most Africans supplied milk to European dairies, and in this way white colonists reaped most of the profit.

In the 1940s, the weight restrictions on Bechuanaland cattle were lifted and the cattle export industry was once more launched. In the 1955-56 season, Tarr decided to close down his dairies because of drought and the consequent shortage of milk. However, he continued to rent out these dairies to Africans who paid him 10% of the total sales.⁵⁴ In the Mmadinare-Bobonong area, Schur also quit dairying during this period because of his interests elsewhere.⁵⁵ Thus, the Tati Creamery ran the risk of closing down if it failed to raise enough milk to maintain itself. In 1957 the export of Lobatse cream to the Union was blocked by a 4d. per pound butterfat levy imposed for the purpose of protecting the Tati Creamery, which offered the only market for daily products apart from the Union of South Africa.⁵⁶ From as early as 1940, Southern Rhodesia had started paying higher prices than those obtained in the Protectorate from cream exports and subsequently the Protectorate government decided to impose an embargo to stop the sale of cream to Southern Rhodesia because, as the Resident Commissioner argued in 1940:

there was a legitimate basis for the argument that the imposition of the suggested embargo was part of Protectorate war effort, to assist the United Kingdom.⁵⁷

The policies which were adopted by the colonial administration to meet the war exigencies greatly underdeveloped African agriculture and consolidated the existing socio-economic imbalances in Bechuanaland Protectorate.⁵⁸ For example, a War Fund was created to which every taxpayer was required to contribute a levy of 2/6d. There was also in operation a War Supplies Directorate which made purchases on behalf of the South African government, as well as for the United Kingdom. In this manner, South Africa was used as an instrument to suck capital of economic surplus out of its own satellite and to channel part of this to the world metropole. This is generally how the South African sub-metropole was instrumental in the development of underdevelopment of Bechuanaland Protectorate by connecting it to the system of exploitation associated with the metropole. Although on the surface, dairying, like some other departments, seemed to be economically viable, the impact of these schemes on the African's standard of living was negative when hut tax, poll tax, war levy and feudal dues that they paid were considered. These frequently absorbed a

sizeable portion of the peasant's meagre surplus product. The unfavourable terms of trade, as well, under which the peasant and capitalist farmers were forced to operate, also took their toll on their disposable income.⁵⁹ As the District Commissioner at Serowe enquired in July 1941:

Has it not been found in other districts that there is a danger of inflicting real hardship on the most indigent class of tax payers? The collection of 2/6d., in addition to tax and tribal levy from the owner of the beast and a few head of small stock, often entails deprivation of the little he does possess and is likely to pauperise him completely.⁶⁰

British war policy and post-war policy together had a negative impact on peasant production. The economic endeavours implemented during the 1940s and 1950s were not self-perpetuating and declined once they were left to their own devices. Dairying in Bechuanaland Protectorate began to decline in the late 1950s when many white colonists left the business.⁶¹ When Leonard Tarr closed down his dairying concerns in 1955–6, a dairy was opened at Mahalapye to cater for the Africans who were still milking for commercial purposes.⁶² The centre was managed by an African foreman who was trained by the Agriculture department and the centre was inspected periodically. This period coincided with the opening of the hospital in the town and therefore there was a need to supply it with fresh milk.⁶³ Since the hospital catered mainly for Europeans, this may have been the reason for government effort to ensure a regular and clean supply of milk to the hospital. African vendors were required to take their milk to a central depot for inspection, filtering and bottling under supervised sanitary conditions.

The three co-operative concerns in the Matsiloje area also began to lose momentum during this period. By the early 1960s, because of drought and subsequent low milk production, the Matsiloje dairy was closed down in 1964, followed by the Moroka dairy in 1966–7. Some of the Africans bought milk separators and practised dairying privately, but this was undermined by lack of co-operation from the colonial government, mostly because the latter switched its interest once more to cattle export. The export of cattle once more gained momentum with the official opening of Lobatse Abattoir in 1954. Dairying once more lost importance to the cattle industry as clearly revealed in correspondence between the colonial authorities. In May 1955, the Director of Veterinary Services asserted that:

I am extremely alarmed to hear that the practice of milking cows is now spread far and wide throughout the Northern territory, since the country is losing through this practice. There is no need for me to point out that there is, throughout Africa, a general shortage of meat, and since Bechuanaland is probably the only country with a surplus for export, we should foster the beef trade to the exclusion of the cream trade.⁶⁴

With these words, the fate of the dairy industry was sealed. The Veterinary and Medical departments' campaigns against the continuation of dairying on the grounds that it was responsible for malnutrition and stunted growth also had an effect in drawing away colonial government interest from this sector to cattle export. The Lobatse Abattoir was duly opened in 1954 as a Colonial Development Corporation enterprise. It began operation as the sole exporter of carcasses, and by 1960, its exports represented 80–90% of the total export of cattle. It is probable that, during this period, white settler enterprise shifted to breeding for beef export; hence their diminished interest in dairying. Archival information is quite scanty on dairying in the early 1960s.

However, it should be noted that during the period just before independence, in 1957-58, and in the early 1960s, there occurred a serious drought in which Bechuanaland Protectorate lost about one-third of its cattle population.⁶⁵ This tallies with the dates of the closure of the co-operative dairies. According to some small stock owners, they pulled out when the large stock owners did so. There was not enough milk brought to the dairies to warrant their continued operation, and not enough cream to enable Tati Creamery to maintain itself. The dairy in Lobatse, on the other hand, gave way to the abattoir.

Conclusion

Through the operation of the dairy industry, British colonial policy in Bechuanaland Protectorate led to the maintenance and, in some cases, the consolidation of the existing socio-economic imbalances. To a large extent, the large stock owners benefited more than the small stock owners. Dairying appears to have served to improve the lives of a handful of people, thus bearing testimony to Baran's contention that:

Where an increase in the aggregate national product of an underdeveloped country took place, the existing distribution of income prevented this increment from raising the standard of living of the broad masses of the population.⁶⁶

The extent to which this economic advancement was worthwhile is questionable. The burdens placed upon the African population as a whole in the form of tax levies, and the unfair trade relations in which the settlers dominated the export-import system, did not facilitate economic growth of this advantaged class. The indigenous petty-bourgeoisie which managed to arise in the peripheral areas was not strong enough to bring about the transformation of their particular societies into an expanding capitalist economy.⁶⁷ The African petty-bourgeoisie in Bechuanaland Protectorate were always subordinate to white settlers in the dairying business. The white settlers, through their role as middlemen, and the role of the colonial government in encouraging settler-owned milk-buying cream depots highlighted this economic imbalance. On the other hand, British colonial war policy was another factor which rendered dairying somewhat destructive to the economic growth of Bechuanaland Protectorate. Admittedly, there was a noticeable improvement in the production of butter and cream, but this was promptly lapped up by contribution to the war effort. In the dairying business, increased production was effected through the system of co-operative dairies implemented during the same period to contribute to the war effort, as the High Commissioner commented in 1940:

This country is an agricultural country producing milk and butter, pigs, poultry and eggs, sheep, corn and, to a lesser degree, maize, beans and other crops. It is the duty of the country to do all it can to reinforce production.⁶⁸

These new schemes, which were implemented by the colonial administration during this period, should not be viewed in isolation but within the broader context of compliance with both the British war policy and post-war policy of this period. The changing role of Britain in the world economy after 1945 led to a fundamental reorganisation of the home country which was followed by an adjustment in colonial policy.⁶⁹ In the same manner, Bechuanaland economic policy was reorganised in

keeping with the needs of the home markets from the outbreak of the Second World War until independence.

The dairy industry was also treated as secondary by the colonial administration, and thus hindered from bringing about viable economic growth to all Africans in the Protectorate. The operation of this sector of the economy was too taxing and expensive to the colonial administration because of its capital-intensive nature as well as its unproductiveness in terms of yield per beast. Thus, the operation of the dairy industry was determined by the whims of the cattle industry. The dairy industry was therefore established in response to the weight restrictions imposed by the Union of South Africa, and promptly lost its vigour once the weight restrictions were removed. The Veterinary and Medical departments expressed the danger of combining dairying and cattle raising for export. They pointed out that commercial dairying led to stunted growth and so poor beef. Thus, the cattle export industry was to be developed at the exclusion of the dairy industry. The opening of the Lobatse Abattoir in 1954 equally contributed to the renewed attention given to the cattle export industry at the expense of the dairy industry. The colonial Administration turned its attention to the cattle export industry in the 1950s and the 1960s, and when the drought set in the early 1960s, the fate of the dairy industry was sealed.

In the final analysis, it can be argued that, economically, the impact of the dairy industry on the Africans was quite negligible in that it did not change the lives of the broader masses of the population. It was introduced as a substitute to the cattle export industry and remained that way from its establishment in the early 1930s until around independence in 1966. Its benefits, which were few and far between, tended only towards improving the lives of a few at the expense of the majority of the population. It was also encouraged in some parts of the Protectorate while others were completely neglected.

Notes

Lily Mafela is a member of the University of Botswana Faculty of Education This essay, supervised by Elliot Makambe, was completed in 1982.

¹ Sir. Hercules Robinson to Colonel F.A. Stanley, M.P., February 1885, C.4275, *British Parliamentary Papers*.

² G. Colcolough and S. McCarthy, *The Political Economy of Botswana: A Study of Growth and Distribution* (London: Oxford University Press, 1980) p.27

³ Colcolough and McCarthy, *The Political Economy of Botswana*, p. 19

⁴ E.A. Brett, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment in East Africa: The Politics of Economic Change, 1919 – 1939*, (London: Heinemann, 1973), p.5

⁵ P.A. Baran, *The Political Economy of Growth*, (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 275

⁶ BNA S298/4/3, Resident Commissioner to Chief Agricultural Officer, Produce of Bechuanaland Protectorate Efforts to increase Native Production, 4 April 1944.

⁷ P. Molutsi "The Historical Roots of Agricultural Underdevelopment in Kgatlang (1930-1970)" (unpublished research essay, UBS, 1980)

⁸ Colcolough and McCarthy, *The Political Economy of Botswana*, p.20

⁹ *Ibid.* p.25

¹⁰ C. Morse, *Basutoland, Bechuanaland Protectorate and Swaziland: Report of an Economic Survey Mission*, (London, HMSO, 1960), p. 105

¹¹ Interview with Mr. Rhyne Kemsley, Dairy Officer, Mahalapye, 15 Dec. 1981.

¹² BNA V. 1/5/2, Cattle Exports from Bechuanaland Protectorate to the neighbouring markets, 1938-1948.

- ¹³ BNA S130/3 Report on the dairy Industry of Bechuanaland Protectorate by the Chief Agricultural Officer, Russel England, 1932
- ¹⁴ A. Pim, *Financial and Economic Position of the Bechuanaland Protectorate: Report of the Commission appointed by the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs*; (London, HMSO, 1933), p. 131.
- ¹⁵ P.A. Baran, "On the Political Economy of Backwardness," in C.K. Wilber (ed.), *The Political Economy of Development and Underdevelopment*, (New York: Random House, 2nd ed., 1979), p.91
- ¹⁶ J.D. Cockcraft, A.G. Franks and D.L. Johnson, *Dependence and Underdevelopment: Latin America's Political Economy*, (New York: Douldeday and Co. Inc., 1972), p.13.
- ¹⁷ Brett, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment in East Africa*, pp 6–7.
- ¹⁸ P.T. Mgadla, "The History of the town and Area of Lobatse from Pre-Colonial Times to 1945" (unpublished research essay, UBLS, 1978) p.25
- ¹⁹ BNA S40/10, High Commissioner to Resident Commissioner Mafeking, Lobatse Cooperative Dairy, 31 January 1910
- ²⁰ BNA S242/, Manager of South African Industrial Ltd. to the Acting Resident Commissioner Mafeking, 13 Cold Storage: Lobatse 1933, 20 June 1935
- ²¹ BNA S125/1 Notes on Tshekedi Khama's interview with the High Commissior, 21 Jan 1929.
- ²² Mahalapye interview 4, Leonard Tarr, businessman, 72 years, 16 Dec 1981.
- ²³ BNA S218/8 Agriculture and Dairy Industry Reports of Dr. Thornton Director of Native Agriculture, 1931.
- ²⁴ Schur operated the late Hoare's depots in the Mmadinare-Bobonong area.
- ²⁵ BNA S218/8
- ²⁶ BNA S218/8
- ²⁷ BNA S218/8
- ²⁸ Pim, *Financial and Economic Position of Bechuanaland Protectorate* p 147
- ²⁹ M. Perham, *Colonial Sequence 1930 – 1949: A chronological Commentary on British Colonial Policy in Africa* (London: Methuen 1967) p.77.
- ³⁰ Matsiloje interviews 6, Lucy Mosinyi, totem: Kwena, ward: Fokeng, occupation: peasant, 62 years 4 Jan 1982; Mahalapye interviews 5, Patiko Gareanne Matlhwane, totem: Phuti, ward: Thosa II, occupation: Housewife, 49 years, 17 Dec 1981
- ³¹ Matsiloje interviews 7, Esau Sebitlo, totem: Tshwene, ward: Moroka occupation: peasant 80 years, 4 Jan 1982
- Matsiloje interviews 8, Jacob Mompoti, totem: Nonyane, ward: Mompoti, regiment: Maphutha, occupation: farmer , 85 years 5 Jan 1982
- ³² BNA S45/1/1, Report on the Dairy Industry of the B.P. by C.A. Challis, Assistant Dairy Expert, 1936-57, 1957.
- ³³ BNA S428/3 Cream Industry: Native Danger of Developing at the Detriment of Native health, from Acting Resident Commissioner to Government Secretary, 1942.
- ³⁴ mahalapye interviews 4, Leonard Tarr.
- ³⁵ BNA S452/1 Dairy Industry of Bechuanaland Protectorate, Confidential Reports on 1940.
- ³⁶ BNA S452/1
- ³⁷ BNA S452/1
- ³⁸ BNA S452/1
- ³⁹ BNA S452/1
- ⁴⁰ BNA S298/4/1, Produce of Bechuanaland Protectorate Efforts to Increase Production, 1944.
- ⁴¹ . Brett, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment in East Africa*, p.10
- ⁴² Ennie Naani Molobe (1982) "The role of the Department of Agriculture in the promotion of arable farming in Botswana, 1935-1981" (unpublished research essay, UBS,1982)
- ⁴³ Matsiloje interviews 13, Mapenyana Mahupela, totem: Kwena, ward: Moroka, regiment: Makgasa
Occupation: Farmer, 74 years, 31 Dec 1982.

- ⁴⁴ Matsiloje interviews 5, Peter Keletso Machola totem-kgama, ward-Tiingwane, Occupation: peasant, 68 years; 7 Jan 1982.
- ⁴⁵ BNA S418/1/1-2 Cooperative Dairying, African Creameries, (Milk-buying Depots), 1943-8, 1948-60.
- ⁴⁶ BNA S418/1/1-2
- ⁴⁷ Matsiloje interviews 1, Ruth Keletsi, totem: Tshwene, ward: Fokeng, occupation: peasant, 59 years, 27 Dec 1981
- ⁴⁸ Matsiloje interviews 5, Peter Keletso Machola
- ⁴⁹ Matsiloje interviews 9, Lisi Nkaneyabo, totem: Kolobe, ward: Marukikung Occupation: peasant 6 years 4 Jan 1982.
- ⁵⁰ BNA S451/1/, Summary of Milk-Purchases of the Proprietary milk-buying depots and the three cooperative concerns.
- ⁵¹ C.O. Molebatsi, "Agricultural Transformation and the Rise of the Kulak farmers in Kweneng 1939-1966", (unpublished research essay, UBS, 1981), p.14
- ⁵² F. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, (Middlessex, Penguin, 1967), p. 143
- ⁵³ H.A. Wuschoff, *Colonial Policies in Africa* (Westport: Negro Universities Press, 1944), p.39
- ⁵⁴ Mahalapye interviews 4, Leonard Tarr
- ⁵⁵ BNA S451/1/1 Report on the Dairy Industry of the B.P. by C.A. Challis, Assistant Dairy Export, 1937-57, 1957.
- ⁵⁶ BNA S66/5/1-2 Winter Butterfat Production Subsidy, 1939-45
- ⁵⁷ BNA S66/5/1-2
- ⁵⁸ H.H.K. Bhila, "The Impact of Imperialism and Colonialism upon Patterns of Subsistence: The Experience in Botswana since the Second World" (United Nations Conference on Food and Imperialism in East and Imperialism in East and Southern Africa, 2-5 June 1981 Nairobi) p.1
- ⁵⁹ Bhila, "The Impact of Imperialism and Colonialism upon patterns of Subsistence."
- ⁶⁰ BNA S309/2/2/2Resident Commissioner Circular Memorandum to all District Commissioners, Head of Departments, Chiefs, Native Treasurers, 15 July 1941, tax, War levy imposed 1941
- ⁶¹ Mahalapye interviews 2, Bonkamile Kwape, totem: Tshwene, ward: Thosa II regiment: Malekanwa occupation: milk filterer, 58 years 6/12/81
- ⁶² Mahalapye interviews 2, Bonkamile Kwape
- Mahalapye interviews 8, Molebatsi Kute Semetsa totem: Choma, Ward: Sebina, retired cattle-agent 72 years, 19/12/81
- ⁶³ Mahalapye interviews 2 Bonkamile Kwape
- ⁶⁴ BNA S418/1/2
- ⁶⁵ Colcoulough and McCarthy, *The Political Economy of Botswana*, p.28
- ⁶⁶ Baran, "On the Political Economy of Backwardness", p.91
- ⁶⁷ T.E. Weisskept, "Imperialism and the Economic Development of the Third World" in Wilber, *The Political Economy of Development and Underdevelopment*, p.136
- ⁶⁸ BNA S298/4/1 Produce of Bechuanaland Protectorate Efforts to Increase Native Production, from the High Commissioner to all Departments 5 July 1940
- ⁶⁹ . Brett, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment in East Africa.*, p.9

References

Botswana National Archives

- BNA298/4/3 Produce of Bechuanaland Protectorate Efforts to Increase Native Production, 1944.
- BNA S130/3, Report on the Dairy Industry of Bechuanaland Protectorate by Chiefs Agricultural Officer, 1932.
- BNA V. 1/5/2, Cattle Exports from Bechuanaland Protectorate to the Neighbouring markets 1938-1948.
- BNA S242/13, Cold Storage Lobatse, 1933.
- BNA S125/1, Notes on Tshakedi Khama's interview with the High Commissioner, Mafeking 20/6/35.
- BNA S218/8 Agriculture and Dairy Industry Reports by Director of Native Agriculture, 1931.

BNA S40/10 Lobatse Cooperative Dairy, High Commissioner to Resident Commissioner, Mafeking, 31/1/1910.
BNA S428/3 Cream Industry: Native Danger of developing to the Detriment of Natives' health, Acting Resident Commissioner to Government Secretary, 1942.
BNA S452/1, Dairy Industry of Bechuanaland Protectorate, Confidential Reports on 1940.
BNA S298/4/1, Produce of Bechuanaland Protectorate Efforts to Increase Production, 1944.
BNA S418/1 Cooperative Dairying, African Creameries (Milk buying Depots) 1943-8, 1948-60
BNA S66/5/1, Winter Butterfat Production Subsidy, 1939-45
BNA S309/2/2/2, Tax, War levy imposed 1941, July 1941

Oral interviews

Mahalapye interviews

Kemsley, R. Dairy Officer, 15 Dec 1981

Tarr, L.R. 72 years, businessman, 16 Dec 1981

Mathware, P.G. 49 years, Thosa II ward, totem-phuti, Housewife, 17 Dec 1981

Kwape, B, 58 years, Thosa II ward, totem-tshwane, milk-filterer, 16 Dec 1981

Semetsa, M.K. 72 years, Sebina ward, totem-choma, retired cattle agent, 19 Dec 1981

Matsiloje interviews

Keletsi, R., 59 years, Fokeng ward, totem tshwene, peasant farmer, 27 Dec 1981

Ramme, M. 74 years, Fokeng ward, Kwena totem, farmer 31 Dec 1981

Machola, P.K. 57 years, Tingwane ward, totem Kgama, carpenter, 4 Jan 1982

Mosinyi, L, 2 years, Fokeng ward, totem Kwena, peasant farmer, 4 Jan 1982

Sebitto, E. 80 years, Moroka ward, totem Nonyane, Maphutha regiment, farmer 5 Jan 1982.

Nyaneyabo, L., 6 years, Marukung ward, totem kolobe, peasant farmer, 7 Feb 1982.

Segopha, E., 68 years, Rrapula ward, totem tshipi, peasant farmer, 7 Jan 1982

Mahupela, M., 76 years, Moroka ward, totem Kwena, Makgasa regiment, farmer, 8 Jan 1982.