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Best of Intentions?: Rinderpest, Containment Practices, and Rebellion in Rhodesia in 1896

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Abstract
Rinderpest was a deadly bovine virus that plagued cattle herds accross Europe and Asia for centuries. In the late 1880s to early 1890s, the virus found its way to Africa, where it wiped out thousands of non-immune cattle herds belonging to African pastoralists and agriculturalists. By February 1896, the virus had crossed the Rhodesian border along the Zambezi River and began killing off cattle owned by ethnic groups that included the Matabele and the Shona, as well as cattle owned by white settlers. In an effort to contain the virus, the British South African Company consulted with colonial officials in the Cape Colony, who in turn advised the local police in Rhodesia to practice quarantines of cattle herds and authorized the shooting of sick and healthy cattle in order to create a buffer zone against the virus. The harsh practices of the legalized killing of cattle, coupled with a pre-existing tense political situation, convinced the Matabele people to take an armed stand against the colonial state.

Keywords
Rinderpest, Matabele people, containment, colonialism, veterinary medicine

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By Brandon Katzung Hokanson

Even the most miniscule of organisms on earth are incredibly capable of historical agency. Viruses—invisible to human eyes without the aid of an electron microscope—have proven to be profound agents in human history.[1] It was because of a virus that the African continent, in the final decade of the nineteenth century, witnessed one of the worst agricultural disasters of recent human history. Rinderpest, an extremely fatal bovine virus, left a trail of dead cattle and devastated African pastoralists and farmers in its wake. By the spring of 1896, the virus had reached the northern banks of the Zambezi River, and when word emerged that it had crossed the natural barrier in February, it did not take long for the rumors to prove true: cattle began dying in southern Africa in droves, and the British colonial state struggled to cope with an entity that failed to respect borderlines on a map. The British responded to the rinderpest outbreak by practicing quarantines and mass killings of sick and healthy cattle, which proved to be a gross cultural misunderstanding on the part of the colonial state. I argue that these earliest veterinary practices forced upon locals in southern Africa by the British colonial state to contain rinderpest were a major contributing factor for the Matabele Rebellion of 1896-7.

[1] To better understand just how impactful the historical relationship diseases share with humans, see William McNeil, *Plagues and People* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1977).

Cattle were far more than just a food source to the Matabele, as the British would quickly find out.

Narratives written by Africanist scholars dedicated exclusively to the rinderpest outbreak exist in a substantial number. However, the majority of existing narratives have focused on British-administered southern Africa.[2] Since the 1890's rinderpest outbreak was continent-wide, particularly proving devastating in the northern and eastern regions, the contemporary historiography is unrepresentative of the true magnitude of the disease's outbreak. A handful of authors like Helge Kjekshus do make an effort to shed some light on the devastating impact the virus had on East Africa, however the gap in knowledge about the rinderpest outbreak in southern African versus its outbreak in eastern and northern Africa, and even German South West Africa, is still significant.[3] Reason for such a discrepancy is perhaps due to the large quantities of southern Africa-based and Anglophone sources related to the late nineteenth century outbreak that are available in the historical record. Although this paper ultimately contributes to the Anglo-centric historiography focused on British southern Africa—partially due to the larger availability of sources dealing with that region—it does bring forth an important and under-covered aspect of the outbreak by highlighting the role that the

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[2] A thorough survey of rinderpest works focused on southern Africa include the following: Charles Ballard, "The Repercussions of Rinderpest: Cattle Plague and Peasant Decline in Colonial Natal," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 19. no. 3 (1986); Daniel Gilfoyle, "Veterinary Research and the African Rinderpest Epizootic: The Cape Colony, 18896-1898," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 29. no. 1 (March, 2003); C. van Onselen, "Reactions to Rinderpest in Southern Africa 1896-1897," *The Journal of African History* 13, no. 3 (1972); and Pule Phoofolo, "Face to Face with Famine: The BaSotho and the Rinderpest, 1897-1899," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 29, no. 2 (June 2003).

[3] Helge Kjeksjus, *Ecology Control and Economic Development in East African History* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1996), 126-132.

early veterinary practices played in contributing to the Matabele Rebellion. In order to do so, a brief and general history of the outbreak in northern and eastern Africa will be presented, followed by details of how the British colonial state reacted when it first appeared in Rhodesia, which, coupled with a description of the importance of cattle to the Matabele people, will demonstrate how these early practices to stop the spread of the virus in the end contributed to an all-out war.

Rinderpest, also known as "cattle plague," has devasted cattle herds and the psyches of cattle farmers and pastoralists throughout its history.[4] Death by rinderpest for cattle was a brutal experience and at the very least an unsightly one for cattle owners because the rinderpest virus, Morbillivirus, caused a number of painful and visually disturbing symptoms like profuse nasal and eye discharge, bloody fecal discharge, and labored breathing. Upon infection, most cattle would die of the disease in a period of six to twelve days. Most importantly, virgin soil-epidemics of the virus—land with no prior experience with rinderpest—were especially devastating because rinderpest spread easily and rapidly between herds of nonimmune cattle, and in some cases escalated to the level of a panzootic.[5] Prior to the final decade of the nineteenth century, the African continent was virgin soil to rinderpest, but by the end of that decade, the continent was completely devastated.

Precisely when and where rinderpest was introduced to Africa is still a mystery. Clive Spinage, John A. Rowe, and Kjell Hødnebø argue that the 1890's outbreak of rinderpest was not the first outbreak, with several minor, isolated outbreaks occurring in

[4] Clive Spinage has so far completed the most comprehensive history of rinderpest in his book, *Cattle Plague*, where he traces all major outbreaks of the virus and its impact on peoples across the world. Clive Spinage, *Cattle Plague* (New York, NY: Kluwer Academics/Plenum Publishers, 2003).
[5] Rodger W. Blowey and A. David Weaver, *Color Atlas of Diseases and Disorders of Cattle*, 2nd ed. (Maryland Heights, MO: Mosby, 2003), 189-190.

Egypt in the early part of the century. They maintain however that the 1890's outbreak was by far the worst.[6] Several scholars who have written about 1890's outbreak of rinderpest, in addition to Spinage, Rowe, and Hødnebø, assert that it was mostly likely introduced to the continent somewhere between 1887 and 1889 when Italy sent an army to conquer Ethiopia. Traveling with the Italians, in what would prove to be a failed campaign, were cattle from foreign lands used to pull artillery, and it is argued that among these imported cattle, rinderpest had entered the continent.[7]

The virus spread quickly from Northeast Africa, where it killed off great numbers of cattle in Sudan and Ethiopia and moved down the eastern part of the continent, crashing into the cattle herds of pastoral peoples in what is present-day Kenya and Tanzania. One of the ethnic groups that suffered the worst from rinderpest was the Maasai. The Maasai were pastoralists who, in addition to cattle-rearing, had a strong warrior tradition. Helge Kjekshus, in his book focusing on the German colony of Tanganyika (Tanzania), argued that rinderpest was disastrous to peoples like the Maasai. Along with breaking the "economic backbone" of many pastoralist communities, Kjekshus also argued that rinderpest "initiated a breakdown of a long-established ecological balance and placed nature again at an advantage."[8] Kjekshus mentioned that rinderpest contributed to mass famine

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[6] Spinage, *Cattle Plague*, 497; John A. Rowe and Kjell Hødnebø, "Rinderpest in the Sudan 1888-1890: The Mystery of the Missing Panzootic," *Sudanic Africa* 5 (1994): 150.

[7] Spinage, *Cattle Plague*, 498; Rowe and Hødnebø, "Rinderpest in the Sudan 1888-1890," 153-154; Kjeksjus, *Ecology Control and Economic Development in East African History*, 127; Jose Burman, *Disaster Struck South Africa* (Cape Town, South Africa: C. Struik Ltd., 1971), 63; Nancy J. Jacobs, *African History through Sources: Colonial Contexts and Everyday Experiences, c. 1850-1946* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 77.

[8] Kjeksjus, *Ecology Control and Economic Development in East African History*, 126.

among the Maasai, and also forced them to rely on ethnic polities that practiced agriculture, like the Wayambo, for food. In terms of numbers of cattle lost, Kjekshus concluded that the region prior to the outbreak held approximately 4.5 million cattle, and after rinderpest had moved through the area, the cattle population dropped to approximately 450,000—a catastrophic loss to the locals.[9]

Prior to 1896, the death and destruction that rinderpest had wrought in the northern and eastern part of Africa had its southward spread halted by the natural barrier of the Zambezi River, and it appeared that the natural barrier would withhold the virus. However, by February 1896, locals who lived along the river began to notice cattle dying from some mysterious illness.[10] An article published in the *Rhodesia Herald* on February 26th mentioned that this "cattle sickness" had, alongside a locust outbreak, become a major issue in Rhodesia.[11] Being generally brushed off as a mere cattle disease, people were overly optimistic that it would run its course. However, by March, it was clear that the mysterious disease was far more serious than previously made out. On the 9th of March, J. A. Stevens, the Acting Secretary for the British South Africa Company, wrote to the Imperial Secretary based in London about the rising outbreak. Stevens noted that the disease "is what is believed to be what is called Zambezi cattle fever," indicating that at this point people living in northern Rhodesia still struggled to accurately identify the disease. In his report of the virus, Stevens also mentioned a long list of symptoms seen in the cattle, such as "running at eyes and nose," "intestines

[9] Kjeksjus, *Ecology Control and Economic Development in East African History*, 131.
[10] Spinage, *Cattle Plague*, 525.
[11] "Occasional Notes," *Rhodesia Herald* (Harare, Zimbabwe), February 26th, 1896.

full of blood," "mucus bloody," and "slight congestion of the lungs." At the end of his report, Stevens, grimly noted that "when symptoms once appear death follows rapidly," and even grimmer, that there were "no cases of recovery yet recorded."[12]

The governing body of the British South Africa Company realized it needed to act, and throughout the first weeks of March, sent repeated messages to the High Commissioner, Sir Hercules Robinson, in Cape Town of the British Cape Colony. Robinson responded by putting the British South Africa Company in communication with the chief Colonial Veterinary Surgeon of the Cape Colony, Dr. Duncan Hutcheon. Hutcheon, advising Robinson and the company government in Rhodesia, and out of fear that the disease would quickly spread from Rhodesia into the Cape Colony, recommended Robinson to take rapid action.[13] On the same day that J. A. Stevens wrote his report about "Zambezi cattle fever" and its symptoms, Hercules Robinson approved an act that would have dire consequences in the immediate future.

Indeed, on March 9th, Sir Robinson permitted an order that fit into the legislative framework of the Animal Diseases Act of 1881, which was a law, once enacted, that allowed for a ban on movement of cattle, a quarantine of infected regions, and the destruction of infected herds.[14] Most importantly, in the order,

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[12] J. A. Stevens to Imperial Secretary, March 9th, 1896, in *Correspondence Relating to the Outbreak of Rinderpest in South Africa in March 1896* (London, UK: Eyere and Spottiswoode, 1896), 2.

[13] Spinage, *Cattle Plague*, 526.

[14] Daniel Gilfoyle, "Veterinary Research and the African Rinderpest Epizootic: The Cape Colony, 1896-1898," 136; The Animal Diseases Act of 1881 was created as a means to protect cattle and other domestic animals in the British Empire from the spread of disease. The act gave imperial officials in British colonies the right to control the movement, particularly the importation and exportation of livestock, require locals to report signs of disease to law enforcement, and authorize the killings of sick and healthy animals when and where deemed necessary. Hercules Tennant and Edgar Michael Jackson, eds.,

there was opportunity for healthy cattle to get killed as well; "any cattle found trespassing . . . may be destroyed by the owner or occupier of the land trespassed upon."[15] Healthy cattle could be also legally killed by local authorities when they deemed "it desirable to isolate or destroy in order to prevent the spread of infection."[16]

On March 11, the *Rhodesia Herald* noted that the colonial government had taken notice. In the article, there was also an agreement to keep all main roads open, however, "all native cattle" had to be "removed five miles from it."[17] Sir Robinson wrote a message to Joseph Chamberlain, Secretary of State for the Colonies, that the disease afflicting Rhodesia and threatening other British colonies was "rinderpest, or a disease almost identical with Rinderpest." Robinson had mentioned to Chamberlain that the order he signed on the 9th, which entailed "the removal and, where necessary, the destruction, of cattle," would "have the effect of confining the disease." At the end of his missive, he mentioned that he was greatly concerned about the welfare of both native Africans and European settlers, stating "the whole of the wealth of the native population is invested in cattle," and "a large proportion of the European farmers are also dependent on the pastoral industry."[18] Little did Robinson and his veterinary consultant

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Statutes of the Cape of Good Hope, 1652-1895 (Cape Town, South Africa: W. A. Richards and Sons, 1895), 3260-3264.

[15] Hercules Robinson, March 9th, 1896, in *Correspondence Relating to the Outbreak of Rinderpest in South Africa in March 1896* (London, UK: Eyere and Spottiswoode, 1896), 2.

[16] Ibid.

[17] "More Cattle Disease," *Rhodesia Herald* (Harare, Zimbabwe), March 11th, 1896.

[18] Hercules Robinson to Joseph Chamberlain, March 11th, 1896, *Correspondence Relating to the Outbreak of Rinderpest in South Africa in March 1896* (London, UK: Eyere and Spottiswoode, 1896), 1.

Hutcheon know that the order that they approved would be received quite negatively by the Matabele people.

In order to better explain how a series of veterinary containment practices—which scholar Daniel Gilfoyle considers to be, from the veterinary perspective of the time, uncontroversial—became an important factor for the Matabele to rise against the British, it is important to understand both the importance that cattle had in their society as well as the political climate in the region.[19] The political climate prior to the rinderpest outbreak had already been tense. The first mass wave of European settlers moved in land owned by the Matabele in 1890, when the British South Africa Company established a series of settlements in the area. A member of the Matabele, Ndansi Kumalo, recalled that "we were terribly upset and very angry at the coming of the white men."[20] Three year later, in 1893, a fierce war was fought between the Matabele and Shona people against the government of the British South Africa Company over issues of stolen cattle. The war did not last long, with the soldiers serving the British South Africa Company using technology like heavy machine guns to force the Matabele forces to seek peace terms by the beginning of the following year. By the outbreak of rinderpest in Rhodesia in 1896, a great amount of tension still existed between the Matabele and the British South Africa Company because of the war, as well as the increasing influx of white settlers who continued to build settlements on what used to be Matabele land.[21] Kumalo mentioned how after the

[19] Daniel Gilfoyle, "Veterinary Research and the African Rinderpest Epizootic: The Cape Colony, 1896-1898," 136.
[20] Ndansi Kumalo, "The Story of Ndansi Kumalo of the Matabele Tribe, Southern Rhodesia," in *Ten Africans*, ed. Margery Perham (London, UK: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1936), 69.
[21] Enocent Msindo, *Ethnicity in Zimbabwe: Transformations in Kalanga and Ndebele Societies, 1860-1990* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2012), 94.

fighting, "the white men sent police who did abdominal things," such as physical assaults and the thievery of cattle, and that the Matabele were "treated like slaves."[22]

The Matabele were largely a pastoral people who also maintained a strong warrior tradition. When he was growing up, Ndansi Kumalo talked of how he learned to both take careful care of cattle and become a warrior. He mentioned that it was his responsibility as a child to round his family's cattle up, and if he forgot even just one, he would "get a good thrashing."[23] In Matabele society, cattle represented much more than just a basic source of food. Cattle were seen as a form of currency and bride wealth. Cattle were also significant for pastoral peoples in southern Africa because they were commonly used in sacred rituals and in occasional sacrifices.[24] Kumalo recalled when rinderpest first appeared in the herds of the Matabele, stating the cattle began to die off quickly. He also stated that the Matabele "could not help thinking that all these dreadful things" like the outbreak of rinderpest "were brought by the white people."[25] The fact that rinderpest was so deadly by itself, killing off the entirety of the herds it infected, made the government policies of killing both infected and none-infected cattle all the more devastating to pastoral African people like the Matabele.[26] Although the

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[22] Ndansi Kumalo, "The Story of Ndansi Kumalo of the Matabele Tribe, Southern Rhodesia," 72.
[23] Ndansi Kumalo, "The Story of Ndansi Kumalo of the Matabele Tribe, Southern Rhodesia," 66.
[24] Sean Redding, *Sorcery and Sovereignty: Taxation, Power, and Rebellion in South Africa, 1880-1963* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2006), 66.
[25] Ndansi Kumalo, "The Story of Ndansi Kumalo of the Matabele Tribe, Southern Rhodesia," 72.
[26] There is also strong evidence that the white population living in British colonies in southern Africa also reacted negatively to the legal killing of cattle. Daniel Gilfoyle mentions twice in his work, "Veterinary Research and the African Rinderpest Epizootic," that whites showed strong resistance to the killings. On September 12, white farmers exclaimed directly before Hutcheon

following brief song originates with the Sotho—another southern African cattle-rearing people—and not the Matabele, it is still an excellent direct statement of how crippling the loss of cattle from rinderpest—and the treatments forced upon African pastoralists by the government—was:

> No more cattle, no more milk: what will we eat?
> No more cattle, no more fuel: what will we burn?
> No more cattle, no more skins…what will we wear?
> No more cattle, no more weddings: how will we marry?
> No more cattle, no more plowing, except the slow plowing with picks, slow, tiring and insufficient for the vast spaces that the Basotho have set aside for cultivation. Where will we eat? And where will we earn money?[27]

On the final days of March 1896, members of the Matabele chose to make a stand and fight against the British South Africa Company and its European settlers in Rhodesia. The rebellion caught the company government completely by surprise and cause an explosive stirring in the local media. An April 1st article from the *Rhodesia Herald* wrote of the confusion and commotion the colony was suddenly experiencing. Stating that "a rising of some description has undoubtedly taken place among the Matabele," the article also described killings of white settlers and mass movements of settlers into large towns like Bulawayo.[28] Another

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that they would rather be shot before they would allow their cattle to be killed. Later in October, a group of white cattle farmers confronted, and eventually routed, a contingent of police who were in process of rounding up cattle to be killed. Gilfoyle, "Veterinary Research and the African Rinderpest Epizootic: The Cape Colony, 1896-1898," 135, 138.

[27] H. Dieterlen, "La peste bovine au sud de l'Afrique," *Journal des Missions Evangeliques*, (1897): 16-17, in *African History through Sources: Colonial Contexts and Everyday Experiences, c. 1850-1946*, Nancy Jacobs, 79. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

[28] "Native Rising," *Rhodesia Herald* (Harare, Zimbabwe), April 1st, 1896.

article in the same issue of the same newspaper talked of the rebellion, using derogatory words to describe the Matabele like "kaffir," along with talks of both whites and natives being killed.[29]

By looking at the local media in the immediate few days following the rise of the Matabele, alongside reports of progress and setbacks on the frontlines, a clearer picture emerges on what the cause of the rebellion was. The *Rhodesia Herald* argued that, at the moment, "the causes are complex and uncertain."[30] Just a few days later, in an article published by the Rhodesian newspaper, the *Bulawayo Chronicle*, Cecil Rhodes was interviewed, and he thought the causes of the rebellion was "due to the premature arming of the Matabele as policemen." However, the author of the *Chronicle* article had also received the opinion of the "Native Commissioners," and that they were adamant that this was unlikely the reason.[31]

On March 28th, in the very immediate wake of the rebellion, an author for the *Bulawayo Chronicle* pondered the possibility of a link between the legally enforced shooting of cattle and the agitation of the locals. The author specifically stated that "the course of the disease [rinderpest] among the cattle, and the conquest shooting of them," by colonial authorities under the guidance of the colonial veterinarians, "may have aroused bitter feelings." At the same time, however, it appears that the author attempted to justify the shooting of cattle, and therefore failed to understand truly why shooting of cattle by government agents would trigger bitter feelings, because he wrote that "the Chief

[29] "Brushes with the Natives," *Rhodesia Herald* (Harare, Zimbabwe), April 1st, 1896.
[30] "Native Rising," *Rhodesia Herald* (Harare, Zimbabwe), April 1st, 1896.
[31] "Mr. Rhodes at Salisbury," *Bulawayo Chronicle*, April 4th, 1896.

Native Commissioner had explained this very well to them [the Matabele], when the measures were adopted."[32]

The papers occasionally printed articles with a Eurocentric analysis of the Matabele culture when trying to come up with an explanation for the rebellion. An article printed by the *Bulawayo Chronicle* April 22nd, 1896, prioritized Matabele religion as the cause for the rebellion, however, at the same time took great pains to explain the importance that cattle held for the Matabele. The article wrote that "faith in the M'Limo or native god has ranked among the foremost" causes for the rise. However, the article also talks of the fact that "the native has an intense love for his cattle . . . being the zenith of a kafir's happiness," and even states that "he [the Ndebele] treasures his oxen like a miner his gold."[33] Even with the premium placed on religion as a major cause for the rebellion, the article failed to mention the mass killing of Matabele cattle by colonial officials. The fact that the relationship that the Matabele had with cattle was so strong—in the case of this article, from an outsider's understanding Matabele culture—and that it is well known that cattle were forcefully killed, taking the additional step of connecting the two is important. Other local Rhodesian newspapers managed to make this connection, the importance of cattle to the Matabele and the forced killing of them, as a major reason for the Matabele to rise against the British.

On April 22nd, an author for *Rhodesia Herald* wrote that "it has been said that if the Matabeleland and cattle questions had been managed differently," there would have been no rebellion. The author of the article reasoned if it was really due to how the British South Africa Company trying to stop the rinderpest spread by killing and seizing cattle that drove the Matabele to rebellion, "a limited amount of sympathy could be entertained for the natives."

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[32] "Bulawayo's Safety," *Bulawayo Chronicle*, March 28th, 1896.
[33] "A Broken Idol," *Bulawayo Chronicle*, April 22nd, 1896.

However, the article, in an extremely biased and inaccurate way, emphasized that the sympathy "must be very limited" because of "the hideous method the Matabele chose to revenge themselves."[34]

An article printed by the *Bulawayo Chronicle* on the 22nd of June 1896, presented the causes for the rise of the Matabele with less racist view than the *Rhodesian Herald* article of the 22nd of April. The article in the *Chronicle* wrote that religious influences combined with "the recent destruction of cattle owing to the ravages of rinderpest, were responsible for the present rising."[35] This article carefully identified that there was no single great cause for the rise of the Matabele, arguing rather that it was a combination of reasons, in this case religion and the killing of Matabele cattle by colonial authorities, that caused the rise. However, it is still clear that the killing of the cattle was one of the more predominant causes and is extrapolated as such in international media covering the outbreak of rinderpest and the rise of the Matabele.

Consider this: On March 28th, 1896, in the immediate outbreak of the Matabele Rebellion, the *San Francisco Chronicle* published an article that speculated the causes of the rebellion. The article wrote that "possibly one cause of the disturbance is the regulations recently enforced to stamp out rinderpest."[36] Like the *Bulawayo Chronicle* article printed on the 22nd of April, it was mentioned that the "Kaffire" were "greatly attached to their cattle." The exact same report and claim that the killing of the cattle was a major cause for the rebellion was printed in another California newspaper, the *Los Angeles Times*, on the very same day.[37]

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[34] "Late News," *Rhodesia Herald* (Harare, Zimbabwe), April 22nd, 1896.
[35] "The Native Rising," *Bulawayo Chronicle*, June 20th, 1896.
[36] "Revolt in South Africa," *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 28th, 1896.
[37] "Matabele Revolt," *Los Angeles Times*, March 28th, 1896

Even in the British metropole, newspapers managed to connect the killing of cattle by colonial authorities as important cause of the Matabele Rebellion. In April, an article printed in the *Manchester Guardian* wrote that "the killing of cattle on the account of renderpest [sic] disturbs the native mind."[38] Another article printed in the *Manchester Guardian* a month later asked the figurative question, "how, then, has the present "rebellion" come about?" Before stating its own answer, the article went into depth describing the rinderpest outbreak in Rhodesia and mentioned that the mass killing of cattle as a containment practice was something "the natives could not be expected to understand." The article continued to belittle the Matabele by stating that while the Matabele were acting "unreasonably from an intelligent white man's point of view," it was understandable that the "natives regarded this [the killings] as a fresh and intolerable outrage." The article concluded with a certain degree of sympathy for the Matabele, albeit using extremely racist language, stating how the Matabele were "goaded to desperation by wholesale cattle seizing and cattle killing," which "encouraged the "rebellion.""[39]

In the end, the Matabele Rebellion only lasted for approximately a year, and even when members of the Shona polity joined their side partway through the conflict, the Matabele were defeated by a massive force of British soldiers.[40] Rinderpest certainly played a role in their defeat because more and more Matabele cattle continued to die of the virus during the campaign

[38] "Special Morning Express: The Matabele Rising," *Manchester Guardian,* April 13th, 1896.
[39] "Matabeleland and the Charter Company," *Manchester Guardian,* May 27th, 1896.
[40] For more information on the Second Matabele War, see T. O. Ranger, *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia, 1896-97: A Study in African Resistance* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1967) and Robin H. Palmer, "War and Land in Rhodesia," *Transafrican Journal of History* 1, no. 2 (July 1971).

which contributed to considerable starvation amongst the population.[41] Despite the defeat of the Matabele by the British colonial state, the Matabele Rebellion—along with a another local rebellion that took place in December 1896—managed to achieve at least one positive and unrealized consequence, which was that the fear of additional rebellions by natives in southern Africa led to the British colonial authorities to minimize and eventually stop the legalized mass killing of cattle as a preventative measure to contain rinderpest.[42] The fear of future rebellions caused by the killing of cattle can be seen in an article printed in the *Manchester Guardian* on November 23rd, 1896. The article warned that if cattle belonging to "warlike tribes Swazis, Basutos, and Zulus are to be shot," a massive and immediate rebellion amongst these African polities would have been likely.[43] By the end of 1896, under the leadership of the Chief Veterinarian of the Cape Colony, Duncan Hutcheon, the killing of native cattle was minimized, and a new line of defense had to be drawn at the Orange River, with hopes that rigorous quarantining and the establishment of a fence line along the river, would be the best hope of preventing the disease from spreading any further.[44]

Despite all of the money that the British colonial state had invested in its colonies in southern Africa to stop the spread of rinderpest, Hutcheon's last-ditch defense made at the Orange River

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[41] Burman, *Disaster Struck South Africa*, 65.

[42] In November 1896, the killing of cattle by colonial police sparked another rebellion—this time among Africans belonging to the Tswana ethnic group—in the British colony of Bechuanaland. The rebellion was short-lived, ending in August of the next year, but it, along with the Matabele Rebellion, caused the British colonial governments in southern Africa to reconsider the legal mass killings as a preventative measure for rinderpest. Harry Saker and J. Aldridge, "The Origins of the Langeberg Rebellion," *The Journal of African History* 12, no. 2 (1971): 299.

[43] "Interview with Mr. Selous," *Manchester Guardian*, November 23, 1896.

[44] Gilfoyle, "Veterinary Research and the African Rinderpest Epizootic," 139.

even proved a failure. On March 24th, 1897, rinderpest was discovered for the first time in the Cape Colony. The failure of Hutcheon's method proved that the previous European idea of disease containment would not work in the African environment, and something else had to be attempted.[45] The second round of attempts to stop rinderpest, while maintaining element of quarantining, the mass shootings of sick and healthy cattle were minimized. This time inoculation, under the leadership of the German bacteriologist, Robert Koch, was attempted. However, it was in fact local scientists who came up with a preventative treatment that witnessed some success. Blood-serum injections, where the blood and serum (plasma) of an infected cow was strategically injected into a healthy cow, provided immunity for many herds. However, not all cattle herds—more specifically the owners of these herds—were treated equally. White farmers were granted more access to the blood serum more so than their African pastoralist and farmer counterparts. By 1899, rinderpest presence had significantly declined and in 1905 it was eliminated from South Africa.[46]

Regardless of how the rinderpest panzootic ended in southern Africa at the conclusion of the nineteenth century, the outbreak and the first methods employed to contain it had disastrous consequences for African natives who suffered the worst from both. In Rhodesia, it was the cattle herds of the Matabele that had to take the brunt of the virus, and who were forced to endure veterinary practices that required the shooting of even their healthy cattle. The practice of cattle shooting coupled with dissent that had already existed for the British South Africa Company since 1894,

[45] Gilfoyle, "Veterinary Research and the African Rinderpest Epizootic," 139.
[46] Amanda Kay McVety, *The Rinderpest Campaigns: A Virus, Its Vaccines, and Global Development in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 27-30; Spinage, *Cattle Plague*, 567.

was motivation for the Matabele to take agency into their own hands and fight back. Although the rebellion ended in failure, and their cattle continued to die of rinderpest in droves, the Matabele's fight against the British made the colonial government reconsider its practices of shooting cattle. The long and atrocious fight against rinderpest in nineteenth-century Africa is proof that diseases, even those that do not infect people, have an impact on human history. As W. McNeil put it, humans have and will continue to be at mercy of the historical agency of disease, since "we remain caught in a web of life—permanently and irretrievably—no matter how clever we are at altering what we do not like."[47]

[47] McNeil, *Plagues and People*, 16.

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