

CASH, CATTLE OR WOMEN
(a conflict of concepts in a dual economy)

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CASH, CATTLE OR WOMEN : A CONFLICT OF CONCEPTS IN A
DUAL ECONOMY*

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Before we are one hour older, if I have done nothing more, I hope at least to have persuaded you that the apparently fanciful title of my talk is scientifically justified, and that in posing the choice between cash, cattle or women, I have given the briefest summary of the vital conflict of conceptual values which underdeveloped African rural communities are facing in the course of present-day economic development.

I realize that in this talk I shall drift from the field of Southern African anthropology - with which I am supposed to be familiar - into the field of African economy, of which by training I am expected to be blissfully ignorant. While I shall therefore tread warily and diffidently, my diffidence may also be tempered by the hopeful expectation that we may discover a fringe area of interest, a no man's land of enquiry, which neither your nor my discipline has yet successfully occupied and where, with a little goodwill on both sides, a joint excursion might yield fruitful results with regard to a better understanding of some of the problems of socio-economic change in our African communities.

Speaking as a social anthropologist to economists, and knowing only too well the dangers of getting our wires crossed when we start using the more refined intra-disciplinary definitions in our inter-disciplinary communications, I would ask you to agree to my using two terms in a broadly understandable, though perhaps not strictly technical sense:-

* Paper read to the Economic Society, Durban, October 1962. The contents of this paper were discussed with Miss Joan Knox of the Department of Economics in the University of Natal. I am grateful for her patient efforts to extricate me from the tangle of economic phraseology which threatened to ensnare my argument.

- 1) 'Economic(s)', and 'economy' in the sense of relating to the production and distribution of wealth;
- 2) 'Wealth', in the sense of a value concept implying material well-being, but not excluding social well-being. (Here bearing in mind that man may choose to pursue wealth either for his immediate or his future well-being).

If you accept these expressions as working formulae for the sake of our mutual understanding we can talk, without fear of terminological contradiction, about wealth as an economic as well as a social concept, both in western societies with an exchange and money economy, and in tribal societies with a so-called subsistence economy; and it will be possible for us to discuss, on a comparative basis, the pursuit of wealth as an economic process with social implications. And we shall have little trouble in recognizing the existence in both kinds of society an urge to accumulate wealth, although the nature of wealth may be substantially different in one society from what it is in the other.

Having thus agreed to compare the accumulation of wealth in both types of society, I would pose as a first question: How is wealth being accumulated? Since I need in this gathering not waste my time by outlining how wealth is being pursued in societies with a western economy, I can suffice with traditional tribal society. Since we are here accustomed to thinking in terms of subsistence economies, we might as well first observe how wealth is not likely to be accumulated in tribal society: namely by agricultural (crop) production, which was and essentially still is, geared to meet bare subsistence needs, that is the food consumption requirements of each family or such other social unit engaged upon crop production. Some qualification is necessary. Although the absence of a developed marketing system and the lack of suitable storage facilities make it unrealistic to expect traditional farming production to aim at more than subsistence requirements, and that for this reason the accumulation of wealth had no place in the normal process and aims of traditional crop production, small surpluses were in fact occasionally produced. Indeed, among some hard-working folk such surpluses were probably fairly regularly produced and disposed of in a variety of ways, e.g. either by eating more than strictly necessary, or by being extra lavish with hospitality and beer at the producer's home. Although in both ways a sense of material and social well-being was induced, and although in principle the imbibers of a host's beer were as often as not expected to render some manual service (thrashing, tilling, weeding) in return, it is doubtful if you would consider this an 'economic' return for the surplus produced. Yet a Zulu, for instance, would find little difficulty in re-

garding overeating or freely imbibing nourishing beer as an acquisition of personal wealth, umuntu ocebile, a 'fat' man, being synonymous with a 'wealthy' or 'prosperous' man.

There is, however, a third way of getting rid of excess quantities: by exchanging these for other consumer goods (pots, utensils) and preferably, small (and rarely, large) livestock. I repeat, however, that since such transactions are of an ad hoc nature and not a regular feature of traditional crop production we may, by and large, exclude tribal crop husbandry as a field of economic enterprise associated with the accumulation of wealth.

For reasons which will become apparent I shall leave animal husbandry until later, and first deal with one or two other activities. Even in traditional society there was a measure of industrial specialization, and the stereotyped picture of tribal families all being perfectly capable of, and used to, fulfilling the whole range of their own consumption requirements - utensils, clothing, housing, furnishings, etc. - needs some modification. There always were people with special skills in some fields and little or no skill in others. These recognized potters (women), wood-, skin- or iron workers (men), etc., though primarily farmers like all others, were part-time producers of marketable goods. Their production was definitely aimed at an output exceeding their own domestic requirements, and at a deliberate and profitable disposal of the surplus production. If you add to these people other specialists - such as diviners, herbalists, midwives - who were and are paid for their services you must conclude that, even in a society with a so-called subsistence economy, there exist scattered but fairly numerous instances of economic enterprise in which not the satisfaction of bare subsistence needs, but profit-making and the accumulation of wealth through exchange transactions, are the primary (or at least an important) aim. However modest their scale, the incidence of these activities was regular enough for the development of some locally recognized standard values, e.g. the exchange value of a clay pot being its contents in grain; among the Shona, the contents of one 'hozi' storage compartment as the equivalent of a head of cattle; iron spear heads, hoes, etc., having recognized values in terms of small or large stock.

In these private 'home industries' therefore, as well as among the few types of professions, one recognizes the kind of economic activity that could without difficulty also be found in societies with an exchange economy; and although normally haphazardly conducted, there is no doubt that one can in these cases even speak of production for a 'market' (with regard

to the highly specialized iron industry among some Shona tribes, for instance, a fairly well developed and widespread exchange system existed). In short, co-existing with an agricultural production geared to subsistence needs, there were in tribal society recognized other means of production by which individuals could and did accumulate wealth in terms compatible with those found in a western exchange economy.

Let us now ask the next question: why do people want to accumulate wealth? There are probably a host of reasons, but I shall confine myself to a few major reasons which are comparable in both types of society:-

(a) Purely or mainly for the sake of amassing a fortune, that is accumulation for the sake of accumulating, and of satisfying the sheer sense of possession. Here the classical stereotype of the miser regularly counting his growing pile of money for the joy of dipping his hands into his wealth, is to some extent paralleled by the owner of a flock of sheep in the Bubera Reserve in Southern Rhodesia, who refused my offer of four times the market value when I wanted to buy one of his multitude. Although he barely had a shirt to cover his back, he refused to sell because he 'much preferred to keep counting all his animals and enjoyed merely looking at them'.

(b) The second reason why people accumulate wealth may be for the enhancement of one's social status and prestige and, going one step further, in order to gain political power. I do not want to go into psychological aspects, except for noting what we have all observed: that the display of material wealth, the ability to entertain and in other ways disseminate the knowledge that one is wealthy, can be and often is a powerful contributory factor towards gaining social status and prestige; and provided the means are large enough and ambitions are led into the right channels, wealth can play an important role in the manipulation and acquisition of political power.

The same can be said of traditional Bantu society, with this qualification, that the odds are likely to be stacked more heavily against the parvenu. This is so, partly because the range of material needs is much more limited and the accumulation of material possessions (excepting livestock) becomes rather meaningless after consumption needs are adequately satisfied; perhaps even more important, however, because there is a tendency in tribal society for wealth to be associated with rank in the genealogical and hereditarily conditioned political hierarchy.

It may be desirable to elaborate a little on this. The concept of personal property did exist in traditional Bantu society, but was very largely limited to articles of personal use - clothing, adornments, weapons, utensils. With regard to commodities of wider use, even if individually acquired - such as food grown, forest produce collected, monies earned by personal labour - the individual's right of 'ownership' was (and still is) almost invariably modified by an inherent 'communal' quality. This means that, if necessary, such property could be called upon to serve a wider community of interests (the family unit of the primary owner, or even a wider group of kinsmen, e.g. a lineage segment of some 3-4 generations deep). In other words, with regard to the latter kind of property, although the individual who acquired it would undoubtedly have a preferential right to the fruits of his own labour, a communal 'right of avail' (I am diffident about using the term 'ownership' in this connection) would obtain, which entitled this wider group of kinsmen to look upon this property as forming part of a common family 'estate', of which the group could avail itself for the benefit of its more needy members. In this concept, the family estate (which thus involved all but the most 'physically' personal property) was part and parcel of the structure of these kinship groupings themselves, and the management of the family estate was therefore vested in the hands of family elders, those that were genealogically senior. A junior member, who by luck or hard work had succeeded in amassing a fair amount of property of a not strictly 'personal' utilization value, would not be permitted to exercise an unrestricted right of ownership over such property without consultation with his family elders; and might, in the interest of his wider family group, even have to forfeit some of these assets in favour of a more needy (or senior) near-relative. Refusal to recognize the legitimacy of these wider claims, would be tantamount to insubordination, and might well lead to his excommunication from the kinship group, and the withdrawal of its ritual, legal and social protection to which he and his immediate dependants would normally have been entitled, and without which life itself would be rendered insecure.

Do not think this is all past history, an anthropologist's reconstruction of the social fossils of a buried age. A good deal of this is still very much alive to-day in virtually every rural African society, however exposed to western economy.

This hierarchical family control over individually acquired property, while not completely discouraging all individual efforts to accumulate property (the person concerned did, after all, retain a pre-

ferential claim to these assets, and a rough tally of how much other relatives 'borrowed' from him was kept), had at least a depressing affect upon the amount of fun the individual worker hoped to derive from the fruits of his efforts, and this itself is probably one important reason for the odd lack of African response to the type of incentive to which white workers normally do respond.

Then there is the political factor. Since the management of worthwhile property (i.e. wealth) was the prerogative of the genealogically senior, and since the genealogically most senior were likely to be also the political leaders in a society organized very largely upon kinship structure, wealth was also an attribute of the politically powerful, and therefore associated with the relative few in hereditary positions of tribal authority. The rank and file of the community would accept material egalitarianism not only as a social norm but as a matter of political prudence. While modest departures from this norm would be tolerated (as long as one was prepared to share), a spectacular increase in wealth of someone not well up in the political hierarchy, was almost bound to arouse envy and suspicion, and even to-day would be tantamount to inviting an accusation of witchcraft.

One reason for the well-known Zulu institution of ukusisa and its counterparts among other tribes - that is the distribution in usufruct by an owner of a large herd of cattle among widely dispersed relatives or friends - was undoubtedly the fear of disclosing the full extent of one's amassed fortune, and to avoid creating a climate of envy and jealousy in which witchcraft actions and other forms of retaliation so readily flourish. (At the same time, of course, in this veiled manner, wealth nonetheless constituted a useful instrument to exert influence and command allegiance among the recipients of the distributed stock).

In talking of amassed wealth in African tribal society, I spoke in terms of livestock. Having previously said that the range of other material needs was strictly limited, this could not surprise you. Indeed, livestock and especially cattle may, even within the context of tribal economy, be regarded as 'real capital' (in western economic sense), being 'produced means of production'.

Have we now reached the point of summing up, can we now come to the conclusion that in the production and reproduction of livestock in an otherwise subsistence economy, we have found the nearest equivalent of a western concept of capital formation, production and economic

growth? In other words, does the investment in and reproduction of livestock (cattle) presents an end in itself, the most meaningful and ultimate aim of the pursuit of wealth in traditional Bantu society?

Before we draw this conclusion, let us examine the economic role of livestock, and especially cattle, a bit more closely. Among people like the Zulu and other southern Bantu the use made of cattle was fairly extensive: milk formed a fairly regular part of the family diet, skins of dead animals were used for shields, straps and clothing (calf skins mainly), horns had some use as containers; dung was used variously as manure, fuel or floor polish. Since the introduction of the plough, cattle became useful as draught animals. Slaughtering, however, was an irregular event - among commoners even a rare event - more often than not induced by ritual exigency, the propitiation of ancestral spirits or some other ceremonial event of considerable importance, which reduced the value of cattle as a meat supply for domestic consumption. While the killing and cutting up of a beast for (food) exchange purposes was certainly not common, cattle did form a source of security in time of food scarcity.

Turning to the Shona tribes across the Limpopo, cattle and other livestock, while apparently equally prized as possessions and objects of capital investment, were (are) very little used as a milk supply, and as far as I could judge, no beast was killed without some pressure having been exerted by the spirit world. The introduction of the plough made cattle very popular as draught animals but also vastly increased the proportion of oxen in the cattle population which, I was told, did adversely affect the rate of natural increase (in some areas bulls were so scarce that when a certain ritual prescribed the sacrifice of a bull, an ox might have to be killed together with a rooster, in order to render the total offering unmistakably 'masculine').

Only during the past forty years or so, when cash needs increased and stock sales began to fulfil a necessary function, a new dimension was added to the economic value of cattle. On the whole, however, speaking of traditional Bantu society, and thinking of the domestic use made of livestock, I am inclined to think (though I may be biased by my Shona experience) that the 'economic' role (in western sense) of cattle has been much overrated.

The primary use of livestock (cattle especially) and their main 'productive' or 'capital' value, however, lay in quite a different field of human enterprise, that of the exchange of women in marriage and

the procreation of the family. This is, as I understand, not a field which economists have so far been prepared to accept as part of their province. It is one of my aims to persuade you that it is, for the simple reason that I cannot see how you could study the process of economic growth in underdeveloped communities without taking cognizance of what, according to the patterns of conceptual thought in these communities, does form the very core of the traditional concept of property, wealth and the pursuit of wealth.

To understand to dynamics of this conceptual frame you will have to think in terms of two basic and closely interrelated ideas:-

(a) that indigenous communities, like those of the patrilineal Bantu of Southern Africa, comprise large numbers of different agnatic kinship groupings (call these 'lineages') each of which is conceived as an expanding unity of kinsmen, departed, living and as yet unborn. That is, the spirits of the dead ancestors, the living members and the unborn progeny, all form interdependent parts of a separately identifiable, growing kinship organism;

(b) these lineages are exogamous. Although both males and females are members of such lineages, a lineage cannot reproduce itself through the mating of its own males and females; even if the actual relationship is pretty remote, such unions would still be regarded as incestuous. In lineages with a patrilineal line of descent (i.e. in most southern African Bantu tribes) this means that the needs of procreation, this driving biological and mystical urge to reproduce one's own blood and lineal kingroup, can be satisfied only with the help of females obtained from other lineages. Since every lineage is in a similar plight, some inter-lineage exchange arrangement had to be evolved, through which the process of reproduction of agnatic kingroups could take place in a regular and legitimate fashion. The systems that operate depend on the particular kinship structure of the societies concerned, and various types are possible.

The simplest solution (but a rather rare one) is for two lineages to exchange women as wives, for instance in a direct exchange of husbands' sisters (diagram I) or by involving females of successive or alternate generations (one of the 'cousin marriages', diagram II). But even among tribes in which such marriages are regarded as preferential, the actual incidence of these bilateral exchanges is rather low. By far the most common is a system in which progressively more lineages

become involved. If you turn to diagram III the principle becomes very clear. Lineage or family A gets a wife from B, B from C, C from D, etc. In all these separate transactions, however, the wife-receiving group (e.g. A) gives a compensation to the wife-providing group (B), and this compensation enables the latter group (B) to obtain in turn a wife from a third (C) group for the satisfaction of its own reproductive needs. The marriage transaction therefore fulfils the vital needs of both contracting groups, and what is exchanged between them are equivalent reproductive values: A obtains from B a woman of normal child-bearing capacity who will reproduce A's family and lineage; B obtains from A the means (usually a locally more or less standardized number of cattle) of obtaining from a third family a woman who will render the same reproductive services to his own (B) family and lineage. This is the so-called lobola or bhadi system in a nutshell; among the Shona tribes, for instance, this system accounts for ± 98% of all rural marriages (pagan or Christian), and any other marriage (except the feudal 'service marriage'¹) is here in conflict with the basic laws of kinship and the assumptions of incest.

I do not want to go into matters of customary law and ethics tonight, except for emphasizing that under no circumstances is here a question of 'buying wives' (a shocking supposition): not the woman's person (which remains identified with her own kingroup) but her reproductive services are obtained, and the transaction is essentially one of an exchange of reproductive capacity.

What is of importance in this context are the socio-economic implications. First of all there is here a question of 'evaluation' and even of a 'standard value' for normal transactions which can be measured in economically significant terms. Although there will be some strenuous

1) Instead of paying lobolo a man would obtain a wife in return for a lifetime's service to his in-laws. Although in theory he obtained paternal rights to (at least some of) his children, in practice the position was often so obscure that he would ultimately tender a few head of cattle in order to establish an indisputable claim to his offspring.

'bargaining' (much of it stereotyped custom) during the preliminary negotiations, lobolo values are pretty well standardized: among the Shona in the 1940's and 50's, for instance, 10-12 head of cattle for a wife with a full reproductive history ahead of her. Among many tribes with a strongly developed hierarchical political structure and without collateral system of succession (as have the Shona), the lobolo value may be graded according to the political status of the bride's father; say ten head for the daughters of commoners, 15 or 20 for a headman's daughter, much higher still for a chief's daughter. But even these values are more or less standardized (with or without the help of legislation, as in Natal). The main point is that even the lower standard lobolo rates represent values which are considerable higher than the average family's cattle holding. Among the Shona, for instance, the average cattle estate was $5\frac{1}{2}$ head during the late forties, that is half the lobolo value of a single young bride; in the 1900's, with less than 2 head of cattle per family, the lobolo value was 4-5 heads, again more than twice the average cattle estate.

Does this mean perpetual bankruptcy of Bantu families for the sake of family reproduction? Of course not, for families do not only have sons who require lobolo to marry wives, but also daughters who bring in lobolo by marrying husbands in other families. In many tribes this relationship is specifically recognized in a system of 'linking' particular brothers and sisters for the purpose of lobola (e.g. the cibanda institution of the Shona). And since for the purposes of marriage and family reproduction the kinship groupings were fairly large, and the number of sons and daughters within these wider groupings more or less equal, marriage traffic could be sustained by balancing incoming and outgoing lobolo (if necessary, with a period of 'credit' thrown in) even with high standard rates of lobolo.

One implication of this system is immediately apparent: whatever the economic functions of livestock in the more conventional western sense, these functions are eclipsed by the role of cattle in the process of marriage and the reproduction of lineal kingroups.

Perhaps less evident, but inescapably part of the same concept, however, is another implication of immense importance: because of the interchangeable values of marriageable brides and lobolo cattle, not only livestock but also wives and marriageable daughters (or rather, the reproductive capacity of these) form part of the family estate.

and are in fact the most valued elements of the concept of 'property' and 'wealth' in traditional Bantu society.

Again I must warn you against jumping to the facile conclusion that therefore women - wives and daughters - are regarded as 'chattel' to be disposed of by a male-controlled society; even a cursory study of customary law relating to the position of women will refute this fallacy. The key to an understanding of their position in the family estate, lies in a wider and more fundamental concept of wealth, which has become virtually lost in our materialistic society. What the Shona call pfungo and the Zulu umfuyo can be interpreted as something between 'property' and 'wealth'; it has the connotation of 'asset' in a productive sense, also of potential well-being, strength, richness, and a promise of prosperity in a more-than-material sense. The Shona term nhaka (a deceased person's estate) and the Zulu term impahla (property), besides referring to personal belongings, have this in common that they include, together with cattle and other livestock, the lobolo value of unmarried daughters. Nhaka, moreover, very definitely includes widows - or more correctly, their unspent procreative capacity. These are the primary 'assets' included for distribution in a deceased person's estate.

(I should here add that land - a primary 'asset' or 'property' in our society - was not as such included in the concepts of nhaka or impahla. While land was (is) utilized in individually recognized and legally protected allotments, it could not as such be 'owned' or 'appropriated' in tribal society. Even nowadays, in spite of the growing scarcity of land and the enhanced value attached to individually occupied holdings, the reluctance to accept land as 'property' is still widespread).

In these tribal societies, then, wealth is a productive and organic concept. So strong and self-evident is this organic quality that it has even been ascribed to the money economy concept of interest derived from capital investment: e.g. the common Zulu term for interest is inzalo¹⁾, that is, live offspring.

1) Matters of Zulu terminology were discussed with Dr. D.McK. Malcolm whose guidance is hereby gratefully acknowledged.

In short, wealth (and for that matter 'capital') in traditional Bantu society represents primarily the actual or potential capacity of the family or lineal kingroup to reproduce itself. In a society with a strictly limited range of material wants the only really meaningful pursuit of wealth is that which aims at the multiplication of one's progeny. For herein lies the strengthening of one's primary resources in times of need, and the provision of material, social and even spiritual security and well-being: blood-kin to grow and gather food for sustenance, the expanding family as a corporate social unity for the mutual protection of its members, and the broadening ranks of descendants who will minister to the vital needs and whims of the ancestral spirit world. At the same time it is also the way to social prestige and, ultimately, political status and power.

Having outlined these fundamental concepts, I want to put it again to you: if the science of economics is concerned with the production and distribution of wealth, if the formation of capital is an economically meaningful object of the accumulation of wealth, and if real capital represents the produced means of production and reproduction; and if, within the context of traditional indigenous society, the only really meaningful form of capital is that which can be utilized for the reproduction of one's own blood, family and lineal kingroup, (if on all these points we agree) then the whole indigenous conceptual complex of 'productive property' and the pursuit of 'wealth' aimed at the perpetuation of lineal kingroups must, I should say, logically fall within the field of economics as much as it should demand the attention of social anthropologists.

To deny this heritage of an underdeveloped past a place in the study of economic theory if not practice, seems to me an unwarranted restriction of your discipline. I would go further and maintain that, unless you take due cognizance of these fundamental principles of primitive economy, the structure of your theoretical framework is incomplete. Moreover, the application of your science to such problems as the stimulation and development of the economy of the indigenous communities of Africa will be badly handicapped, and often be (as indeed it has only too often been) disruptive rather than constructive. For your ideas and aspirations about 'economic growth' (so fashionable nowadays) are esoteric growths on African soil. Your frame of mind and the conceptual tools of your profession are the products of an

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advanced stage in the socio-economic evolution of man, shaped at a time when, among the vanguard of human society, wealth had already lost most of its organic character and was no longer rooted in the pulsating flow of human life and procreation itself.

To-day, economists direct their attention to underdeveloped areas, where among the great majority of tribal communities these concepts are still meaningful, even though, after the imposition of cash taxation, the lure of factory-produced consumer goods and other requirements of a dynamic and demanding new world, the value concepts of a western money economy have gained a firm and rapidly expanding foothold. It is, in fact, the co-existence of both the western 'materialistic' and the traditional 'organic' concepts of wealth in present-day African society which presents one of the most fascinating (and difficult) aspects of the study of socio-economic development.

The two concepts, though very different, are not always or necessarily in conflict with one another, for each has in African society to some extent its own sphere of operation, distinct from or complementary to the other. In brief outline, the situation is as follows:-

On the one hand: cash needs have become an integral and growing part of African rural life, primarily for the payment of taxes and for satisfying a progressively widening range of factory-produced consumer goods and other values of the western world (e.g. education). Because, almost generally in Southern and Central Africa, the traditional resources of rural communities can at best meet only a very minor part¹⁾ of the cash requirements, rural families have come to rely heavily on the earnings of their migrant workers, and these wage earnings have become an established and essential part of the economic basis of rural family life.

1) Among the rural Swazi some 80% of all cash income of rural families is derived from wage labour outside the sphere of rural economic activity.

On the other hand: in the traditional sector of rural economy, there is an agricultural subsistence production, plus the pursuit and accumulation of wealth in the organic sense I have sketched. This sector caters primarily for the vital needs of the rhythm of life, death and procreation of corporate kinship groups.

Theoretically one may be tempted to regard this as a double economic structure, consisting of two separate sectors, each with its own system of values, its own set of needs and its own resources and recognized avenues to fulfil these needs, that is, as self-sufficient and mutually independent spheres of socio-economic activity.

In practice, of course, the two sectors are not entirely separate, and the values of both interpenetrate, so that we are in fact dealing, not with a double structure, but with a dual economic system within a single socio-economic structure.

One of the most significant (and to agronomists, disturbing) penetrations is the increasing use of wage money for the purchase (not production) of food in the rural subsistence sector. (In Keiskammahoeck district, for instance, even after a 'good' harvest, families have to buy food for nine months of the year)¹⁾. This development is due to a combination of factors which tend to inhibit adequate crop production. Shortage and diminishing fertility of arable land, as well as climatic hazards, are undoubtedly major factors in many areas, but certainly not everywhere. In Swaziland, for instance, there is no general shortage of African held arable land and (except in the Lowveld) conditions are reasonably favourable to crop production. Yet, less than half the rural families produced (1960) enough staple food for their bare subsistence needs, relying mainly on wage earnings to make up the deficit²⁾. A more fundamental factor is the change in African attitudes to the role of land, which as a primary source of subsistence is yielding its place to a more rewarding mi-

1) Reported by Professor M. Wilson at the Social Sciences Research Conference, Durban, July, 1962.

2) Report of the Swaziland Survey, 1960, Chapters VII and VIII.

grant labour market. At the same time the value of land tenure tends to become assessed in terms of social and residential security rather than of economic productivity¹).

Other examples of interpenetration are legio: the introduction of cash payments in customary marriage transactions, in tribal litigation, in fees paid to witchdoctors and midwives, in payments made for occasional labour engaged in subsistence crop production and so on.

From the other side, however, traditional values, such as the continued insistence on lobolo, the social and political ramifications of material wealth, institutional kinship obligations, tribal associations, the pressure from mystical forces (ancestral spirits, witchcraft and sorcery) exert their influence upon African participation in the wage economy sector. In one way or another these factors influence the timing, duration, place, rhythm and even nature of migratory employment, as well as the pattern and volume of cash expenditure and investment.

The result is an often baffling interplay of different standards of evaluation with regard to one and the same commodity, depending on the particular context in which the evaluation takes place. During the late 'forties and early 'fifties the cash equivalent of a full-grown head of cattle for marriage (lobolo) purposes was £5 among the central and eastern Shona tribes; and the same cash value applied in other 'traditional' contexts, such as in legal actions concerning the payment of fines or compensations. A person might well settle such debts by handing over cattle (and not money), but mindful of its market value in the 'materialistic', non-traditional context, refuse to sell an identical beast to a butcher or at a stock sale for £12 or £15. Question him about this discrepancy, and the chances are that he remains oddly unconcerned. To his mind there is no price conflict, because in either case he has been logically guided by the accepted

1) Report of the Mangwende Commission of Inquiry, Salisbury, 1961, p. 29 ff.

standard of evaluation applicable within the particular context of the transaction; and since he has no difficulty in distinguishing the two, his mind can jump from one conceptual compartment into the other without becoming confused. Another example: A has run out of food and borrows half a bag of maize from B to feed his family. Another man, C, borrows half a bag of maize from A which he sows, after which he reaps and sells the resulting crop. Creditor B will be entitled to the return of only half a bag of maize from debtor A who consumed the loan to sustain life; but he may claim one bag from C who multiplied and commercialized what he borrowed¹⁾.

In these cases the functional contexts which determine the basis of evaluation, are easily distinguished and no conflict arises. It is not always so, and instead of finding the organic and materialistic concepts of wealth juxtaposed in peaceful co-existence, they may in other situations present sharply opposed forces in a bitter tug of war.

Elsewhere²⁾ I described in some detail the changing role of the lobolo in modern African life, and the effect of this change upon the structure and cohesion of the family. It is, briefly, that as the result of expanding cash wants, the cash load (in respect of lobolo and other marriage payments) payable by groom-and-family to bride-and-family has become an ever increasing burden, requiring longer periods of wage employment to discharge. A very considerable part of this burden now falls upon the shoulders of the groom himself, instead of, as in the past, upon a common family estate. One result is that, while the median age of white bridegrooms upon first marriage has dropped during the twenty-year period since 1937, the median age

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- 1) The claim may not always succeed in a tribal court. Much depends on the success of C's venture, the relationship between creditor and debtor, and the circumstances under which the transaction took place.
 - 2) 'Bantu Marriage at the Cross Roads', Proceedings of the 8th Annual Conference of the Institute of Administrators of Non-European Affairs, 1959.

of African grooms has risen. Nearly half the white men in South Africa marry under the age of 25; just over half of the African men (those whose marriages are registered) marry over the age of 30, a difference in median age of more than five years. Of the protracted period of bachelorhood a considerable portion is spent in wage employment in an environment which daily displays the attractions and temptations of material wealth and comfort. At the same time not only the urge of the blood has to be satisfied (leading to a large amount of promiscuity) but, inevitably, there is a mounting sense of obligation that a man should do his primary duty by marrying and starting to reproduce his own lineal kingroup in a legitimate fashion. Here every man's soul becomes a battlefield of two rivalling forces, two valid but different concepts, both giving meaning and purpose to the pursuit and accumulation of wealth, and therefore persistently clamouring for recognition and priority in the hard struggle to make ends meet. In contemporary African society this is the razor's edge between the old and the new. Here, personal and group aspirations, obligations and loyalties, as well as material, social and spiritual needs converge. Much more is at stake than a personal search for suitable compromises between the conflicting values of a new and complex world. The legal basis of marriage and legitimate offspring, the respective responsibilities of husband and wife, of parent and child, the nature and strength of their wider kinship affiliations and obligations, in short, the very structure and coherence of corporate kinship groupings, are being affected in the groping search for new norms. And in this process of adjustment to rapid change, odd things can happen. Among matrilineal Northern Rhodesian tribes, traditionally without a lobolo institution and with an instable marriage situation, a substantial increase in marriage payments by the groom's family may tend to produce greater marital stability and (probably) enhanced paternal rights. Among our patrilineal southern Bantu, with a lobola system traditionally responsible for stable marital ties and a very strong paternal position with regard to children, the delayed start of formal marriage encourages a growing crop of premarital and maternally affiliated children; while the not uncommon contribution by wage-earning brides to their own lobolo (in order to 'help their boy friends') facilitates lawful matrimony as well as subsequent desertion - which, again, tends to strengthen the maternal rather than the paternal ties with the children.

I have reached the stage when I should either lead you deeper into the as yet largely unexplored undercurrents of socio-economic behaviour in our transitory African society, or call a halt in the hope that I have not yet begun to confuse you.

I have in this paper touched upon some aspects of this curious admixture of concepts which determine the socio-economic behaviour of our African population (in particular, rural communities in southern and central Africa), as the result of the confluence of two widely disparate cultures. It was meant to be an excursion in the field of a dualistic economy, and I have taken some pains to show that the phenomena I discussed are not confined to two separated spheres of human activity, but belong to interlocking sectors (one tradition-oriented, the other western-oriented) of a single socio-economic structure. In this dualistic approach I have deliberately avoided giving undue emphasis to such recognized dichotomies as exchange versus subsistence economy, or urban (industrial) versus rural (agricultural) economy. For I believe that, however attractive superficially, these divisions will prove to be artificial (and therefore deceptive) upon deeper analysis.

Indeed, after half a century and more of ceaseless labour migration, much of it a circulating movement and not a one-way current, it would be strange if town and country, exchange and subsistence, industry and peasantry, were not to some extent mixed up on both sides of these dichotomies. If so, surely it would be more realistic, certainly from the economist's angle, first to accept that the erstwhile separate sectors have grown into an indivisible whole, and then to examine the nature and extent of their interdependence and, in particular, the interplay of basic concepts, old and new, indigenous and western, which motivate socio-economic behaviour in this transitory society. For it is in the sphere of conceptual thinking, in the uneasy co-existence of old and new, that we find the more fundamental dichotomy which cross-cuts all other divisions. In the field of African economy probably the most significant expression of this dichotomy concerns the meaning and function of wealth, represented in the juxtaposition (and opposition) of what I called the (western-derived) 'materialistic' and (tradition-derived) 'organic' concepts of wealth. The clearest symbol of the former is money; of the latter, women, genetrix; or if you wish, cattle, for their exchange is the generating principle in the organic chain linking exogamous kinship units for the purpose of family procreation - an this represents in any organized human society the genesis of all social and economic growth.

1/10/62.
DURBAN.

H-42

DIAGRAM I

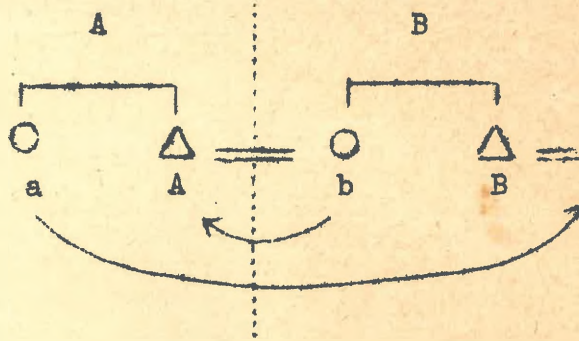


DIAGRAM II

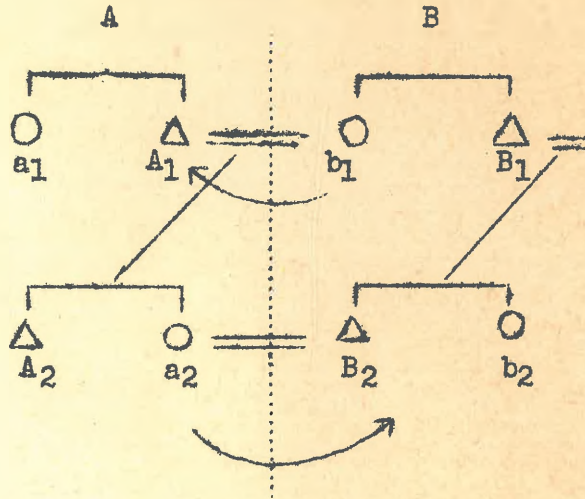
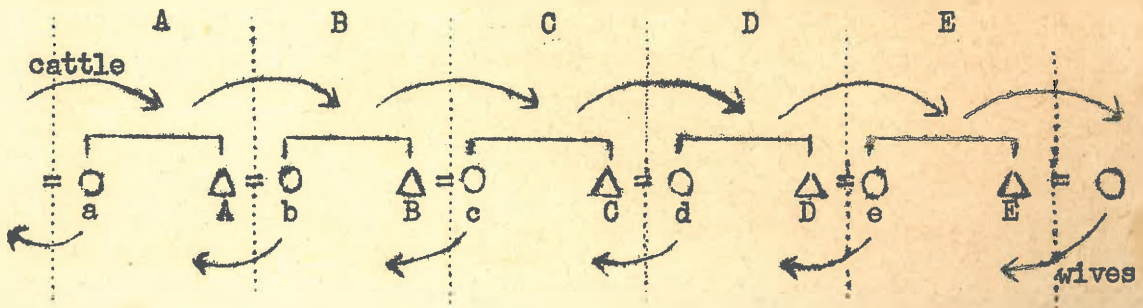


DIAGRAM III





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