discussion article

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Beasts, banknotes and the colour of money in colonial South Africa

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Abstract

This essay explores the role of commensuration – the mechanisms that render equitable and negotiable different orders of value – in the production of society and history. While equilibration, standardization and conversion are implicated in most theories of money and commodification, their nature as social processes has not been adequately specified, above all in the construction of universalizing ideologies and modernist political and economic regimes. We pursue these processes in relation to one African theatre, examining the ways in which different regimes of value, brought up against one another in the encounter between the southern Tswana peoples and European colonizers, became the subject of both conflict and complex mediation. Cows, coin and contracts – which had the capacity to construct and negate difference – soon were invested here with magical qualities. But colonized peoples were also sensitive to the capacity of such currencies to enable or impede convertibility and the forms of abstraction and incorporation they permit. Which is why, in South Africa and elsewhere, those currencies often became metonymic of the contestations of value on which colonial struggles, *tout court*, were played out.

Keywords

Colonialism; commodification; commensuration; currencies; money; South Africa

Introduction

Once upon a time it was little more than a cliché to remark the material(ist) underpinnings of colonialisms, old and new. Classical Marxist political economy, its various Marxoid offshoots, and liberal economic histories alike took for granted that materialities motivated and conditioned colonial encounters everywhere. This, almost in a caricature of Hegelian dialectics, produced its antithesis in the 1990s – the so-called 'culturalist' approach, which argued that, above all else, those encounters were exercises in the imposition on widely dispersed 'others' of new orders of knowledge, new ways of being-in-the-world, new modes of self-awareness. In retrospect, this theoretical opposition now seems Procrustean. Colonialism everywhere has always been a process simultaneously material and meaningful, violent and capillary. Materialities – the concrete, ecologically founded activities of production, exchange and consumption – are always mediated by cultural categories and dispositions, themselves less a closed system of 'symbols and meanings' than a field of evanescent, differentially valued, variably contested signs and practices; conversely, those categories and dispositions are constantly revalued by the conditions of the concrete world in which they are firmly embedded. To be sure, meanings, messages and values are often materialized in objects that carry their force more compellingly and unobtrusively than words. Which is why the material record often reveals things about large-scale historical processes that the documentary record does not.

It is for this reason that close attention to materialities affords a privileged insight into the workings of colonialisms everywhere; they open up an otherwise refractory angle of vision onto the regimes of value that underlie the interactions, over the short, medium and long run, between colonizers and those whom they would bring under their dominion.

But regimes of value – and, even more, encounters between different regimes – presume mediation, translation and communication among the currencies, at once verbal and material, that objectify them. Which, in turn, depends on mechanisms of commensuration, that render negotiable otherwise inimical, apparently intransitive, orders of signs and practices. Without such mechanisms, which have often been the object of conflict and contestation, colonialism, as modernist project, would have made no sense, neither as a world-historical undertaking on the part of colonizers nor as a lived reality to those upon whose worlds it was wrought.

The following essay, then, interrogates the role of commensuration in the colonial encounter and, by extension, in the production of society and history. It explores a very specific obsession with very general historical implications: the effort of colonial evangelists to introduce coinage, to replace beads and cattle with banknotes, among Tswana peoples in South Africa. At its broadest, it posits a post-Marxist argument about the salience of commensuration in the modernist construction of society and history, and, above all, in the forging of empires. For at the heart of all 'modern' colonialisms, a condition of their possibility perhaps, were mundane mechanisms that made inimical kinds of value, with different cultural roots, at once objectifiable, comparable and negotiable. Commensuration and objectification, standardization and abstraction, equilibration and convertibility, of course, all feature prominently in classic theories of commodification, also in theories of the workings of money. But their significance in the construction of modernity as an ideology of global scale, and in the encounter between Europe and its others, has not been adequately plumbed. Nor, we believe, have their various media, their poetics and magicality, been adequately theorized.

In order to make our general point, and to explore its further theoretical consequences, we analyse processes of commensuration in one African colonial theatre, focusing on the material transactions they enabled across semantic frontiers; on their diverse and differently endowed media, alike indigenous and imported; on their implications of the long run for cultural constructions of wealth; on their material effects upon all involved. We ask why it was that the campaign to convert Tswana to Christianity, and to the ways of the West, concentrated so centrally on recasting their currencies – on teaching them to use cash, to do good by buying and selling goods, to commodify their labors by transforming the wages of sin into virtuous incomes. We trace how these ventures were challenged by African conceptions of value, how they called into being hybrid tokens of exchange, how they set in train struggles to domesticate new alchemies of enrichment while striving to protect local means of storing wealth. We shall show that, for 19th-century colonial evangelists in South Africa, saving savages meant teaching savages to save. Also to produce providentially, using God's gifts to bring forth the greatest possible abundance. Or at least marketable surpluses. Drawing 'native' communities into that body of corporate nations meant, first and foremost, persuading them to accept money, the ultimate currency of conversion, commerce, civility, salvation. In their efforts to do this, the Protestant missions took the waxing spirits of capitalism, its specie and its signifying conventions, on a world-historical journey.

In recuperating that journey, we seek to make visible the hidden hand, sometimes the sleight of hand, behind the political economy of 19th-century European colonialism. Which returns us to the broad outlines of our argument: (i) inasmuch as the building of empires depended on processes of commensuration, on rendering epistemically equivalent and transitive once incomparable objects and ideas, signs and meanings, it demanded media – beads, coin, contracts and the like – with the capacity, simultaneously, to construct, negate and transfigure difference; and (ii) inasmuch as those media, those currencies of conversion, opened up new lines of distinction, new languages of value, new forms of inequity, new objects of desire, new possibilities of appropriation and exploitation, they took on magical properties; this because (iii) they appeared, in and of themselves, to objectify history-in-the-making, even to make history of their own accord. Which, we shall demonstrate, is why banknotes, beads and bovines became the objects of a protracted struggle in the South African interior; why, more generally, they became metonymic of the differences of value on which the colonial encounter, *tout court*, was played out.

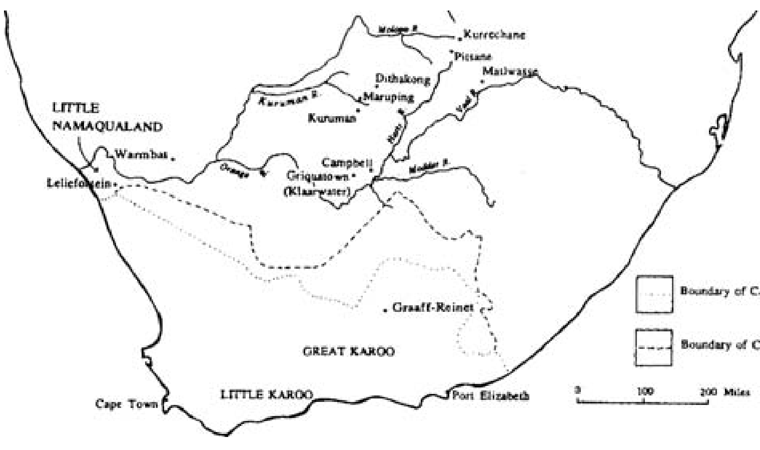

Figure 1 Map of South Africa in the early 19th century.

As this suggests, we seek here to make two species of theoretical claim. Both are instantiated by our South African story, both extend far beyond it. One is about 'modern' European colonialism, whose historical logic, we propose, is incomprehensible without an understanding of the processes of commensuration and conversion that allowed various worlds to be brought into the same orbit of being, both imaginatively and concretely. The other is about commensuration itself and about the media upon which it depends; media fetishized not merely because they congeal labour power and/or obscure relations embodied in processes of production, nor because they displace unspeakable passions from people to objects or vice versa, but because, being uniquely endowed things, they take on a social life of their own. Their genius, we shall show, does not lie in their being empty, or emptied, signifiers, just as their meaning does not derive from their relations to other, equally empty, signs. It is owed in part to their intrinsic properties, in part to the moral, material and magical work they are made to do in the exigent course of history.

Species of values, value and specie

Christian political economy: secular theology, sacred commerce If early modern European political economy was a secular theology (Hart 1986, 647), contemporary Nonconformist theology sanctified commerce. During the 'second reformation' of the late 1700s, British Protestantism had refashioned itself with cultural fabric milled by the Industrial Revolution. Indeed, the interplay of church and business, realms never fully separate, produced a rich discourse, at once religious and temporal, about value and its production (Hempton 1984, 11; Waterman 1991, 3f). Evangelicals of the 18th century, Rack (1989, 385f) claims, had been more influenced by the language of practical reason than their espousal of scripture and spirituality might suggest.

But the discourse of political economy was particularly congenial to the spirit of the great evangelical societies. While liberal theory per se was seldom a subject of open discussion among missionaries to South Africa, most of them were guided by its material and moral principles. Evangelical societies were run like businesses, with men of commerce actively investing their resources and managing their affairs (Helmstadter 1992, 10). 'Business', in fact, seems to have served as a synecdoche for human action in the world (Smith 1976 (1776), 14), just as 'usefulness' conveyed a sense of virtuous efficacy (Helmstadter 1992, 9). In the field, the Nonconformists put their trust in the power of money to bring progress, and to place all things, even God's grace, within human reach. This faith in the creative powers of cash recalls Simmel's *Philosophy of money*, perhaps the most refined statement of the 19th-century European belief in the transformative power of coin. For Simmel (1978, 291), man was by nature an 'exchanging animal' and, by this token, an 'objective animal' too; exchange, in its 'wonderful simplicity', made both the receiver and the giver, replacing selfish desire with mutual acknowledgement and objective appraisal. Transaction, he went on, begets rationalization. And the more that values are rationalized, 'the more room there is in them, as in the house of God, for every soul'. Because of its unlimited convertibility (Simmel 1978, 292), money was uniquely capable of setting free the intrinsic worth of the world to be traded in neutral, standardized terms. And so it enabled the construction of an integrated society of morally dependent but psychically self-sufficient persons (Simmel 1978, 297f).

While they might never have put it in just these terms, Nonconformist missionaries in South Africa devoted much of their effort to making Africans into 'exchanging animals', an enterprise in which cash played a pivotal role. They, too, nurtured the dream of an expansive civil society built not upon savage barter but upon transactions among self-possessed, moneyed persons. According to this dream, the liberation of 'natives' from a primitive dependence on their kin and their chiefs lay in the creation of a higher order, a world of moral and material interdependence mediated by stable, impersonal media: letters, numbers, notes and coin.

There was, as everyone knows, another side to money: its long-standing Christian taint as an instrument of corruption and betrayal. In part this flowed from the power of cash, indeed all instruments of commensuration, to equate disparate forms of value. It could dissolve what was unique, precious and personal, reducing everything to the indiscriminate object of private avarice. What was more, the ability of coin to transpose different forms of worth enabled profitable conversions to be made among them; in particular it allowed the rich to prosper by using their assets to control the productivity of others. Bloch and Parry (1989, 2f; cf. Le Goff 1980) remind us that this sort of profit was anathema to the medieval European church, which saw productive work as the only legitimate source of wealth and condemned, as unnatural, the effortless earnings of merchants and moneylenders. Capitalism was to exploit the metabolic qualities of money in unprecedented ways, of course – especially its capacity to make things commensurable by turning distinct elements of human existence, like land and labour, into alienable commodities. Protestantism would endorse this process by sanctifying desire as virtuous ambition, and by treating the market as a realm of provident opportunity. Yet its medieval qualms remained. As Weber (1958, 53) stressed, those Christians who most aptly embodied the spirit of capitalism were ascetics. They took little pleasure in wealth per se. For them, making money was an end in itself, a transcendental value. It gave evidence of ceaseless 'busy-ness' and divine approval.

Insofar as money remained demonically corrosive, there was only one way to avoid its corrupting qualities: to let it go. If it was to generate virtue, it had visibly to circulate. Hoarded wealth was 'the snare of the devil' (Wesley 1986, 233). It made men forsake the inner life for superficial pride, luxury and leisure. The Divine Proprietor required that his stewards put his talent to work either by cycling it back into honest business or by giving it away in charity; the proper movement of wealth was both creative and positive. By those lights, exchange *was* production (Parry 1989, 86). Nonconformists like Wesley still held to a labour theory of value, but now the notion of industry was cast in terms of manufacture and the market, of wage labour, the circulation of wealth, and the productive character of capital.

Read in this light, it is clear that the economic emphasis of missionary practice in South Africa expressed more than a mere effort to survive or even to profit. It expressed the spirit of liberal modernity, being part of the attempt to foster a self-regulating commonwealth, for which the market was both the model and the means; to foster, also, what Unsworth (1992) has aptly termed a 'sacred hunger', an insatiable desire for material enrichment and moral progress. As we shall see, the task proved onerous, for the 'mammon of unrighteousness' was never easily befriended. By the mid-1820s some of the more radical evangelicals in England were denouncing the reduction of human qualities to price. And, in the mission field, the Nonconformists were caught, time and again, in the double-sided implications of money. Meanwhile, the kind of value carried by coin would come face to face with African notions of worth, setting off new contrasts, contests and combinations.

Other kinds of value The southern Tswana world of the early 19th century bore some similarity to the one from which the missionaries set out. Stress was laid here, too, on human production as the source of value. Here, too, communities were understood as social creations, built up through the ceaseless actions and transactions of people eager to enhance their fund of worth. Here, too, exchange was facilitated by versatile media that measured and stored wealth, and permitted its negotiation from afar.

These parallels, we have argued (Comaraoff and Comaroff 1992, 127f), are sufficient to cast doubt on the exclusive association of commodities and competitive individualism with industrial capitalism. Or with modernity. But, by the same token, similar practices do not necessarily have the same genesis, constitution or meaning. Although southern Tswana subscribed to a fundamentally humanist sense of the production of wealth, their understanding of value – and the way it vested in persons, relationships and objects – was different from that of their interlocutors from abroad. Thus, while early missionaries thought they detected in the Africans a stress on self-contrivance, a dark replica of Western economic man, they found, on longer acquaintance, that this person was a far cry from the discrete, enclosed subject they hoped to usher into the church. Indigenous 'utilitarianism', Tswana literati like Molema (1920, 116) insisted, was unlike European 'egoism'; the evangelists referred to the 'native' variant as 'selfishness'. Indeed, closer engagement of previously distinct economies on the frontier would reveal deep distinctions behind superficial resemblances. And it would give birth to a dynamic field of hybrid subjects and signs.

The Setswana verb *go dira* meant 'to make', 'to work', or 'to do'. *Tiro*, its noun form, covered a wide range of activities – from cultivation to political negotiation, from cooking to ritual performance – which yielded value in persons, relations and things. It also produced 'wealth' (*khumô*), an extractable surplus (of beer, artefacts, tobacco, stock and so on) which could be further deployed to multiply worth. Sorcery (*boloi*) was its inverse, implying the negation of value through attempts to harm others and/or unravel their endeavours. *Tiro* itself could never be alienated from its human context and transacted as mere labour power; that experience still awaited most southern Tswana. Rather, it was an intrinsic dimension of the everyday act of making selves and social ties.

This vision of the production of value, based on close human interdependence, bore little resemblance to that of liberal economics. For Tswana, wealth inhered in relations. Which is why its pursuit involved (i) the construction of enduring connections among kin and affines, patrons and clients, sovereigns and supporters, men and their ancestors; and (ii) the extension of influence by means of exchanges, usually via the medium of cattle, which secured rights in, and claims over, others. But, while these rights and claims were constantly contested, the productive and reproductive properties of a relationship, be it wedlock or serfdom, could not be separated from the bonds that bore them (Molema 1920, 125; Schapera 1940, 77). The object of social exchange was precisely not to accumulate riches with no strings attached; the traffic in beasts served to knit human beings together in an intricate weave, in which the density of linkages and the magnitude of value were one and the same thing.

Because they were the means, par excellence, of building social biographies and accumulating capital, cattle were the supreme form of property here; they could congeal, store and increase value, holding it stable in a world of flux (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992, 139). Not surprisingly, their widespread use as currency in human societies was noted by early theorists of political economy (Smith 1976 (1776), 38; Marx 1967, 183). While Adam Smith judged them 'rude' and 'inconvenient' instruments of commerce, he appreciated that they embodied many of the elementary features of coin, being useful, alienable, relatively durable objects. Although standardized as species, moreover, stock come in different sizes and colours, genders and ages, and so might be utilized as tokens of varying quality and denomination. (Many African peoples, famously, have long elaborated on the exquisite distinctions among kine). True, cattle are not as divisible as inanimate substances like metal and tend, therefore, to be more gross, slow-moving units of trade. But, as we shall see, southern Tswana took this to be one of their advantages over cash, whose velocity they regarded as dangerous. Herds were movable, of course, especially for purposes of exchange, a fact stressed by Marx (1967, 115); for him, the apparent self-propulsion of currency was crucial to its role in animating commodity transactions. Affluent Tswana men exploited this ambulatory quality, dispersing bridewealth to affines and loaning stock to clients as they strove to turn their resources into control over people. They also rotated animals among dependents, and between cattle-posts, both as a hedge against disaster and as a way of hiding assets from the jealous gaze of rivals (Schapera 1938, 24).

It is as exchange value on the hoof, then, that cattle occupied a pivotal place in southern Tswana political economy. Their capacity to objectify, transfer and enhance wealth endowed them with almost magical talents. Much like money in the West. The beast, goes the vernacular song, is 'god with a wet nose' (*modimo o nkô e metsi*; Comaroff and Comaroff 1992, 127). This is a patent instance of fetishism in bovine shape – of the attribution to objects, that is, of value produced by humans – which suggests that the commodity is not specific to capitalism. At the same time, the case of Tswana stock also shows that commodification need not be an all-or-none process, that it is always culturally situated in a meaningful world of work and worth. Here, for example, while animals enabled rich men to lay claim to the labours of others, they did not depersonalize relations among people. Quite the contrary. They drew attention to the social embeddedness of those very relations – while making them seem part of the natural order of things.

The complex qualities of cattle currency would intervene in mission efforts to transform the southern Tswana sense of value. For beasts were enough like money to be identified with it, yet enough unlike it to make and mark salient differences. On the one hand, they could abstract value. On the other, they did the opposite: they signified and enriched personal identities and social ties. The capacity of animals in Africa to serve both as instruments and as signs of human relationship has often been noted; the so-called 'bovine idiom' is an instance of the more general tendency of humans to use alienable objects to extend their own existence by uniting themselves with others (Mauss 1954; Munn 1977). Both in their individual beauty and their collective association with wealth, kine were ideal – and idealized – personifications of men. A highly nuanced vocabulary existed in Setswana to describe variations in colour, marking, disposition, horns and reproductive status (Lichtenstein 1973, 81; Sandilands 1953, 342). Named and praised, they were creatures of distinction. Not only did they bear their owners' stamp as they traversed social space (Somerville 1979, 230), they also served as living records of the passage of value along the pathways of inheritance, affinity, alliance and authority.

The intricate patterns of stock deployment among Tswana made it difficult for early European visitors to assess their holdings. Longer-term records suggest a history of fluctuations in animal populations, with cycles of depletion being followed by periods of recovery, at least until the end of the 19th century (Grove 1989, 164). But there is clear evidence of the existence, at the beginning of that century, of large and unequally distributed herds. Observers were struck by blatant discrepancies in cattle ownership, and by the unambiguous association – Burchell (1822–24, ii, 272) used the word 'metonymy' – of wealth in kine with power (cf. Lichtenstein 1973, 76f; Molema 1920, 115). Thus the chief was the supreme herdsman (*modisa*) of his people, a metaphor that captured well vernacular visions of value and political economy. Situated atop the *morafe* ('nation'), he presided over a domain marked not by fixed boundaries but by an outer ring of waterholes and pasture – in other words, a range (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992, 141). Royal stock also built relations beyond the polity, being used to placate and to trade with other sovereigns.

It was not only chiefs who mobilized cattle as a currency of power; other men of position also accumulated stock and set up networks of alliance and patronage. Ordinary male citizens, however, relied on inheritance, bridewealth and natural increase to build their modest herds. Some had no animals at all. They made up what Burchell (1822–24, ii, 348) termed an 'ill-fated class', eternally dependent on their betters. In the bovine economy of the southern Tswana, in sum, an indigenous 'stock exchange' underwrote inequalities of class, gender, generation and rank. As the pliable media used to forge all productive relations, human and superhuman alike, cattle were the quintessential form of social and symbolic capital.

Cattle were also a prime medium in the exchanges that, by the late 18th century, linked southern Tswana to other peoples on the subcontinent, yielding beads from the Kora and Griqua to the south, and iron implements, copper jewellery and tobacco from communities to the north and north-east (Lichtenstein 1930, 409; Stow 1905, 449, 489). Bovine capital also gave access to the ivory and pelts desired by white travellers, who arrived in growing numbers from around 1800 (Shillington 1985, 11). And pack-oxen enabled the long-distance haulage of *sebilô*, a sought-after hair cosmetic, from its source in Tlhaping territory (Campbell 1813, 170). But the earliest European explorers already noted that Tswana were reluctant to trade away their beasts. Somerville's (1979, 140) expedition to the interior failed in its mercantile objectives because of the natives' 'unwillingness to part with their cattle'. The Englishman found this 'difficult to account for, since they convert them to no useful purpose whatever'.

Nonetheless, regional exchange networks were active enough to persuade the Europeans that they had stumbled upon the 'essential principles of *international traffic*', or 'mercantile agency in its infancy' in the African veld (Burchell 1822–24, ii, 555; original emphasis). Andrew Smith (1939, 251), in fact, observed that chiefs managed production explicitly to foster alliances; they tried, as well, to monopolize dealings with foreigners and to control commerce across their realms (Campbell 1822, ii, 194). Indeed, whites found these men aware of discrepancies in going rates for such items as ivory, and keen to profit from them. Notwithstanding the reluctance to sell beasts, occasions to traffic with Europeans – in the early years for beads, later for guns and money – were eagerly seized.

We shall come back, shortly, to the entry of the civilizing mission into southern Tswana commerce. Already, however, two things are clear. The first is that the Africans had long channelled their surpluses into trade, bringing them a range of goods from knives and tobacco to widely circulating forms of currency. The second is that, of the latter, beads had become the most notable. According to Beck (1989, 220) beads were introduced into southern Africa by the Portuguese, and continued to find their way into the interior in small quantities after the establishment of the Cape Colony (Saunders 1966, 65). Only at the turn of the 19th century, however, did sizeable mass-produced stocks arrive from abroad (Somerville 1979, 140). Metal rings and beads, especially of brass and copper, seem to have pre-dated glass imports in long-distance trade (Stow 1905, 489).

By the early 19th century mass produced beads were serving as media of transaction that articulated local and global economies, linking the worlds of cattle and money (cf. Graeber 1996). Along with buttons, which were put to a similar purpose, they were portable tokens that, for a time, epitomized foreign exchange value beyond the colonial frontier. Beads were 'the only circulating medium or money in the interior', Campbell noted (1822, i, 246), adding that every 'nation' through which they passed made a profit on them. Different kinds composed distinct regional currencies; Philip (1828, ii, 131) tells us that no importance was attached to particular examples, however beautiful, if they were 'not received among the tribes around them'. At the same time African communities showed strong preferences, in the early 1800s, for specific colours, sizes and degrees of transparency (Beck 1989, 220f).

Even as they became a semi-standardized currency for purposes of external trade, beads served internally as personal adornments; in this they were like many similar sorts of wealth object. Their attraction seems to have stemmed from the fact that particular valuables could be withdrawn from circulation for display, itself a form of conspicuous consumption.[1] But men of means also accumulated hidden stocks: 'their chief wealth, like that of more civilized nations, [was] hoarded up in their coffers' (Campbell (1822, i, 246; cf. Graeber 1996). Market exchange was, at this point, a sporadic activity directed at specific exotic objects. It was set apart from everyday processes of production and consumption.

Some observers stressed the monetary properties of beads: 'They answer the same purpose as cowrie shells in India and North Africa', Campbell (1822, i, 246) wrote, 'or as guineas and shillings in Britain'. But others were struck by the differences. For a start, aesthetic qualities seemed integral to their worth. 'Among these people', offered Philip (1828, ii, 131), 'utility is, perhaps, more connected with beauty than it is with us'. Simmel (1978, 73) would have said that the separation of the beautiful from the useful comes only with the objectification of value; the aesthetic artefact takes on a unique existence, *sui generis*; it cannot be replaced by another that might perform the same function. Such an artefact, therefore, is the absolute inverse of the coin, whose defining feature is its substitutability.

Among southern Tswana the increasing velocity of trade did render some media of exchange – first beads, then money – ever more interchangeable. But the process was never complete. And it did not eliminate other forms of wealth in which beauty and use explicitly enhanced each other. Indeed, the longevity of cattle currencies in African societies bears testimony to the fact that processes of rationalization, standardization and universalization are always refracted by social and cultural circumstance. In the cow, aesthetics and utility, uniqueness and substitutability complemented each other, colouring Tswana notions of value in general, and of money in particular.

Objects that come to be invested with value as media of exchange vary greatly over time and space, a point well demonstrated by the emergence of new currencies as formerly distinct economic orders begin to intersect. Marx (1967, 83) once said that, when the latter happens, the 'universal equivalent form' often lodges arbitrarily and transiently in a particular commodity. So it was with beads, which had been mass produced for different ends in the West, but turned out to serve well, for a while, as a vehicle of commerce beyond the colonial border. Marx also added that, as traffic persists, such tokens of equivalence tend to 'crystallize . . . out into the money form'. So, once again, it was with beads. While Tswana would accept various articles as gifts, these were of little use in trade. 'They want money in such a case', Campbell (1822, i, 246) found, 'that is, beads'. As transactions increased in volume, standards of value in the worlds linked by this new currency began to affect each other; merchants noted that rates charged by Africans in the interior rose and became more uniform.[2] By the 1820s the demand for beads at the Cape had driven up prices dramatically, to the extent that missionaries tried to secure supplies from England at one-third of the cost (Beck 1989, 218f).

The bottom soon fell out of the frontier bead market, however (although not so further north; see Chapman 1971 (1868), 127). That market seems to have been sustained by the dearth of fractions of the rixdollar, the currency at the Cape in the early 1800s (Arndt 1928, 44–46). After 1825 Britain introduced its own silver and copper coinage to its imperial possessions, and paper dollars were replaced by sterling. Once the new supply had stabilized, and had filtered into the interior, its effect on bead money was devastating.

Ironically, while Tswana came to reckon in money, many traders preferred to deal in kind. But, even more important than changes in the cash supply, a shift was occurring in the structure of wants and in local notions of value. It was encouraged, above all, by the presence of the evangelists and by the entry onto the scene, at their urging, of a cadre of itinerant merchants and shopkeepers.

Here, then, were two distinct regimes of value, one European and the other African, whose engagement would have a profound impact on the colonial encounter. To the Nonconformist evangelists economic reform was no mere adjunct to spirituality; virtue and salvation had to be made by man, using the scarce material resources bequeathed by providence for improving the world. Commercial enterprise allowed the industrious to turn labour into wealth and wealth into grace. Money was the crucial medium of convertibility in this. It typified the potential for good and evil given as a birthright to every self-willed individual. Southern Tswana, upon whom the evangelists hoped to impress these divine possibilities, also inhabited a universe of active human agency, in which riches were made through worldly transactions. Exchange, in their case, was effected primarily through cattle. In contrast to cash, stock socialized assets, measuring their ultimate worth not in treasures in heaven but in people on earth. We move, now, to examine how these regimes of value, already in contact in the early 1800s, were brought into ever closer articulation.

Extending the invisible hand

Civilizing commerce, sanctified shopping: the early years British observers in the early 1800s might have acknowledged that southern Tswana showed a lively interest in exchange. But they also stressed the difference between 'native commerce' and orderly European business. Thus Burchell (1822–24, ii, 536–39) noted that 'mercantile jealousy' had produced competing efforts to monopolize traffic with the colony to the south. He proposed a 'regulated trade for ivory . . . with the Bichuana nations', to be vested in an authorized body of white merchants who would institute 'fair dealing' to the advantage of all. Like liberal economies before and since, his 'free' market required careful management.

The founding evangelists shared this trust in the beneficent effect of trade. Some said that the very 'sight of a shop' on mission ground roused savages to industry (Philip 1828, i, 204–5). The equation of civilization with commerce might have become one of the great clichés of the epoch. But, for the Nonconformists, it was far from a platitude. The point was not to create an exploitable dependency, although that did happen. Nor was it simply to play on base desire to make people give ear to the Gospel, although that happened too. It ran much deeper. Trade had a capacity to breach 'the sullen isolations of heathenism', to stay the 'fountain of African misery' (Livingstone 1940, 255). All of which made material reform an urgent moral duty. The optimism of the missionaries in this respect was to falter in the face of the stark realities of the colonial frontier. The Christians had eventually to rethink their dream of a commonwealth of free-trading black communities, actively enhancing their virtue and wealth. But they continued to hold that the market would rout superstition, slavery, sloth; this even when, later in the century, market forces undercut their own idyll of independent African economies, compelling 'their' peoples to become dependent on wages.

There was, in other words, more to championing commerce among heathens than merely making virtue of necessity, as some have suggested, although it is true that many pioneer evangelists had to exchange to survive (Beck 1989, 211). In fact, the most ardent advocates of free enterprise were often those most opposed to clergy themselves doing business. Livingstone (1857, 39) held that, while missionary and trader were mutually dependent, 'experience shows that the two employments can not very well be combined in the same person'. Ironically, he was to be accused of gun-running by the Boers. But then, on the frontier, the lines between prestation, purchase and profit were very fine indeed – and frequently in dispute. While traffic with peoples living beyond colonial borders was forbidden by law, missionaries were de facto exempt, except for the ban on selling liquor, weapons and ammunition. Dealings with Africans often went well beyond the procuring of necessities, involving considerable capital outlay. In the upshot, competition and accusations of dishonorable practice among the brethren soon became common (Beck 1989, 214).

From the first, Tswana associated evangelists, like all whites, with barter. The clergymen tended to be less than open in their formal correspondence about their dealings. Cooperation between the Nonconformists and merchants was close; traders journeying beyond the Orange River tended to lodge at mission stations and often accompanied evangelists on their travels (Livingstone 1960, 141).

The Nonconformists also gave out goods for purposes other than trade. Early on they dispensed tobacco, beads and buttons to encourage goodwill, only to find that prestations came to be expected in return for attending church and school.[3] Few Tswana seem initially to have shared the European distinction between gifts and commodities, donations and payments. Yet one thing was widely recognized: that whites controlled desirable objects. As a result, they soon became the uncomfortable victims of determined efforts to acquire those objects. Their correspondence declared that all Africans, even dignified chiefs, were inveterate 'beggars', that they persistently demanded items like snuff, which the missions were assumed to have in large supply, and that their behaviour violated Protestant notions of honest gain (Moffat and

Moffat 1951, 63). It took a while for the Christians to realize that 'begging' was also a form of homage to the powerful (Price 1956, 166; Mackenzie 1871, 44f).

As Beck (1989, 224) confirms, the evangelists introduced more European goods than did any other whites at the time. Their dealings eroded the local desire for beads and buttons in favour of a complex array of wants, primarily for domestic commodities like clothes, blankets and utensils. But this transformation, as we have suggested, entailed far more than the mere provision of objects. Changing patterns of consumption grew out of a shift in ideas about the nature, worth and significance of particular things in themselves. Which, in turn, was set in play by the encounter of very different regimes of value. Thus, even where their uses seemed obvious, such goods as clothes and furniture were given meanings irreducible to utility alone, meanings which often made the Europeans uneasy (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997, chapter 5).

Yet more basic than this was the fact that, as the century wore on, it was less missionaries than the merchants they brought in their wake who were responsible for the supply of goods. Discomforted by the image of men of God haggling over the price of trinkets (Beck 1989, 213), most evangelists encouraged independent traders to settle on their stations. By 1830 John Philip (1828, i, 204f) had already publicized the success of his 'experiment' to have one open a store at Bethelsdorp. Money, he said, had gone up in the people's estimation. They had begun, enthusiastically, to bring produce to the trader to exchange for goods. Bechuanaland soon followed Bethelsdorp. The introduction of stores in this manner – all the better to instruct non-Western peoples in 'the economic facts of life' – was a high priority among British Protestants in many parts of the world.

Time would mute the idyll of cooperation between missions and merchants. Already in 1841 Mary Moffat (1967, 18), while reiterating the need to foster a desire for commodities, bemoaned the high prices charged by local dealers for 'worthless materials'. While the whites squabbled over their dealings with Africans, Tswana sovereigns had their own reasons for being wary of merchants. The latter paid scant respect to long-standing mores or monopolies, being ready to buy from anyone who had anything desirable to sell; the purchase of ivory and feathers from Rolong 'vassals' in the Kalahari, for instance, cost the life of one businessman and his son (Mackenzie 1871, 130). Such friction was frequent beyond the mission stations (Livingstone 1959, ii, 86). But even when storekeepers operated under the eyes of the evangelists, their behaviour often gave offense. Brawling, theft and sexual assault were common. No wonder that local rulers developed a 'well-known' reluctance to allow itinerant traders to traverse their territories (Mackenzie 1871, 130), or that, later in the century, strong chiefs would try to subject European commerce to strict control (Parsons 1977, 122).

The evangelists would have to wrestle constantly with the contradictions of commerce. In embracing its virtues, they had to deal with the fact that the two-faced coin threatened to profane their sacred mission. Yet the merchants were essential in the effort to reform local economies by hitching them to the colonial market – and to the body of corporate nations beyond.

Object lessons And so the merchants remained on the mission stations, where they prospered. Storekeepers stocked all the quotidian objects deemed essential to a civil 'household economy' (Moffat 1842, 507, 502f): clothes, fabrics, furniture, blankets, sewing implements, soap and candle moulds; the stuff, that is, of feminized domestic life, with its scrubbed, illuminated interiors. Shops also carried the implements of intensive agriculture, and the guns and ammunition required to garner the 'products of the chase', increasingly the most valuable of trade goods. Colonial whites abhorred the idea of weapons in African hands. But, by the 1830s, 'old soldier's muskets' were being sold for '6, 7 and 8 oxen', and three or four pounds of gunpowder for a single animal (Smith 1939, 232).

Mission accounts from the late 1800s show that European commodities had begun to tell their own story in the Tswana world. Ornaments, cooking utensils and consumables were widely purchased, as were coffee, tea and sugar. The foreign goods that seemed everywhere in use spoke of far-reaching domestic reconstruction.

At least in some quarters. The acquisition of these commodities required surplus production and disposable income, which was restricted to the emerging upper and middle peasantry. At the same time, despite their taste for European things, many wealthy men remained reluctant, save *in extremis*, to sell stock (Schapera 1933, 648). On the other hand, the market was particularly attractive to those excluded from indigenous processes of accumulation. Client peoples, for example, were easily tempted to turn tribute into trade – which is why some chiefs lost their monopolies over exchange (but cf. Parsons 1977, 120). Especially along the frontier, ever more Tswana, citizens and 'vassals' alike, entered into commercial transactions; as a result, they acquired manufactured goods well before the South African mineral revolution of the 1870s and the onset of large-scale labour migration. Small objects may speak of big changes, of course. Rising sales of coffee, tea and sugar marked important shifts in patterns of nutrition and sociality. They also tied local populations to the production and consumption of commodities in other parts of the empire (cf. Mintz 1985). As George Orwell (1962 (1937), 82) once said, in this respect, 'changes in diet are more important than changes of dynasty or even of religion'.

But mission accounts also suggest that things had veered out of mission control. Wookey (1884, 304), for instance, admitted that the material developments promoted by the evangelists had not been an 'unmixed good'; in this he anticipated the concerns of African critics, voiced later, about the impact of sugar, alcohol and imported provisions on the health of black populations. Not only had new diseases appeared, but drink had become 'one of the greatest curses of the country'. The most profitable and addictive of commodities, its effects were a sordid caricature of the desire to make 'natives' dependent on the market.

As new industrial centres sprang to life around the diamond fields, the satanic underside of commerce came all but to the Nonconformists' door. And, as it did, it exposed their naivety in hoping to introduce Tswana to the market in a controlled, benevolent manner. By then, in any case, the traders they had brought into their midst had already helped to set a minor revolution in motion through the 'magic' of their commodities. That magic had ambiguous effects. It led, at one extreme, to the contrivance of a polite bourgeois life-world; it led also, among ordinary people, to forms of consumption in which objects were deployed in new designs for living, newly contrived identities, all of them stylistic fusions of the familiar and the fresh. At the other extreme, it left a trail of addiction and poverty (Holub 1881, i, 236). To be sure, the merchants had also given southern Tswana practical lessons in the exploitative side of enlightened capitalism. From the very first, these entrepreneurs had engaged in the infamous practice of buying local produce for a pittance and then, when food was short, selling it back at exorbitant profit.

The missionaries themselves had also played a crucial role in determining the ways in which Western objects and market practices had entered into Tswana life, however; as we have stressed, there is more to commodification than the mere provision of goods. The Christians had set out to instil a 'sacred hunger', a sense of desire that linked refined consumption to a particular mode of producing goods and selves and encouraged continuing investment in civilizing enterprise. Above all else, this required a respect for the many talents of money.

The objectification of value and the meaning of money

Insofar as colonialism entailed a confrontation of different regimes of value, the encounter between Tswana and the missionaries was most clearly played out – and experienced – through the media most crucial to the measure of wealth on either side: cattle, money and the trade beads that, for a while, strung them together. Encounters of this sort, especially when they involved European capitalism in its expansive form, often ended in the erasure of one currency by another. But they sometimes gave rise to processes a good deal more complex than allowed by most theories of commodification. For value is borne by human beings who seek actively to shape it to their own ends. Along the frontier, cash and cows became fiercely contested signs, alibis of distinct, mutually threatening modes of existence.

To Tswana, it will be recalled, beasts were the prime means of storing and conveying wealth in people and things, of embodying value in social relations. In fact, control over these relations was one of the objects of owning animals. Thus, while cattle were indeed sometimes dealt on the foreign market, the bulk of both internal and long-distance trade seems to have been directed towards acquiring more stock.[4] In ordinary circumstances barter never drew on capital. Beads, here, stood for worth in alien and alienated form, circulating against foreign goods, or against those which had been freed from local entanglements. By being transacted with neighbouring people for animals, they could also be used to convert value from more to less reified forms.

But this currency had its own logic. With the increasing standardization of the bead market across the interior in the early 19th century, the value of certain resources in Tswana life was rendered measurable, and more easily negotiable. Articles formerly withheld from sale, or given only for cattle (such as karosses, made as personal property; Lichtenstein 1930, 389), became purchasable (Moffat and Moffat 1951, 262, 267). The Nonconformists encouraged this process of commodification, although their real objective was the introduction of money. Hence they used the token currency themselves to put a price on inalienable things, such as land and labour. Not only did they pay wages in it, but, in 1823, used it to acquire (what they thought was) the freehold on which their station was built (Moffat and Moffat 1951, 189, 113). Beads were also bartered for agricultural surpluses by both missionaries and merchants.

The effort of the evangelists to commodify African land, labour and produce, and to foster a desire for domestic goods, eventually helped to reorient the bulk of trade from the hinterland towards the Cape. This had the effect of limiting the viability of bead currency itself. The latter had served well as long as token transactions remained relatively confined in space and time, as long as they involved a narrow range of luxuries from a few external sources of supply, as long as exchange was sporadic and did not extend to the procurement of ordinary utilities. But once the ways and means of everyday life began to be commodified, and increasingly to emanate from the colonial economy, a more standardized, readily available and widely circulating currency was needed to buy and sell them. And so, as Tswana engaged with a broadening range of manufacturers and middlemen in the 1830s, money quickly became the measure of worth. This, in turn, posed a threat to vernacular regimes of value, which before had been kept distinct from foreign traffic. Even where coin did not actually change hands, it came to stand for the moral economy, the material values and the modes of contractual relationship propagated by the civilizing mission – and its world.

In spite of this, or perhaps because of it, the first attempts of the missions to teach the value of cash were not a success. Tswana evinced distrust in European tender, most notably in paper money. Not only was it suspected of being an easy medium of fraud, but its lack of durability was also a worry. For good reason. Between 1806 and 1824, rixdollar notes were infamously fragile, and were thought unreliable by many whites as well (Arndt 1928, 44, 62). Later in the century, traders would pass illiterate Africans false bills – issued, in one case, by the 'Bank of Leather', entitling the bearer to 'the best Value' in 'London or Paris Boots & Shoes' in exchange for diamonds (Matthews 1887, 196).

Given the uncertainties of colonial currency, the evangelists did not always entrust the introduction of money, or the dissemination of its qualities, to the workings of the market. Occasionally they took matters into their own hands. Thus the Rev. Campbell had, on a tour beyond the colonial frontier in 1812–13, decided that the Griqua merited consolidation both as a 'nation' and as a base for expanding London Missionary Society operations into the interior (Parsons 1927, 198). Crucial to the venture was a proper coinage (Campbell 1813, 256):

> It was likewise resolved, that as they had no circulating medium amongst them, by which they could purchase any small articles . . . supposing a shop to be established amongst them . . . they should apply to the Mission Society to get silver pieces of different value coined for them in England, which

Figure 2 Examples of Griqua Town coins.

> the missionaries would take for their allowance from the Society, having Griqua town marked on them. It is probable that, if this were adopted, in a short time they would circulate among all the nations round about, and be a great convenience.

God's bankers indeed! This mission money would be dubbed 'one of the most interesting emissions in the numismatic history of the British Empire' (Parsons 1927, 202; see also Arndt 1928, 128). Campbell set about ordering supplies of special coinage from a well-known English diesinker. We have record of four denominations, two each in silver and copper. Shipped to South Africa in two consignments in 1815 and 1816, this money established itself in limited circulation (*pace* Arndt 1928, 127), a few examples turning up in places like Kimberley in later years.

The evangelists also deployed other means to foster respect for money. At issue, as we have said, was a moral economy in which its talents measured enterprise and enabled the conversion of wealth into virtue. If there was no cash in the African interior it had to be invented – or its existence feigned. The evidence shows that, even when little coinage was in circulation, the Nonconformists used it as an invisible standard, a virtual currency, against which to tally the worth of goods, donations and services.

Amidst a barter economy the missions reckoned accounts with numerical exactitude. In the 1820s the Methodists on the eastern Cape frontier encouraged offerings of beads and buttons that would be rendered in shillings and pence according to current 'nominal' values (Beck 1989, 223). Also at issue in this small grinding of God's mills was the effort to encourage calculation. Counting – adding up, that is, the margins of profit and loss – enabled accounting, the form of stock-taking that epitomized Puritan endeavour. The evangelists associated numeracy with self-control, exactitude, reason; school arithmetic, for example, was taught mostly in fiscal idiom, computation being inseparable from the process of commodification itself.

Numbers provided a tool with which to equate hitherto incomparable sorts of value, to price them, and to allow unconditional convertibility from one to another. Quantification was iconic of the processes of standardization and incorporation, the erasure of differences in kind, at the core of cultural colonization. But it was also salient to the exacting logic of evangelical Nonconformism, with its need to measure conquests and count treasures. This emphasis on numbers cannot be taken to imply a trading of quality for quantity, however, as Simmel (1978, 444) might have implied in arguing that the reduction of the former to the latter was an intrinsic feature of monetization. The Protestants were also preoccupied with the morality of money, with the exchange of riches for virtue above price. They sought ceaselessly to reconcile these two dimensions of value. For, just as time always entails space, quantity always entails quality.

Still, by promoting the commodification of the Tswana world – where, in fact, cattle had long been counted – colonial evangelism spawned a shift from the qualitative to the quantitative as the dominant idiom of evaluation. This shift had important consequences for control over the flow of wealth, as men of substance were quick to grasp. In effecting it, the Nonconformists were helped, and soon outstripped, by the European traders. Ironically, while these men preferred to do business by barter, they used monetary values to compute all transactions (Philip 1828, i, 205f) – including the wholesale purchase of local produce, for which they gave goods set at well-hiked retail rates, and the extension of loans, from which they extracted high interest (Shillington 1985, 221; Livingstone 1940, 92). In attempts, later on, to exert influence over prices and profits, some Tlhaping farmers would persuade merchants to pay them in cash for their crops (Shillington 1985, 222). But coin remained scarce for a long time and struggles to elicit it from white entrepreneurs would go on well into the next century in some rural areas (Schapera 1933, 649). Not only did storekeepers benefit from conducting business by barter, mediated through virtual money; by using goods as token pounds and pence, they also limited the impact of rising prices in the Colony on those they paid in the interior. This form of cash in kind was a species of signal currency that had its (inverted) equivalent in Tswana 'cattle without legs', or cash as kine. Such were the hybrid media of exchange born of the articulation of previously distinct, incommensurable regimes of value. They expressed the efforts of the different dramatis personae to regulate the conversion of wealth in both directions. We return to them below.

While familiarity with the value of money did not always translate into the circulation of cash, it did bear testimony to the growing volume of Tswana production for the market. Most lucrative were the fruits of the hunt. As they gained access to guns, African suppliers became ever more crucial to the capital-intensive colonial trade in feathers and ivory – until natural resources gave out (Shillington 1985, 24). But agriculture was also important, especially among the middle and upper peasantry. Surpluses were sold in increasing quantities, permitting the purchase of cattle, farming implements, wagons and other commodities. With the discovery of diamonds, but before the territory was annexed by Britain in 1871, Tlhaping, Kora and Griqua took part in the new commerce, finding stones and selling them to speculators for cash, wagons and beasts (Shillington 1985, 38; Holub 1881, i, 242). Matthews (1887, 94f) writes that, once this trade had been outlawed, traffic was conducted in an argot in which gems were referred to as 'calves'.

Although southern Tswana soon lost all claim to the diamondiferous lands, many remained implicated in the local economy around Kimberley – wherever possible converting their profits into livestock. Indeed, a report in the *Diamond news* in 1873 voiced the worry that, by turning their cash into animals, blacks were avoiding wage work (Shillington 1985, 68). Such anxieties were not baseless. But they focused only on Africans of means, underestimating the growing impoverishment of the interior. While most resources, even water, now had a price in southern Bechuanaland (Holub 1881, i, 231, 246), the majority of Tswana were in no position to benefit from new market opportunities. Those with stock and irrigated lands might have been able to provision the diamond fields; however, as John Mackenzie observed, the 'poorer classes . . . [were] often sadly disappointed'.[5] Many had already begun to sell their labour either to rural employers or in the Colony.[6]

Of the ironic history of southern Tswana proletarianization we have written elsewhere (Comaroff and Comaroff 1987; 1997, chapter 4). Here it will suffice to make two points. First, the workings of the colonial economy, of the very mechanisms supposed to 'civilize' and enrich Africans, did more than just eat away at their material lives. It also perverted the effort of the Protestant mission to instill in them a commitment to the idea of self-possessed labour and enlightened commerce; to seed among them the persuasive hegemony of the market as sacralized place, practice and process; to replace their 'primitive communism' with a lifestyle centred on refined domesticity, the nuclear family and money. Second, as this suggests, most ordinary southern Tswana remained reluctant proletarians, with strong views about the terms on which they were willing to sell their labour. Even when hunger was rife, and jobs at the diamond fields were scarce, they were loath to toil on the Transvaal goldmines, where there was a great demand for employees, but where workers were known to be ill treated (Van Onselen 1972, 486; Cape of Good Hope 1907: 20). In fact, observers noted repeatedly that labour migration was not driven by brute necessity. Among other things, it was tied, as an inspector of native locations observed in 1908 (Cape of Good Hope 1909: 32), to the state of cattle-holding; also, as we have said, to the desire of Tswana to invest, through various forms of stock exchange, in local social relations and political enterprises. It was just this, of course, that decades of colonial evangelism had been designed to transform.

Stock responses

Cattle, currency and contests of value By the close of the 19th century southern Tswana communities had become part of a hybrid world in which markets and migration were more or less prominent, in which money had become a ubiquitous standard of worth, in which coin undercut all other currencies, including cattle. For many, this last development was neither inevitable nor desirable. Turning cattle into cash was not a neutral act. It entailed the loss of a distinctive form of wealth and endangered their autonomy. Especially older men, whose power and position derived from their herds, sought to reverse the melting of everything to money. Even more, as we have noted, they tried constantly to convert all gains from the sale of labour or produce into beasts. Their orientation contrasted with that of the rising Christian literati, for whom universalizing media – cash, education, consumer goods – promised entry into a modernist, middle-class commonwealth. Not that these families ceased to invest in beasts; correspondence among southern Tswana elites at the time makes frequent mention of transactions in kine.

The missionaries knew that livestock enabled southern Tswana to sustain their independent existence – and to resist the invasive reach of Christian political economy. Efforts to persuade men to harness their beasts to arable production might have been reasonably successful. But, for the most part, the evangelists had failed to decentre the 'alien order' inscribed in animals. They had not convinced Tswana to dispense with their herds or the social relations secured by them. Quite the contrary; in 1881, in Kuruman, the people were still 'almost all engaged in pastoral pursuits – either being themselves the owners of cattle, or as servicing those who are'.[7] What is more, their stock gave the Africans a potent resource – their own cultural expertise – in their dealings with whites. Here, to their obvious satisfaction, they were on home ground; here their own local knowledge gave them a clear edge; here, within the colonial economy, was one domain, one site of contest, from which they profited (Mackenzie 1887, i, 80). The corollary? By investing in wealth that served as a hedge against the market they made themselves less dependent, conceptually and bodily, on the cycle of earning and spending on which the missions had banked to change their everyday life-ways. Through such ordinary deeds were grand colonizing designs eluded. For a time.

Other whites, in particular those eager to employ black labour, shared the uneasiness of the missionaries over the enduring African preoccupation with cattle. They, too, were aware that stockwealth allowed 'natives' some control over the terms on which they entered the market economy. From the very start the colonization of southern Tswana society involved the gradual, deliberate depletion of their herds and the dispossession of their range. It was a process that gained momentum through the century. Early on, Boer frontiersmen tried to press Rolong communities into service by plundering their beasts, seizing their fountains and invading their pastures. Later, in the annexed territories of Griqualand West and Bechuanaland, settlers impounded 'stray' African stock in such numbers that government officials were moved to express concern (Shillington 1985, 99f). Exorbitant fees were charged for retrieving these beasts, cash that had to be borrowed from traders at the cost of yet further indebtedness. The Tswana sense that 'money eats cattle' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992, 151) owed much to such experiences.

Apocalypse, then: rinderpest Several of the evangelists working on the unsettled frontier protested the blatant expropriation of African stock.[8] At the same time, they did not mask their relief when the rinderpest pandemic of 1896 seemed, along with overstocking and deteriorating pasture, to deal a fatal blow to Tswana herds. Clergy elsewhere in southern Africa reported that stricken populations were seeking refuge at missions (Van Onselen 1972, 480f). Many of them cheered the apparent demise of pastoralism. A few, though, pondered its implications for the lingering ideal of viable Christian communities in the countryside. While the scourge would probably help their cause, mused Willoughby at Palapye, it had reduced 'the capital of the country' by some 50% to 60%. And it had deprived Tswana of their protection from drought, their income from transport riding and their main means of locomotion.[9]

The Tswana experience of rinderpest was unquestionably apocalyptic in the short run. Stockowners large and small lost millions of beasts (Molema 1966, 196). The southernmost peoples, who were already land-poor and widely dependent on wage labour, never fully recovered. Some communities in semi-arid regions turned to agriculture for the first time, only to be struck by locusts and drought. Over the longer run, in fact, herds did recover in most places. But the impact of the devastation was inseparable from that of wider political and economic processes unfolding at the time – most immediately from the protracted, at times violent, struggle of the Africans to withstand those who would deprive them of their autonomy. Beasts were often implicated in acts of rebellion along the frontier; they became highly charged objects of contestation on both sides. When government agents sought to halt the implacable advance of the pandemic by shooting entire herds of Tswana stock,[10] they were met with acute disaffection. Rumours spread that the authorities had introduced the rinderpest to reduce blacks to servitude (Van Onselen 1972, 487). In the end, some rulers complied with the administration and received compensation. From cattle to cash once more.

Africans in the Cape called the rinderpest *masilangane*, 'let us all be equal' (Van Onselen 1972, 483), a sardonic reference to its levelling effects and to the power of beasts to make or break people. While the pandemic was ruinous, it did not diminish the value of stock among Tswana. Exploiting the transport crisis caused by the shortage of oxen, the upper peasantry were first to rebuild their herds – and, with them, the distinctions that comprised their world. Their understanding of the economic forces at work was epitomized in the relation of cattle to coin. Not only could coin eat cattle, but the replacement of the second was made possible by the first. And yet animals remained the preferred form in which to store money; a form which, barring catastrophe, allowed it to grow into, and accumulate, social worth. The association of beasts with banks became a commonplace, making livestock synonymous with wealth at its most generative (cf. Alverson 1978, 124). In the event, cash came to be seen as the most fitting recompense for kine (Schapera 1933, 649), kine the optimum medium for the storage of cash. As we said earlier, they were alike special commodities. Both had an 'innate' capacity to equate and translate different sorts of value. And to produce riches. It is this capacity to commensurate that gives such media their magic. Because of it, they seem to bring about transformations, and so to make history, in their own right.

But cash and cattle were also different in one respect that no European political economist could have anticipated: their distinctive colours, their racination. Money was associated with transactions controlled by whites. It was also a highly ambiguous instrument. On the one hand, it opened a host of new possibilities, typifying the culture of the mission and its object-world, and it made thinkable new materialities, new practices, new passions, new identities. Yet, on the other, in its refusal to respect personal identities, it also undermined 'traditional' monopolies, eroded patriarchal powers, displaced received forms of relationship. 'Money', the vernacular saying goes, 'has no owner' – *madi ga a na mong*. In democratizing access to value, it put a great deal of the past at risk, sometimes in the cause of transitory desire. Formerly inalienable, intransitive values might now be drawn into its melting pot. And, in the name of debt, tax collectors could attach Tswana cattle and force men to sell their labour to raise cash.

Government stock, live stocks Meanwhile, many observers were announcing the death of African pastoralism. Prematurely, it turns out. The *Report of the South African Native Affairs Commission of 1903–4* (South Africa 1905, 54), concluded that 'money [has become] the great medium of business where formerly cattle were used'. In a post-pastoral age, it went on, Africans should be encouraged to use government savings banks. But the matter was not so straightforward. In 1909 a resigned Rev. Williams wrote to his superiors that, to Tswana, cattle were already like government bonds:[11]

> the Native is very slow to part with his cattle . . . Too often he will see himself, wife and family growing thin, whilst his cattle are increasing and getting fat, but to buy food with any portion of them is like draining his life's blood . . . His cattle are like Government Stock which no holder will sell for the purpose of living on the Capital unless forced to do so.

The reference to 'life's blood' is telling. Williams understood that beasts, here, enabled a particular kind of existence. It was this, for Tswana, that made them capital in the first place. Indeed, any asset that did the same thing might be treated as if it were stock. Even coin. But all too often coin did the opposite, consuming cows and threatening relations made through them. Ironically, it was referred to in Setswana as *madi*, an anglicism and a homonym for "blood." But this was blood, or perhaps blood-money, in a less sanguine sense. It connoted the alienable essence of the labourer, that part of her or him from which others profited (J. Comaroff 1985, 174). As Williams implies, selling cattle under coercive conditions was tantamount to selling lifeblood.

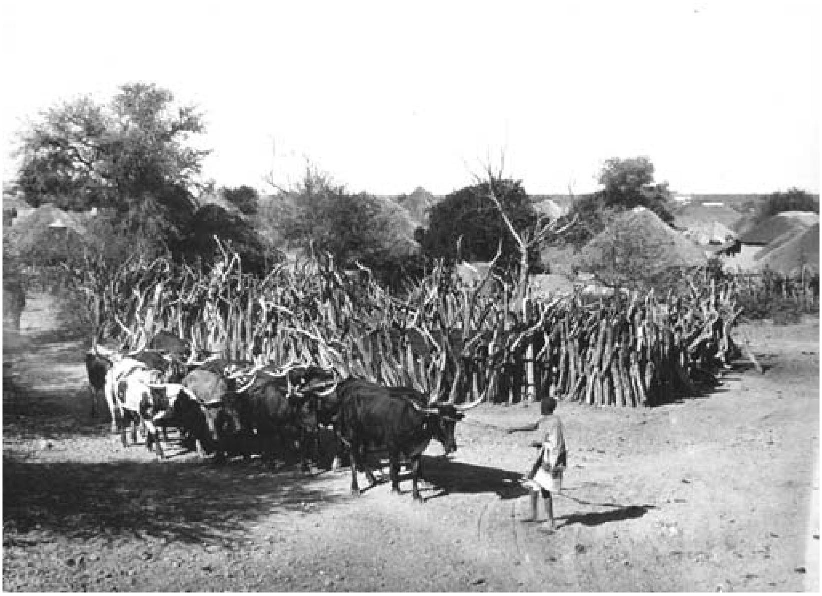

Figure 3 Cattle being herded in Mochudi (photo taken by Isaac Schapera in the early 1930s and made available by the Botswana National Museum and the estate of Isaac Schapera).

The Rev. Williams went on to say that in fact Christian teaching had made inroads into the Tswana reluctance to sell beasts, that many were now willing to part with cattle when corn was scarce. But prices had fluctuated wildly on local markets. No wonder, Williams concluded, contradicting what he had just said, that Tswana were slow to retail their stock. Returns on agricultural produce were also erratic. As a result, money was often scarce. Under these conditions, the capacity of kine to serve as the 'safe custody' of wealth was underlined. Hence the fact that they were exchanged only for coin or other forms of capital, particularly wagons, ploughs and guns, which had become the primary means of producing wealth in a receding rural economy.

But, as importantly, cattle were also shares – live stocks, as it were – in a social community and a moral economy whose reproduction they enabled. In southern Tswana chiefdoms, patronage continued to be secured through the loan of cows; young, educated royals seem, in the early 1900s, to have used their cultural capital to shore up family herds, and vice versa. Court fines were levied in kine and marriage involved the transfer of animals late into the 20th century. Significantly, where bridewealth came to be given in cash payments, the latter was often spoken of as token beasts, 'cattle without legs' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992, 148).

Endings, continuities

Livestock, in sum, were still the medium for making the social connections that formed and re-formed a recognizable social world. These 'signal transactions' (Sansom 1976, 145) – in nominal animal currency at a rate well below prevailing prices – distinguished privileged exchanges from ordinary commercial dealings. Legless cattle were a salient anachronism, an enclave within the generalizing terms of the market. Counted in cows but paid in coin, this notional cash in kine was the inverse of the cash as kind deployed by merchants to compel Africans to barter at non-competitive rates. Both virtual currencies served as modes of surge control that tried to harness the flow of value, if in opposite directions, by putting a brake on the rapid conversion from one form to another.

It was precisely because they experienced colonization as a loss of control over the production and flow of value that so many Tswana pinned their hopes on cattle in the early 20th century. In them, it seemed, lay the means for recouping a stock of wealth and, with it, a sense of self-determination. This did not imply an avoidance of money or wage work. The Africans had been made dependent, to a greater or lesser degree, on the colonial marketplace; their access to beasts and other goods – not to mention cash – lay increasingly in the sale of their produce and/or their labour. Neither did it imply opposition to Christianity. By the turn of the century most chiefs had joined the church, and many of their people followed suit, even if they were not, in the main, pious converts. The significant contrast in this world did not lie between Christian and non-Christian. It was between those for whom the values and relations inscribed in cattle remained paramount and those more invested, ideologically and materially, in the capitalist economy of turn-of-the-century South Africa. Cows, and the ways in which they were used, were the markers of this contrast. Rather than the bearers of a congealed, unchanging tradition, they were the links between two orders of worth. Thus, even where they served as icons of *setswana*, they were hybrid signs of identity in the here-and-now; identity that was itself a matter of shifting relations and distinctions.

Remember too, in this respect, that stockwealth was not repudiated by those of more modernist bent; they tended to treat it like other forms of capital in a world of mercantilism, commerce and commodities. It was they – the educated children of old elites, the upper peasantry, and the petite bourgeoisie cultivated by the mission – who were heirs to the liberal vision of the early evangelists. Others, less able to ride the contradictions of colonial political economy and Protestant modernism, remained marginal to the conventions and the cultural practices of the marketplace. They sought to garner what they could of its wealth,[12] and to invest it in the social and material assets they knew and appreciated. This was to be an enduring strategy, visible even as the forces of global capital reshaped the post-apartheid southern African periphery in the late 20th century. In August 1995 the *Gaming gazette* of the Sun International Corporation carried the story of a man, apparently of modest means, from Ramotswa in Botswana. He had hit the jackpot on a slot machine at the Gaborone Sun Hotel. Ralinki, his given name, would use his winnings to buy beasts. For Tswana, he explained, ‘cattle are . . . wealth, and it is traditional to have as many as possible to pass on to your sons’.[13]

Which brings us back to the matters with which we began. World historical movements of social incorporation – nation-building, colonialism, globalization and the like – are all founded on a logic of commensuration and conversion, on the demand that inimical sorts of value – in respect of language and culture, wealth, beauty, even the idea of God – are made equatable and translatable. Irreconcilable forms of difference among people and things are rendered reducible, imaginatively and concretely, to common denominators. As our case shows, such processes of commensuration and conversion, and above all their enabling currencies, have often been the focus of concern, indeed of struggle, among people caught up on all sides of colonial encounters. These people tend to be minutely sensitive to the capacity of diverse media – money, beads, stock or whatever – to make or to resist convertability and, therefore, the modes of exchange, abstraction, exploitation and incorporation they allow, modes that sustain or threaten the autonomy, distinctiveness and control we often associate with the 'local'. That is why currencies of conversion often come to be fetishized, why they seem to have a power all of their own, why they loom so large at times of great historical changes of scale in economy, society and culture. Hence the obsession on the part of European missionaries with inducting Africans into the use of money – and the equally impassioned investment, among Tswana, in retaining their wealth in kine. Conversion, after all, was not merely a matter of religious reform. It was the key mechanism of imperialism at large.

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Notes

1 What seems significant in the use of the coin, jewel, bead or shell as personal adornment is that it be regarded as intrinsically valuable; not, like notes or credit cards, as a token of value that resides elsewhere. Yet the distinction between 'real' worth and its representation is often hard to sustain.

2 Earlier discrepancies – and the fact that they could mass produce trinket cash – had, of course, been advantageous to the Europeans. In 1802 LMS clergy in the eastern Cape actually contemplated setting up a button factory to assist their purchase of things like stock (Beck 1989, 214).

3 Mrs Hamilton, New Lattakoo, 16 February 1818 (CWM, LMS Incoming Letters (South Africa), 7-3-A).

4 There is evidence from elsewhere in South Africa that some African traders sold stock in order to use the cash they received to buy more at lower prices (Beck 1989, 214; Peires 1981, 100).

5 J. Mackenzie, Kuruman, 17 February 1882, Report for 1881 (CWM, LMS South Africa Reports, 2-1).

6 J. Mackenzie, Kuruman, 17 February 1882, Report for 1881 (CWM, LMS South Africa Reports, 2-1); R. Price, Kuruman, 29 April 1885 (CWM, LMS Incoming Letters (South Africa), 43-1-B); Mackenzie (1871, 521; 1975, 42f); Wookey (1884, 304f).

7 J. Mackenzie, Kuruman, Report for 1881 (CWM, LMS South Africa Reports, 2-1).

8 Mackenzie (1887, i, 234f); cf. W. Ashton, Barkly West, 26 January 1887 (CWM, LMS Incoming Letters (South Africa), 44-5-A).

9 W.C. Willoughby, Palapye, 21 April 1896 (CWM, LMS Incoming Letters (South Africa), 53-1-D).

[10] J. Brown, Taung, Report for 1896 (CWM, LMS South Africa Reports, 2-4); cf. Cape of Good Hope (1897, 71f).
[11] H. Williams, Kanye, Report for 1908 (CWM, LMS South Africa Reports, 4-2).
[12] In fact the very poor had little or no stock, or any other assets. They depended on wage work, and whatever else came to hand, to eke out an existence for themselves and their families.
[13] Ralinki's Speedy P98 000 Win, *Gaming gazette* 5 (8) (August 1995), 2.

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Cattle, community and corrals *John Creighton*

Jean and John Comaroff's paper provides an elegant narrative describing the processes at work behind the adoption of coinage amongst the Tswana of southern Africa under the influence of European missionaries and colonists. My own particular interests are set back two thousand years earlier with the adoption of coin in France and Britain. At this time Rome was the up-and-coming imperial power engaged in trade, and then conquest, stretching its area of influence and dominions from the Mediterranean littoral into temperate Europe. As such I envy the Comaroff's ability to use a rich array of source material that is unavailable to me with my much poorer archaeological remains and fragmentary literary sources. None the less, many of the themes have echoes of processes that must have taken place many years before in this other time and place.

I would particularly like to comment on two aspects of their discussion. First, I would query the distinction that they draw between the uses of cattle to create social connections in contrast to the impersonal use of money and, second, I would like to look at some of the archaeological correlates of the commodification of cattle, thinking about the evidence that I as an archaeologist would look for to develop this narrative.

Cattle as 'shares' in a social community

The paper discussed the role of cattle in constructing enduring connections among kin and affines, patrons and clients, sovereigns and supporters, men and their ancestors. Exchange, usually involving cattle, secured rights in, and claims over, others. 'The object of social exchange was precisely not to accumulate riches with no strings attached; the traffic in beasts served to knit human beings together in an intricate weave, in which the density of linkages and the magnitude of value were one and the same thing' (p. 113). This they contrasted with the early modern concept of money as 'capable of setting free the intrinsic worth of the world to be traded in neutral, standardized terms' (p. 111). Money was seen, in a sense, as antisocial: 'in its refusal to respect personal identities, it also undermined "traditional" monopolies, eroded patriarchal powers, displaced received forms of relationship . . . In democratizing access to value, it put a great deal of the past at risk' (p. 128).

Coming from my angle of looking at the Roman world, I found this dichotomy curious. In the late republic money was in many ways used in a similar manner to the cattle amongst the Tswana. Far from being impersonal and diminishing social relations, coin was one of the media through which these were articulated, through pretty much the same processes of investing, giving and lending it to a range of kin and affines.

In the Roman republic the elite invested cash in relatives, friends and clients. These loans were not just anonymous interest-bearing payments; they were one of the mechanisms through which the patron–client relationship was forged. Aspiring senators would lend money to clients, or act as surety for others to lend them cash. They would assist their subordinates in other ways too by defending clients' interests in court and would speak on their behalf to other influential Romans, such as the *quaestores* who distributed state funds and conducted auctions. If the senator was a commander in the field, then his clients might serve and fight for him, in turn he would ensure his clients got a proportion of the booty. However, money flowed the other way as well. Clients would support their patron's career, even funding a senator's political campaigns for elected office in return for influential jobs. They could even assist a patron in paying a fine if he were convicted of some misdemeanour, of embezzlement or abuse of power. Money flowed, often in large sums, from one person to another or from one part of the empire to another, but this flow of cash for the main part took place bounded within and consolidating social relations. Other forms of moneylending at a high interest could also exist, but that was the exception.

The investment in clients and relatives with cash seems to directly parallel the Tswana investment with cattle. Indeed the Roman word for money (*pecunia*) derives from that for cow (*pecus*). So one question I would pose is to what extent is the distinction between social bonds through investing cattle and impersonal exchange through the use of coin a real dichotomy? Despite the plague of rinderpest in the late 19th century cattle continued to be the preferred store of wealth amongst the Tswana, but is there any sign that those previously endowed with large herds start to invest cash in clients and relatives in the way that they had formerly invested cattle, or was coin used in a different socially un-embedded way from the start?

The size and management of cattle

The second area which I am very curious about is the transformation which takes place in the breeding and management of cattle as the process of commodification took place. The Commaroffs' paper is dominated by historical sources, but what are the archaeological correlates of this process taking place?

In northern Europe the transformation from cattle to coin being the major 'store of wealth' is often seen as happening around the Roman conquest, with a shift back to the importance of stock after the decline of Rome. One piece of evidence which is often marshalled to support this interpretation is the change seen in the faunal record. After cattle had become domesticated in the Neolithic they generally decreased in size from their wild ancestors the aurochs; however, around the end of the first millennium B.C. the size of cattle increased again. Larger beasts predominate in Roman times only for them to temporarily shrink in size again during the early migrationary period until towns and markets once again predominated in the landscape of the later medieval era. The argument goes that in prehistory it was the number, investment and dispersal of the cattle which was valued and the social ties thereby generated (a clear analogy being made with societies such as the Tswana here), whereas in the Roman period we have the development of an urban market in meat, so the size of the animals becomes important in a way it was not before. Size of cattle and the commodification of meat are seen as relational.

So what happened in the nineteenth century amongst the Tswana? While cattle were still invested in as the preferred 'store of wealth', did their increasing exchangeability with cash lead to similar processes at work, with new stock management practices leading to larger cattle or new breeds coming in?

In southern Africa as a whole, the indigenous Africander breed of cattle dominated (from the Sanga group of cattle breeds found across the continent); these had good resistance to heat and ticks and a quiet temperament (DAGRIS 2004). They were large animals, mature cows nowadays weighing between 525 and 600 kg. But whether this size and weight was reached by the cattle before selective Afrikaans stock breeding in the 18th and 19th centuries is unclear; again it would be worth looking at the faunal record. Breeding programmes in the 20th century tried to improve on this stock because they had a growth potential lower than desired and were late in reaching maturity, and because many of the cows did not calve regularly. Interbreeding with other stock (British Herefords and shorthorns) led to new breeds such as the Bonsmara, which grew more rapidly, having about 20% higher weights at weaning; they also calved more regularly. Here the requirements of the market clearly led to change in the cattle stock. But what about cattle amongst the Tswana at an earlier date? They had their own distinct but smaller breed of the Sanga-type cattle, mature cows nowadays averaging around 360 kg, but alas a brief search has not revealed data about changing practice amongst them (DAGRIS 2004). Archaeological analysis of cattle bones is really needed to give the time-depth data to see the impact of any changes in the cattle alongside the historical changes outlined by the Comaroffs.

On a different tack, what happened to the Tswana settlements? Structurally these had been dominated by a cattle enclosure at their heart, signifying the importance of these animals. Around this were built houses to form the homestead and the whole was surrounded by a stockade. The entrance to the complex was at the lowest point, often facing the east, opposed at the highest point by the dwelling of the male head of the household, with those of wives on either side in order of seniority. Within the central enclosure grain was stored and important men were commonly buried. This common arrangement has come to be described as the central cattle pattern (Mitchell 2002). But what happened in the period of commoditization of cattle? Did the central cattle enclosures retain their dominant position or can we see their importance change as the role of cattle altered? Did men continue to be buried associated with the all-important cattle enclosures as their role in society shifted?

These are some of the potential types of archaeological evidence which I would look for to help elaborate Jean and John Commaroff's historical narrative.

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Crossing boundaries. Regimes of value in intercultural colonial contexts. Reflections on Jean and John Comaroff's 'Beasts, banknotes and the colour of money' *Laurier Turgeon*

This thought-provoking essay strives to theorize the concept of 'regimes of value' and, more specifically, the role of material objects in the convertibility of different orders of value in the making of modern economies and societies. Put forth by Arjun Appadurai in his edited volume *The social life of things* (1986), the notion of regime of value originally referred to the use of categories of material objects in the construction of value within a specific cultural context. Appadurai was more concerned with the way value is invested in objects than in theories of exchange and currency, consequently the notion remained relatively untheorized. Jean and John Comaroff break new theoretical ground in at least two ways. First, they take into consideration and juxtapose different regimes of value – primarily cattle for the southern Tswana peoples and currency for the European colonizers – to see how they are constructed and become the focus of complex mediations between these groups in the colonial context of South Africa. Cattle, like currency (in the form of coins or paper money), come to objectify value because they have the power to make or break social relations, to build new social hierarchies or overturn old ones, to do or undo moral economies. They show that different regimes of value can coexist in the same social space and be played out against one another. Second, Jean and John Comaroff interrogate the role of conversion, or 'commensuration', as they say, of regimes of value, that is, their power to make objects from different cultural contexts universally objectifiable, comparable and negotiable. Instead of making difference, as is usually thought, it is the capacity to negate difference and make all things equal that expresses the effectiveness of a regime of value. It is also these processes of commensuration and conversion that give material objects their magical qualities, through which they become fetishized and 'seem to have a power all of their own' (p. 131). More than the written word or oral discourse, it is material objects that become the preferred tools and means of colonial domination. The authors contribute then to a better understanding of the workings of political economies as well as to the materialities of colonialism.

I would like to raise three issues in the hope of furthering discussions and comprehension of regimes of value in colonial contexts. The first deals with the circulation of material objects across social and cultural boundaries.

Although Jean and John Comaroff are well aware of the vital importance of the circulation of objects in the construction of regimes of value, they appear to be more concerned with their circulation within the same cultural context rather than across cultural boundaries. Regimes of value are presented as constructed internally and 'brought up against one another in the encounter' (p. 107), confronting each other, as it were, and each one attempting to convert the other through processes of commensuration. Do we not have also to consider regimes of value as being themselves built through the intercultural and international exchange? For example, precious metals (gold and silver) used in England to manufacture coins or to guarantee paper money were not produced locally. They were acquired through trade with Europe, America, Africa or Asia. These foreign objects were appropriated, transformed in English mints, made into English currency and accumulated in English banks to express the wealth and the worth of the English people. I know almost nothing about cattle-raising in South Africa, but it does seem legitimate to think that cattle were traded between different ethnic groups, that certain groups acquired larger and better stocks, and that their herds were used to express domination over others. In other words, does the intercultural movement of objects not enhance their meaning and value, as Fred Myers has suggested in *The empire of things* (2001)? Are exchanged objects not appropriated things? Once they have changed hands, they become culturally recontextualized (Thomas 1991); they take on other shapes, acquire new functions, undergo changes in meaning and take on value. When an object is transformed, the process also transforms those who are making use of it. Taking possession of new objects brings about not only cultural reconfiguration, but also social reproduction and the regeneration of individuals and groups. During the colonial encounter, did natives and Europeans alike not seek empowerment through the acquisition of the other's objects? Is what Goethe has so forcefully demonstrated about language not also true of culture, that its power is displayed not in rejecting but rather in incorporating what is foreign to it?

Instead of focusing just on cattle and currency, it may be enlightening to pay more attention to material objects of apparently lesser importance, but which may have constituted sub-regimes of value of their own and contributed to the consolidation of more global regimes. If southern Tswana peoples were so eager to acquire English beads and buttons, in the same way that the English were to obtain South African feathers, ivory and diamonds, it was certainly because it heightened their sense of worth and self-esteem. Tswana peoples and English alike appear to have been more attracted by these exotic objects than by cattle or by paper money. It may be instructive for the authors to deal with these exotics more extensively to see concretely how they were used and valued in the cultures of reception. It is perhaps the exchange of these exotics that made the use of cattle and currency possible and enabled their convertibility. Were beads and buttons not used by the Tswana people to purchase cattle from neighbouring groups for themselves, and feathers and ivory, which could be traded to the English for more beads and perhaps even some coins? Did these highly attractive exotics not become the mediating agencies between the two primary regimes of value?

The second issue I would like to raise concerns imitation and duplication. In many colonial contexts imitation (i.e. voluntary acculturation) can be an effective strategy of countering the colonizing power. It entails literally putting oneself in the place of the colonizer to progressively occupy his social and political space and to eventually replace him (Bhabha 1994). Acculturation is viewed here as a superficial and temporary process, which enables the colonized to preserve his original identity or at least maintain some control over it. I wonder if the same is not true of regimes of value. Was duplication not a more effective means of impeding the other's regime of value than convertibility? Did the development of herds by English colonials not hinder Tswana cattle-raising as much as, if not more than, the use of English currency? Was the widespread use of beads by South Africans not a strategy to counter the use of money by the English?

A third question I would like to raise regards sources. Jean and John Comaroff have based their study primarily on printed English sources. Written sources can provide a wealth of new and revealing information on the materialities of objects as the authors of this article have clearly shown. It would be simplistic to think that one needs to study the objects themselves and their archaeological or ethnographic contexts to understand their materialities. All sources – whether written, oral or material – can contribute to a better understanding of the material qualities of objects and their role in the construction of regimes of value in colonial contexts. In this case, however, the employment of solely English printed sources makes one wonder if the account is not to a certain extent biased and incomplete. The absence of material or even oral sources of information makes it difficult to comprehend the uses southern Tswana peoples made of European objects (buttons, beads, coins, paper money) and the meaning and value they attributed to them. In studying the uses Amerindians made of European beads in colonial North America I realized how important it was to use the archaeological record to document the meaning they gave to them. Although abundant, European printed and manuscript sources provided only very scant and sketchy information on these issues. It was through the archaeological record, for example, that it became clear that almost all European beads circulating amongst Amerindians were exhibited on the body and quickly buried after their acquisition. I am not aware of the state of the archaeological record in South Africa; I suspect it is poor, as in most parts of Africa. Nevertheless, the authors could through comparative ethnography bring up some of these issues and be more cautious in their interpretations of native reactions to European material objects. At the end of their essay they cite the oral testimony of Ralinki, a modest man from Botswana, who used his winnings at the local casino to buy cattle, to convert currency into the traditional form of wealth, which is an indication that not much had changed on the colonial frontier.

Although I know very little about South Africa, the use of European beads amongst Native Americans in the early colonial period, which I have studied quite extensively, points towards imitation and, at the same time, appropriation in the construction of an alternative regime of value (Turgeon 2004). I would like to quickly present this case for the sake of comparison.

Glass and shell beads rapidly became the most sought-after of European objects amongst Amerindians in 16th- and 17th-century north-eastern North America and they were initially employed in many of the same ways as Europeans employed them, that is, primarily for body ornamentation. They were quick, however, to use beads in more excessive and radical ways. They began to circulate widely and in large quantities as currency in commercial transactions but, more importantly, as aesthetic materials used to cover all of the joints of the body : waist, neck, wrists, knuckles, elbows, shoulders, ankles and knees. Almost all of the places where the bodily parts converge were honoured by the wearing of beads; these mobile and also fragile articulations of the body were thus given agency. They were threaded together and made more resistant, 'hardened', as it were. Beads literally tied the different limbs to the body and empowered them. Using the body as a site of display was an effective means of showing ownership and making it visible. The body and, more particularly, the skin have always been considered the first canvas of the art object and of conspicuous consumption. They embodied the tension of foreign appropriation and, as a result, bestowed strength upon their owners. Beads were worn by all members of the community – men, women and children – at strategic moments of its social reproduction. Beads offered strength, courage and protection to men at war; they bestowed sexual attractiveness upon young women wanting to attract a spouse for themselves and a son-in-law for their parents; and they served especially to protect children, the youngest and most vulnerable elements of society. In Amerindian cultures beads were considered more valuable than most other foreign objects because they could be associated with the body and efficiently expressed abstract social and political values. The polished surface of beads conveyed the notions of finish, brilliance, aliveness and action. Immutable, they were icons of completeness, wholeness and immortality. Glass, shell and copper beads were also reflective items signifying light, mind and knowledge for the Iroquoian and Algonquian groups of the north-east. Beads as metaphors for eyes and light had the power to activate the memory and serve as mnemonic devices for remembering important events or for determining culturally encoded actions. From the beginning of the 17th century, perhaps even earlier, beads woven into belts to secure the main articulation of the body, the waist, were detached from the body to represent the body politic. Made up of thousands of shell (and sometimes glass) beads, tightly woven together by women to express the 'words' or 'voices' of the group, these beaded belts materialized the assembly of the people and their voices, and became central objects in diplomatic encounters, used for negotiating treaties, redeeming captives, compensating for lost lives and recording important historical events. Further, their regenerative potency extended beyond the body and the body politic into the afterlife. As with other European trade goods, almost all beads circulating in North America ended up in burials. Mortuary offerings as a phenomenon appear to be related to European contact, for burials at the end of the prehistoric period included almost no material objects. The interment of beads and most other exotic objects appears at the time of the arrival of Europeans and progressively increases with the development of trade; furthermore, the vast majority of beads buried are of European origin. The inclusion of beads in graves represented an extension of the exchange system into the other world; the intention to withdraw them from earthly circulation, to appropriate them radically and, in so doing, to give them added ritual value. Like precious metals or stones in Europe, beads in North America acquired material and ideational value because they were appropriated foreign objects. As regimes of value, they had the power to convert currency into courage and turn dead bodies into living souls.

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