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# 'A half-baked and sickly commercially-minded native': African Entrepreneurship and Cooperative Societies in Southern Rhodesia, c1940s

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## Abstract

This article examines colonial rhetoric, white traders, and African elite viewpoints on cooperative societies and African entrepreneurship during the Native Trade and Production Commission of Inquiry of 1944, known as the Godlonton Commission. It argues that some officials of the Native Affairs Department advocated African cooperative societies as a means of marketing African crops while others were sceptical of the entrepreneurial ability of Africans. It further argues that white traders, represented by powerful business associations, appropriated the derogatory colonial rhetoric on African entrepreneurship to defend their interests in the African reserves. The testimonies of African elites who gave evidence to the Godlonton Commission were mixed. While some supported the idea of African cooperatives, others rejected it preferring that the state support African traders against white traders in the African reserves. Cumulatively, the sentiments aired at the Godlonton Commission contributed to the colonial disinterest in cooperative societies and African entrepreneurship during the post-Second World War period. The article contributes to our historical understanding of African entrepreneurship during the 1940s, and of cooperative societies and the Godlonton Commission in general. The study uses the evidence presented to the Godlonton Commission, its final report, and other archival documents.

**Keywords:** Cooperative societies; entrepreneurship; marketing; capital; African Reserves; Southern Rhodesia.

## Opsomming

Hierdie artikel ondersoek koloniale retoriek, wit handelaars en die swart elite se standpunte oor koöperatiewe verenigings en swart entrepreneurskap tydens die Kommissie van Ondersoek na Inheemse Handel- en Produksie (*Native Trade and*

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*Production Commission of Inquiry*) van 1944, wat bekend staan as die Godlonton-kommissie. Dit voer aan dat sommige amptenare van die Departement van Naturellesake (NAD – *Native Affairs Department*) swart koöperatiewe verenigings gesien het as 'n manier om Afrika-gewasse te bemark, hoewel ander skepties was oor Afrikane se entrepreneursvermoë. Die artikel voer aan dat wit handelaars, verteenwoordig deur magtige sakeverenigings, die koloniale retoriek oor swart entrepreneurskap toegeëien het om hul belange in die swart reservate te verdedig. Die swart elite se getuienis aan die Godlonton-kommissie was uiteenlopend. Terwyl sommiges die idee van swart koöperasies ondersteun het, het ander dit verwerp en verkies dat die staat swart handelaars teenoor wit handelaars in die swart reservate ondersteun. Kumulatief het die sentimente wat by die Godlonton-kommissie gelug is, deels bygedra tot die koloniale gebrek aan belangstelling in koöperatiewe verenigings en swart entrepreneurskap in die tydperk ná die Tweede Wêreldoorlog. Die artikel dra by tot ons historiese begrip van swart entrepreneurskap tydens die 1940's, koöperatiewe verenigings en die Godlonton-kommissie. Die studie steun op die bewyse wat aan die Godlonton-kommissie voorgelê is, sy finale verslag, en ander argivale dokumente.

**Sleutelwoorde:** Koöperatiewe verenigings; entrepreneurskap; bemarking; kapitaal; swart reservate; Suid-Rhodesië.

## Introduction

Building on the growing scholarship on African entrepreneurship and cooperative societies, this article analyses the proposal by the Godlonton Commission of 1944 to introduce cooperative societies[1] to market crops such as maize, and to promote African traders in the African reserves of Southern Rhodesia.[2] By examining some of the testimonies presented to the commission, the article sheds light on the colonial rhetoric, together with the white trader and elite African sentiments, on African entrepreneurship and cooperative societies.[3] It demonstrates that colonial officials' scepticism of the cooperative societies was partially influenced by racist assumptions about Africans' ability to understand business methods. For the white traders, the cooperative societies posed a threat to their livelihoods.[4] The article argues that

1. The idea was to form a consumer cooperative society that had a dual role of marketing African produce and selling manufactured commodities.
2. The African reserves existed under the Land Apportionment Act (1930) and was land held in Trust on behalf of Africans. This land was usually barren and far from meaningful lines of communication.
3. The term white(s) refers to people of European descent, and the word African(s) refers to the indigenous people.
4. The quotation in the article's title comes from the following source: National Archives of Zimbabwe (hereafter NAZ), ZBJ 1/2/1, Memo from the Mashonaland Kaffir Truck

African views of cooperative societies, as expressed by the Africans invited to the Godlonton Commission, were mixed. While some Africans sided with the colonial officials, others resented the control that came with cooperative societies and the competition to African businesses that they posed. At the same time others urged the colonial state to protect African traders from white traders.

The Godlonton Commission was mandated to investigate the political, economic and social aspects of Africans' lives. The Godlonton Commission's final report's recommendations re-organised the African reserves culminating in the passing of the Native Land Husbandry Act of 1951, which created individual tenure under state control.[5] The Godlonton Commission set out to re-draw African agriculture against the backdrop of the failure of Emory Delmont Alvord`s centralisation methods, begun during the late 1920s.[6] Of the many issues dealt with by the Godlonton Commission, it also looked at the 'the economic or other benefits to be derived by Africans from the adoption of cooperative methods of buying and selling both in and outside the Native reserves.'[7] For the Native Affairs Department (NAD), African cooperative societies could solve some of the challenges facing the state in the marketing of maize as well as alleviating the famine in African reserves during periodic droughts.[8] Commenting on colonial interventions in African agriculture, Jocelyn Alexander notes that 'this was a period in which great faith was placed in the merits of state planning, in the possibility of increasing economic efficiency through technical innovation, and in close government regulation'.[9] In its recommendations, the Godlonton Commission advised the state to appoint a Registrar to 'encourage, guide and advise Africans in the limited kinds of cooperation it recommended'.[10]

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Wholesalers Association (MKTWA), to Native Trade and Production Commission, 19 September 1944.

5. M. Drinkwater, *The State and Agrarian Change in Zimbabwe's Communal Areas* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 65; J. Alexander, *The Unsettled Land: State-Making and the Politics of Land in Zimbabwe 1893–2003* (Harare: Weaver Press, 2006); and I. Phimister, 'Rethinking the Reserves: Southern Rhodesia's Land Husbandry Act Reviewed', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 19, 2 (1993), 225-239.
6. Drinkwater, *The State and Agrarian Change*, 40 and 55. Centralisation involved the division of land into 'arable and grazing purposes, with "village lines" and roads "centralized" between the two'. In 1926, Alvord, an American agricultural missionary, became 'Agriculturalist for the Instruction of Natives' in Southern Rhodesia.
7. NAZ, GEN-P/DIN, R.J. Dinnis, 'History of Cooperative Societies for Africans in Southern Rhodesia', Nadform Service Information Sheet, No. 17, 22 March 1960.
8. For more on drought and famine in colonial Zimbabwe see T. Takuva, 'A Social, Environmental and Political History of Drought in Zimbabwe, c.1911 to 1992' (PhD thesis, Stellenbosch University, 2022) and B. Kusena, 'Rural Food Security in Mutare District, Zimbabwe, 1947-2010' (PhD thesis, Rhodes University, 2019).
9. J. Alexander, 'Technical Development and the Human Factor: Sciences of Development in Rhodesia's Native Affairs Department', in *Science and Society in Southern Africa,* ed. S. Dubow (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 212.
10. NAZ, GEN-P/DIN, R.J. Dinnis, 'History of Cooperative Societies for Africans in Southern Rhodesia'.

Against this background, the article brings together scholarship on African entrepreneurship and cooperative societies in colonial Africa so as to understand the Godlonton Commission's proposal to form cooperative societies in Southern Rhodesia. The cooperative movement emerged in colonial Africa during the interwar period and was spurred on by the Great Depression (1929–1939) and the concomitant global slump in the price of cash crops. In most instances, this came with official sanction from the colonial empires who wanted to control the primary commodities market for the purposes of social engineering. For example, in the British colonies of Ghana, Uganda and Tanzania, cooperative societies emerged, as Patrick Develtere posits, 'as a protest against the disadvantageous terms of trade imposed on the peasants by the … middlemen'.[11] In colonial Zimbabwe, the response entailed curbing African competitiveness in agriculture.[12] As a consequence, in Southern Rhodesia cooperative societies were established by politically powerful white settlers, and not in line with the Rochdale model of economic autonomy and democracy.[13] In other parts of Africa, the state heavily controlled the cooperative societies. Frederick Lugard, the Governor of Nigeria between 1914 and 1919, for example, described the colonial use of cooperatives as a way of exerting control and influence over Africans.[14]

The article draws on the recent literature on African entrepreneurship that criticises the use of cultural interpretations in understanding the history of African entrepreneurship.[15] For example, Sean Maliehe takes to task Volker Wild and Léo-Paul Dana for treating African traders as lacking in economic rationale.[16] Wild and Dana, in their respective works on Zimbabwe and Lesotho emphasise how African cultural business practices inhibited the development of African traders.[17] Specifically,

11. P. Develtere, 'Cooperative Development in Africa up to the 1990s', in *Cooperating out of Poverty: The Renaissance of the African Cooperative Movement*, eds P. Develtere, I. Pollet and F. Wanyama (International Labour Office, World Bank Institute, 2008).
12. See B. U. Kauma, '"Small Grains, Small Gains": African Peasant Small Grains Production and Marketing in Zimbabwe during the Colonial Period, c.1890–1970s', *South African Historical Journal*, 73, 2 (2019), 257-287.
13. The Rochdale model, established in Britain in 1844, is often regarded as the pioneer of the cooperative movement.
14. A. Windel, *Cooperative Rule: Community Development in Britain's Late Empire* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2022).
15. S.M. Maliehe, *Commerce as Politics: The Two Centuries of Struggle for Basotho Economic Independence* (New York: Berghan Books, 2021); T.V. Chambwe, 'A History of African Entrepreneurship in Southern Rhodesia' (PhD thesis, University of the Free State, 2020); M.E. Ochonu, *Entrepreneurship in Africa: A Historical Approach*, (Bloomington: Indiana University, 2018); C. Chachange, 'A Capitalizing City: Dar es Salaam and the Emergence of an African Entrepreneurial Elite (c.1862-2015)', (PhD thesis, Harvard University, 2018).
16. S. Maliehe, 'The Rise and Fall of African Indigenous Entrepreneurs' Economic Solidarity in Lesotho, 1966–1975', *African Economic History*, 45, 1 (2017), 116.
17. V. Wild, *Profit Not for Profit's Sake: History and Business Culture of African Entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe* (Harare: Baobab Books 1997); and L.P. Dana, 'Basuto Culture and Entrepreneurship', in *International Handbook of Research on Indigenous*

Wild exonerates the state as an obstacle to the development of African entrepreneurship and pins African failure to bad business practice.[18] However, as this article shows, the Rhodesian state sided with white trader demands and, because they would have challenged the position of white traders in the African reserves, used colonial assumptions about African capacity for and attitudes towards entrepreneurship to dismiss cooperative societies. As will be demonstrated, Wild's analysis underplays the role of colonial policymaking and opposition from white traders to the development of African entrepreneurship. The article shows how state policies to encourage African entrepreneurs were undermined by colonial stereotypes about African business management and by the vested interests of white and Indian traders, represented for example by the Bulawayo Chamber of Commerce and the Mashonaland Kaffir Truck Wholesalers Association [sic].[19]

The article consists of four sections covering the historical background, cooperative societies, white organised business, and African narratives about business and cooperative societies. The first section looks at the historical background of African entrepreneurship and the crisis in the marketing of African crops in Southern Rhodesia up to the 1940s. It also provides historical context to the Godlonton Commission and argues that it is an important window into understanding African entrepreneurship during the 1940s. The second section covers colonial ideas about cooperative societies and African entrepreneurship. It demonstrates how the crisis in the marketing of African crops led the state to consider African entrepreneurship through cooperative societies. The third section examines the opposition of organised white business to the growth of African entrepreneurship in the African reserves. The article concludes by exploring African voices at the Godlonton Commission.

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*Entrepreneurship* edited by L.P. Dana and R.B. Anderson. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2007.

18. Wild, *Profit Not for Profit's Sake*, 155.

19. I acknowledge the derogatory and unacceptable nature of this term and others quoted in this article. Further, the name of this association has not been redacted for reasons of historical accuracy only. As Tatenda Ganyaupfu and Eric Makombe explain in their article: "'No Person shall Sell Goods at an Unjust Profit": A Review of Consumer Price Controls in Southern Rhodesia, 1939-1949', in *Historia,* 67 (2022), 66, 'Kaffir truck' was a term borrowed from South Africa … and 'was applied to small miscellaneous general goods for barter or sale between the Cape Colony and Africans in the Eastern Cape …[which] over time became synonymous with African trade, involving retail, wholesale and distribution in African designated areas such as the reserves. The commodities earmarked for the African market were distinct, being cheap and of low quality'. On this issue, the above authors cite E. Kramer, 'The Evolution of Policy: Trade and Production in the Reserve Economy of Colonial Zimbabwe' (PhD thesis, University of Zimbabwe, 2003), 57-95.

## Historical Background

Historically, the Southern Rhodesia retail sector was heavily skewed against Africans and other 'non-white' and non-British people.[20] This was achieved through settler protests and legislation such as the Immigration Restriction Ordinance of 1903, which attempted to control migration into the country. For example, in 1891 settlers opposed the decision by the British South Africa Company (BSAC)[21] to award a building contract to an African person in Salisbury, the capital of the colony.[22] However, the first exclusionary statute, the 1903 Immigration Restriction Ordinance, targeted Indian traders who posed an immediate threat to white traders. During the 1890s the Tuli Trading Association and the Scottish African Corporation, white owned retail stores – which sold manufactured commodities to both settlers and Africans - unsuccessfully lobbied the BSAC to bar Indian traders from Salisbury, Bulawayo, and Umtali.[23] This was buttressed by the 1903 Immigration Restriction Ordinance which denied Indians citizenship.[24] Furthermore, after 1904 the state did not renew the trading sites of Indian traders, driving them into the African reserves.[25] As will be demonstrated, the state also replicated these discriminatory measures on African traders when they too began to threaten settler enterprises during the interwar period and beyond.

Although the state claimed that the 1930 Land Apportionment Act 'protected' Africans, in reality it underpinned the exploitative apparatus of the state.[26] In terms of this legislation, Africans could not operate businesses in areas designated 'European', although white traders continued to operate in the African reserves. As such, by the 1930s, Indian and white wholesalers had emerged in the African reserves.[27] Some of these wholesalers, such as Lasovsky Bros, Kaufman & Co. and, Patel and Sons, had started as small retailers before becoming the prominent

20. See G. Bishi, 'Immigration and Settlement of "Undesirable" Whites in Southern Rhodesia, c. 1940s–1960s', in *Rethinking White Societies in Southern Africa,* eds D. Money and D. van Zyl-Hermann (London: Routledge, 2020).
21. Cecil John Rhodes formed the BSAC with the sole purpose of finding gold deposits beyond the Limpopo River. In 1889, the BSAC was granted a Royal Charter to establish colonial structures on behalf of the British government and its mandate ended in 1923 with the introduction of responsible government.
22. P. Stigger, 'Minute Substance versus Substantial Fear: White Destitution and the Shaping of Policy in Southern Rhodesia', in *Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa 1880–1940,* ed. R. Morrell (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 1992), 144.
23. Stigger, 'Minute Substance', 145.
24. Stigger, 'Minute Substance', 145.
25. Stigger, 'Minute Substance', 145.
26. A. Mlambo, *A History of Zimbabwe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 61.
27. NAZ, ZBJ 1/1/2/1, Oral evidence from Motibai P. Patel, the Native Trade and Production Commission, 30 June 1944.

suppliers of the 1940s.[28] Most trading enterprises remained small in size, running on marginal profits. In light of the impact of the Great Depression, the retail trade in the African reserves became the preserve of small white traders who bought African maize at very low prices. [29] The interests of white and Indian traders found representation in pressure groups such as the Bulawayo Chamber of Commerce and the Mashonaland Kaffir Truck Wholesalers Association. These two business associations represented the interests of white and Indian traders. The state relied on the traders to extract capital from African peasants through the supply of manufactured goods in exchange for African crops. Furthermore, this retail trade provided employment to many whites when there was high unemployment during the 1930s.[30]

There were also Africans who traded in the African reserves despite the dominance of white and Indian traders. Chief Native Commissioner (CNC) Henry Simmonds told the Godlonton Commission in 1944 that of the 204 general dealer stores and 113 butcheries registered in the African reserves, 50 stores and 75 butcheries were African-owned.[31] What these statistics suggest is that Africans were quite as entrepreneurial as the white and Indian traders, especially in the meat industry. The state encouraged the opening of butcheries by Africans in light of the colonial policy on de-stocking aimed at reducing the number of cattle that Africans owned.[32]

The changes in the global market for primary commodities created a debate in government circles about the marketing of African produce in the period between the 1930s and the Second World War. The Maize Control Acts of 1931 and 1934, passed to protect white farmers from the harmful effects of the Great Depression, disadvantaged African producers.[33] Compounding matters, African farmers had to

28. NAZ, ZBJ 1/1/2/1, Oral evidence from Motibai P. Patel, the Native Trade and Production Commission, 30 June 1944.
29. B. Kosmin, *Majuta: A History of the Jewish Community of Zimbabwe* (Gwelo: Mambo Press, 1981), 12, 38 and 41.
30 NAZ, ZBJ 1/2/1, Memo from the MKTWA, The Native Trade and Production Commission, 19 September 1944; and NAZ, ZBJ 1/2/1, Memo from the Bulawayo Chamber of Commerce (BCC), the Native Trade and Production Commission, 9 September 1944.
31. NAZ, ZBJ 1/2/1, Memo from the CNC Simmonds, the Native Trade and Production Commission, 22 July 1944. A long-serving official of the NAD, Simmonds became CNC in 1940 replacing Charles Bullock. For more on the nature of the NAD before the 1940s see M.C. Steele, 'The Foundations of a Native Policy: Southern Rhodesia, 1923–1933' (PhD thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1972), 222.
32. Drinkwater, *The State and Agrarian Change*, 59.
33. See, E. Punt, 'The Development of African Agriculture in Southern Rhodesia with Particular Reference to the Interwar Years' (MA thesis, University of Natal, 1979), 93. The Maize Control Acts created a two-pool system, the export and local pools, in which maize could be sold. The prices paid for the local pool were up to 50% above global prices. African producers were allowed to sell just 20% of their maize under the

market their maize through white traders who were often unscrupulous.[34] Ian Phimister notes that 'Lomagundi people complained that "the Traders" offer of goods in payment of maize does not help them in meeting their liabilities to the Government in Native Tax, Dog Tax, Dip Fees and School Fees'.[35] The overall impact of the Maize Control Act was that most African producers abandoned commercial maize production during the 1940s.

Compounding matters, the state had to rethink its policy on African maize production because white farmers also abandoned the crop in favour of tobacco in the 1940s. Phimister and Steven C. Rubert note that, 'the fortunes of the tobacco planters were soaring' while maize production declined with the 'harvest of 1942 … [being] the smallest for sixteen years'.[36] As Phimister opines, 'the movement towards tobacco cultivation was so pronounced and the expansion of the domestic economy so rapid during the 1940s that Southern Rhodesia lost its previous self-sufficiency in basic foodstuffs'.[37] Consequently, Southern Rhodesia was faced with a potential food crisis during the Second World War with both African and white farmers reluctant to grow maize.[38]

Also influencing the discussion of cooperative societies at the Godlonton Commission was the presence of white and Indian traders in the African reserves up to the Second World War, as noted by Bryan Kauma.[39] Their unfair trading practices, aided by the Maize Control Act, led the state to rethink the marketing of African crops and the role that African entrepreneurship through cooperative societies could play. While some white traders like Kaufman Sons & Co, and Lasovsky Bros operated on a large scale, others had to rely on the maize trade.[40] Although the manufacturing sector had expanded during the war years, traders in the African reserves still relied on imports from South Africa, Europe and the USA.[41] During the Great Depression and the Second World War, the state was wary of rural traders' unfair trade practices.

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lucrative local market pool while 80% of the maize grown by white settlers could be disposed of under this pool.

34. T. Ncube, 'Peasant Production and Marketing of Grain Crops in Zimbabwe, 1890–1986: An Overview', *Henderson Seminar Paper*, 72 (1987).
35. I. Phimister, *An Economic and Social History of Zimbabwe, 1890–1948: Capital Accumulation and Class Struggle* (London: Longman, 1988), 186.
36. S. C. Rubert, *A Most Promising Weed: A History of Tobacco Farming and Labour in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1890-1945* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1998) and Phimister, *An Economic and Social History of Zimbabwe*, 225 and 229.
37. Phimister, *An Economic and Social History of Zimbabwe,* 227.
38. See Takuva, 'A Social, Environmental and Political History of Drought in Zimbabwe', and Kusena, 'Rural Food Security'.
39. Kauma, 'Small Grains, Small Gains', 21 and 23.
40. NAZ, S915/75, Trade and Commerce Policy, Minutes of Meeting of Group 13, 29 August 1945.
41. NAZ, S915/75, Trade and Commerce Policy, Minutes of Meeting of Group 13, 29 August 1945.

Timothy Burke, Eira Kramer and Leslie Bessant have written extensively on how rural traders adopted unscrupulous measures such as using 'beaten out tins'[42] for weighing, so as to disadvantage African maize growers.[43]

It is within these historical circumstances that the Godlonton Commission discussed cooperative societies. The commission is important in understanding state ideas about African cooperative societies and how African entrepreneurs could participate in the venture. It also gives insight into how white traders resisted the idea of cooperative societies and African entrepreneurship in the African reserves. Commissions were influential during the colonial period in resolving perceived problems in the control of Africans. As Adam Ashforth argues in a study of South Africa, commissions into African affairs were a way of legitimising the state's policy on Africans.[44] In her work on the Dutch East India Company, albeit it in an earlier period, Ann Laura Stoler also shows how colonial commissions' 'solutions were often preordained and agreed upon before they were carried out.'[45] Dickson A. Mungazi arrived at similar conclusions in his study of the nexus between colonial commissions and the policies on African education in Southern Rhodesia.[46] Through them, the state could rehearse and legitimise its policies on African issues.[47] Several interest groups testified before the Godlonton Commission. These included officials in the NAD and white business groups. The list also included white liberals such as Reverend Percy Ibbotson,[48] and a select group of Africans.

## Consumer and Marketing Cooperative Societies

The Godlonton Commission's cooperative societies' proposal aimed at boosting African production of food crops but gave little direct thought to actually developing African entrepreneurship. With settler commercial farmers abandoning maize for the more lucrative Virginia tobacco, Africans needed to be encouraged to fill in the gap in

42. Beaten out tins were manipulated by making them larger so that they carry more maize than what was paid to African farmers.
43. T. Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption, and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996); Kramer, 'The Evolution of Policy'; and L. Bessant, 'Coercive Development: Peasant Economy, Politics and Land in the Chiweshe Reserve, Colonial Zimbabwe, 1940 – 1966', (PhD thesis, Yale University, 1987).
44. A. Ashforth, *The Politics of Official Discourse in Twentieth-Century South Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 2-4.
45. A. L. Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 141.
46. D. A. Mungazi, 'A Strategy for Power: Commissions of Inquiry into Education and Government Control in Colonial Zimbabwe,' *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 22, 2 (1989), 267.
47. Ashforth, *The Politics of Official Discourse*, 7-8.
48. P. Ibbotson was a reverend in the Methodist Church and was also involved in the white liberal movement of the interwar and post Second World War through associations such as the Native Welfare Society.

maize production.[49] Consequently, the Native Commissioners who gave evidence to the Godlonton Commission saw African cooperative societies as a solution to what they deemed a marketing crisis in the African reserves, a crisis that could be traced back to the 1930s.[50] For example, colonial officials pushed for state-managed African cooperative societies to help ease the problem of maize marketing by offering producers relatively higher prices for maize. The state had already used statutory marketing in the cattle, dairy and commercial maize sectors.[51] Moreover, commenting on the period, Alexander notes that 'the expansion of state activity relied on the elaboration of new scientific practices and expertise … It heralded an unprecedented intervention into the ways in which Africans lived and farmed'.[52] In this regard, stabilised marketing through cooperative societies could incentivise Africans to grow more maize and meet the national demand for food.

In addition, the Godlonton Commission envisaged that the cooperative societies would provide Africans with quality manufactured commodities other than those already in supply from white, Indian, and African traders. Describing the retail trade, Chief Native Commissioner (CNC) Simmonds remarked, 'I think with a few exceptions what we generally term "kaffir truck" does not always mean the best value for money. It is generally something that can be sold fairly cheaply'.[53] As Godlonton explained, 'the object of setting up cooperative stores would be to reduce the price of goods to the native or alternatively return any profit to the natives by way of a dividend'.[54] Therefore, cooperative societies would provide 'good prices' for maize and at the same time, improve the 'quality' of consumer commodities available in the African reserves.[55] Claims to 'quality' notwithstanding, behind the veneer of colonial benevolence, as Saul Dubow observes, 'the colonial enterprise of science was utilised not only to observe, measure and control the 'native other' but to proclaim and shape the self-image of colonisers themselves'.[56]

The state also imagined cooperative societies as a way of pooling capital for African traders. One of the challenges to the growth of African entrepreneurship was the unavailability of formal lines of credit. Hamstrung by a lack of capital or access to financial lending institutions, African traders had to save money from meagre

49. Phimister, *An Economic and Social History of Zimbabwe,* 234.
50. See Kauma, 'Small Grains, Small Gains'; and Punt, 'The Development of African Agriculture in Southern Rhodesia.
51. Phimister, *An Economic and Social History of Zimbabwe*, 173.
52. Alexander, 'Technical Development and the Human Factor', 212.
53. NAZ, ZBJ 1/1/1, Oral Evidence from CNC Simmonds, Native Trade and Production Commission, 1 June 1944.
54. NAZ, ZBJ 1/1/3, Oral Evidence from E. H. Beck, Native Trade and Production Commission, 3 August 1944.
55. The concern of the state was to ensure that Africans filled in the gap in food production and not necessarily that they should get competitive prices for their maize.
56. S. Dubow, 'Introduction', in *Science and Society in Southern Africa*, ed. S. Dubow, 3.

earnings over many years. The most common source of savings was from wage labour and peasant agriculture. Africans also raised capital from thrift clubs organised around indigenous methods of lending such as burial societies and tea parties employing cooperative techniques.[57] These 'social cooperatives' and African forms of capital accumulation were not recognised by the colonial state, however.[58] By the 1940s, in addition to investments in cattle and thrift clubs, some Africans banked with the state-controlled Post Office Savings Bank (POSB).[59] The bank had emerged in 1905 to serve both white and African bankers.[60] African patronage of the bank increased over the years and the number of African accounts rose by 1 000 during the Second World War, increasing from 9 540 in 1942 to 10 841 in 1943.[61]

Accordingly, the state hoped cooperative societies would add Africans into formal ways of saving, challenging the monopoly of white and Indian traders in the African reserves. Investing in cooperative societies would add to the other traditional methods of saving amongst Africans as indicated above. Clive Lancaster Carbutt, the CNC at the time, imagined a cooperative society organised like a dividend company with Africans having the opportunity to buy shares. Carbutt was a long serving member of the NAD and was present when the most racial pieces of legislation such as the 1930 Land Apportionment Act, the 1931 Maize Control Act, and the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1934, became law.[62] For him, formal savings would aid the colonial efforts at destocking.[63] Importantly, African cooperative societies, as Carbutt imagined them, could afford Africans with an opportunity to make money through the shared profits of cooperative marketing.[64] The state's concern for African savings was not out of concern for African welfare, however. Various scholars have shown that the state was financially handicapped because of the Great Depression and the Second World War. As such, the state was eager to tap into African funds by incorporating them into the formal banking system and cooperative societies.[65]

57. See G. Austin, 'Indigenous Credit Institutions in West Africa, c.1750-c.1960', in *Local Suppliers of Credit in the Third World, 1750-1960,* eds G. Austin and K. Sugihara (St. Martin's Press, 1993), 93; and P. Madhuku, J. Mujere and B. Mahamba 'Reciprocity and the Moral Economy of Exchange in African "Tealess" Tea Parties in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia, c. 1945–1950s', *South African Historical Journal*, 73, 4, (2021), 818–835.
58. Phimister, *An Economic and Social History of Zimbabwe*, 237.
59. T. Madimu and E. Msindo, 'Towards Banking Inclusion? The Post Office Savings Bank (POSB) in Southern Rhodesia, 1905–1945', *African Economic History*, 47, 1 (2019), 54-91.
60. T. Madimu and E. Msindo, 'Towards Banking Inclusion?', 54.
61. NAZ, ZBJ 1/1/1, CNC Simmonds, 1 June 1944.
62. Steele, 'The Foundations of a Native Policy', 319.
63. NAZ, ZBJ 1/1/3, Oral Evidence from CNC C.L. Carbutt, Native Trade and Production Commission, 3 August 1944.
64. NAZ, ZBJ 1/1/3, Oral Evidence from CNC, C.L. Carbutt, Native Trade and Production Commission, 3 August 1944.
65. See Madimu and Msindo, 'Towards Banking Inclusion.'

Although colonial officials noted the potential of cooperative societies in maize production and to aid African entrepreneurship, they were doubtful that Africans had the skills to manage the cooperative societies. Ascribing their own financial success, sense of 'rationality', superiority and broader racist attitudes to a kind of 'Social Darwinism', Drinkwater observes that 'the whites felt that the rationality they invoked was not only sensible but unquestionable. The rightness of their views could be validated even by laws of science'.[66] Colonial officials such as the Native Commissioner (NC) for Bulawayo expressed to the Godlonton Commission that:

> I am not in favour of cooperative trading in rural areas … The difficulties as regards finance, management, and the lack of commercial knowledge on the part of the African are almost insurmountable at the present. We are heading for disaster if such a system is introduced now. It will come in good time when the natives have developed more business acumen. In the meantime, let them be educated to this end by training themselves as general dealers, hawkers, and butchers in reserves, native areas, and native townships.[67]

Neale Tylor, the location superintendent of Bulawayo, also dismissed the ability of African traders to understand business methods. Baffled by how Africans in the African section of Bulawayo ran their businesses, Tylor pointed out that, 'they seem foolish, they won't attend to their own businesses', adding that 'I don't know what they do. One barber there seems to spend all his time in the canteen with a very little guitar, or they walk around and talk to their friends.'[68] Tylor's views, and those of other colonial officials, was premised on a lack of understanding of African ideas of business. Such thinking led scholars such as Wild to categorise African businesses as 'not for profit'.[69]

Furthermore, the NC for Bulawayo also scoffed at the idea of Africans running a cooperative society, stating that Africans still needed more time to learn business management and that without European supervision, 'there would be a tremendous amount of abuse … within an African run cooperative'.[70] In agreement, the NC for Buhera District stated that Africans in the African reserves did not buy from African businesses because these stores were undercapitalised and without the right stock.[71]

66. Drinkwater, *The State and Agrarian Change*, 40 and 47.
67. NAZ, ZBJ 1/2/1, Memo from the Bulawayo NC, Native Trade and Production Commission, 19 July 1944.
68. NAZ, ZBJ 1/1/3, Oral Evidence from Neale Tylor, Location Superintendent for the Bulawayo Location, Native Trade and Production Commission, 22 July 1944.
69. Wild, *Profit not for Profit`s Sake*.
70. NAZ, ZBJ 1/1/3, The Bulawayo NC.
71. NAZ, ZBJ 1/2/1, Memo from the NC for Buhera District, Native Trade and Production Commission, 30 May 1944.

> The natives throughout the district are unanimous in their dissatisfaction with the present system of trading. And they complain more bitterly of stores run by their own people than of those run by Europeans. A native owner of a general dealer's business has insufficient capital, is thus unable to carry the same volume and variety of stock as a European and looks to exorbitant profits both in goods and in grain to make his business pay.[72]

That African stores had less diverse goods in comparison to Indian and white stores is hardly surprising. The latter, under the ambit of powerful business associations, had access to international trade networks and capital.[73] Nevertheless, it is difficult to assess the performance of African entrepreneurs during this period since the colonial archive is largely silent about the activities of African traders save through the biased opinions of colonial officials.

The Godlonton Commission's spotlight on the poor business skills of African entrepreneurs was disingenuous. By the 1940s, Christian missionary efforts accounted for the development of African school education. The literature on the subject notes that the state created a curriculum that advantaged whites at the expense of Africans.[74] White pupils learnt arithmetic and business skills, essential in entrepreneurship, while Africans were restricted to industrial schools such as those at Domboshawa and Tjolotjo which streamlined them into the cheap labour market.[75] The overall objective was to provide white capital with a cheap labour reserve and at the same time, protect white livelihoods from African competition. Colonial inquiries into African education such as the Hole, Graham, and Kerr Commissions of 1906, 1910, and 1951 respectively, helped to legitimise this skewed status quo in colonial education.[76] As Mungazi explains, 'Education in Southern Rhodesia was nothing more than an exercise in manual labour for the sole purpose of providing cheap labour to the white entrepreneur.'[77] This evidence of systematic neglect of African education suggests that the state, through the NAD, was insincere in its racist derision of African business skills at the hearings of the Godlonton Commission. In any event, evidence abounds that shows African dexterity in business before it was crippled by colonial efforts to streamline Africans into the cheap labour market.[78]

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72. NAZ, ZBJ 1/2/1, Memo from the NC for Buhera District, Native Trade and Production Commission, 30 May 1944.
73. NAZ, S915 75, Trade and Commerce – Policies on Development, 1944 – 1945.
74. M. West, *The Rise of an African Middle Class: Colonial Zimbabwe, 1898-1965* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 36; and Mungazi, 'A Strategy for Power'.
75. Mlambo, *A History of Zimbabwe,* 101.
76. Mungazi, 'A Strategy for Power,' 274.
77. Mungazi, 'A Strategy for Power,' 274.
78. Phimister, *An Economic and Social History of Zimbabwe.*

It was not until the 1940s food crisis that the state debated forming cooperative societies to market African crops.[79] Even then, colonial officials were ambivalent about the success of these cooperative societies. For example, although CNC Carbutt and CNC Simmonds agreed that cooperative societies encouraged Africans to grow maize, they still felt that they needed European supervision. According to Carbutt:

> I think there will be a long period in between when this marketing board would be run by Europeans. Then probably gradually little stores outside connected with the main depot. They could be taken up as they fall vacant by natives.[80]

Agreeing with CNC Simonds, the NC for Buhera supported the idea of an African cooperative under the auspices of the NAD such as a director of native marketing.[81] He argued that such a cooperative would market African produce and import manufactured goods for retail in a network of stores in the colony.[82] The cooperative society would eventually take over 'all existing stores in the reserves and other native areas'.[83] This demonstrates consensus among most NCs over the importance of state control of African cooperative societies. Crucially, the NCs' sentiments are synonymous with the state's move from persuasion towards coercion in its dealings with Africans in the African reserves, cemented by the Godlonton Commission.[84]

One of the main supporters of African entrepreneurship through cooperative societies was Reverend Percy Ibbotson. His ideas on African cooperative societies contradicted those of certain others. While most NAD officials felt that Africans lacked the business acumen to manage a cooperative society, Ibbotson urged the state to train Africans in business management skills at a centre for African traders organised along Domboshawa.[85] According to Ibbotson, Africans attending this business school could be:

> Trained in simple business routine, account keeping and so on, and as a practical project, a cooperative store would be run at the training centre so that those pupils taking this course would receive practical training in running a store, costing, invoicing and all this sort of thing, as a practical project.[86]

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79. See Takuva, 'A Social, Environmental and Political History of Drought in Zimbabwe', and Kusena, 'Rural Food Security'.
80. NAZ, ZBJ 1/1/3, CNC, C. L. Carbutt, 3 August 1944.
81. NAZ, ZBJ 1/2/1, NC for Buhera District, 30 May 1944.
82. NAZ, ZBJ 1/2/1, NC for Buhera District, 30 May 1944.
83. NAZ, ZBJ 1/2/1, NC for Buhera District, 30 May 1944.
84. Alexander, 'Technical Development and the Human Factor', 212.
85. C. Summers, 'Educational Controversies: African Activism and Educational Strategies in Southern Rhodesia, 1920–1934', *The Journal of Southern African Studies*, 20, 1 (1994), 4. Domboshava was established to train Africans in vocational skills.
86. NAZ, ZBJ 1/1/3, Oral Evidence from Rev Percy Ibbotson, Native Trade and Production Commission, 1944. (n.d.).

Ibbotson urged the state to give Africans the opportunity to gain experience in business skills. Giving examples of successful African entrepreneurs in Salisbury, Bulawayo and Plumtree, he stated that 'if they do this without [any] training whatsoever, what are they likely to do when they are trained?'[87] In addition, Ibbotson had helped to start a consumer cooperative society for Africans in Bulawayo.[88] This cooperative venture shows how Ibbotson believed in colonial patronage and the idea of the 'inspired' European guiding the 'backward' African. Writing to the PM Godfrey Huggins, Ibbotson stated,

> until I discussed the matter with them (Africans), they did not have a true conception of what a Co-operative Society is, nor much idea of how to form one. The wish to improve their situation by this means is, however, very strong and justified.[89]

As such, although Ibbotson defended African entrepreneurship and African cooperative societies, he also used racism to explain the limited African failure in business.

Despite his defence of African cooperative societies and entrepreneurship, Ibbotson belonged in the camp of the white liberal movement during the 1930s and 1940s that believed in patronage as an instrument of guiding Africans towards a European ideal of development. Ibbotson was part of the African Welfare Society that emerged during this period, to aid in African development through patronage. Its overall goal was to undercut the African proto-nationalist movement spearheaded by African political organisations such as the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union.[90]

## White Organised Business Opposition to African Cooperative Societies

White and Indian traders operating in the African reserves also appropriated the idea of African business illiteracy to discourage the growth of African cooperatives and entrepreneurship. The Mashonaland Kaffir Truck Wholesalers Association, representing white and Indian traders, criticised African knowledge of business and expressed doubt about the success of an African-run cooperative. The business association was unique in its inclusion of both whites and Indians. Even now, there is nothing in secondary literature on the activities of this interracial group. This

87. NAZ, ZBJ 1/1/3, Oral Evidence from Rev Percy Ibbotson, Native Trade and Production Commission, 1944. (n.d.).
88. NAZ, S482/126/40, Rev Percy Ibbotson to the Secretary for Native Affairs, 21 March 1940.
89. NAZ, S482/126/40, Rev Percy Ibbotson to the Secretary for Native Affairs, 21 March 1940.
90. West, *The Rise of an African Middle Class,* 32.

economic pressure group attacked the proponents of African entrepreneurship such as Ibbotson for 'knowing little of the psychology of the native', commenting that conclusions arrived at by such witnesses, 'will doubtlessly be treated with reserve'.[91] The association opposed the suggestion of 'commercialising the native', urging the state to develop the social, educational and agricultural aspects of Africans' lives instead, thereby facilitating the provision of cheap labour. As the Mashonaland Kaffir Truck Wholesalers Association explained:

> The evidence given by the Medical Director and the Director of Native Agriculture have testified that these essentials have been sadly neglected. A healthy peasantry working on the land on proper agricultural lines would render a great service to the community as a whole than a half-baked and sickly commercially minded native.[92]

Even so, white and Indian traders resented the competition that African entrepreneurship posed. As this article notes, the motivations of the Mashonaland Kaffir Truck Wholesalers Association were economic and aimed at protecting their own commercial interests in the African reserves.

Where the Mashonaland Kaffir Truck Wholesalers Association covertly pushed their agenda, another white organisation, the Bulawayo Chamber of Commerce, was more candid. It defended the position of white traders in the rural areas, arguing that they 'would be deprived of their livelihood should the government decide to alter the existing system, and unemployment would result'.[93] In addition, the Bulawayo Chamber of Commerce stated that white traders had crucial skills that African traders lacked since as 'the present importers of Kaffir Truck they are in the best position to purchase from different world markets the goods required for this colony'.[94] An African cooperative, the Bulawayo Chamber of Commerce posited, '… cannot possibly buy as competitively as the present old establishment organisations who are forced, by competition, to be continually on the lookout for up-to-date goods at the lowest market prices'.[95] As already noted, without access to these markets, African traders found it difficult to compete with white traders.

91. NAZ, ZBJ 1/2/1, Memo from the MTKWA, Native Trade and Production Commission, 19 September 1944.
92. NAZ, ZBJ 1/2/1, Memo from the MTKWA, Native Trade and Production Commission, 19 September 1944.
93. NAZ, ZBJ 1/2/1, Memo from Sub-Committee Appointed by the BCC, Native Trade and Production Commission, 9 September 1944.
94. NAZ, ZBJ 1/2/1, Memo from Sub-Committee Appointed by the BCC, Native Trade and Production Commission, 9 September 1944.
95. NAZ, ZBJ 1/2/1, Memo from Sub-Committee Appointed by the BCC, Native Trade and Production Commission, 9 September 1944.

Importantly, like most of the witnesses to the Godlonton Commission, the representatives of the Bulawayo Chamber of Commerce poked holes into the concept of Africans' capacity to engage in business. The Chamber told the Godlonton Commission that an African cooperative society without supervision would be characterised by mismanagement. In any case, the Bulawayo Chamber of Commerce explained, Africans did not buy from African traders since:

> The Natives were disinclined to purchase trade goods from their compatriots. This has been proved from time and again. A native in charge of a store, being replaced by a Whiteman (sic), the store has increased its turnovers three or fourfold.[96]

That African consumers preferred to buy from white-owned stores compared to African traders was in fact because the former had a variety of stock on account of their access to capital and trade networks.

**African Narratives at the Godlonton Commission**

The ideas on African entrepreneurship and cooperative societies from the African elites who gave evidence to the Godlonton Commission were not homogeneous. Opinions were split across social, economic and status lines. While some supported the introduction of cooperative societies in the African reserves, others rejected the idea outright. Adding to the complexity of the African sentiments, the Godlonton Commission attempted to control the narrative towards the colonial rhetoric on both African entrepreneurship and cooperative societies discussed above by intimidating the African participants. This was aimed at keeping the colonial narrative palatable to the settlers.[97]

To that end, the Godlonton Commission picked prominent Africans, including successful farmers, businesspersons, politicians, and socialites in both the African reserves and urban areas to give evidence. Conveniently for the state, these elite Africans believed in accommodation and non-violent confrontation with the state. As Michael West observes, 'the most prominent members of the African petty bourgeoisie … disassociated themselves from the attacks on the colonial regime'.[98] Indeed some of the views of this elite group on cooperative societies was in keeping with West's observation. Notwithstanding the state's attempt to control the narrative, the African opinions were unexpected and not uniform.

96. NAZ, ZBJ 1/2/1, Memo from Sub-Committee Appointed by the BCC, Native Trade and Production Commission, 9 September 1944.
97. See V.A. Domingo, 'Political Commentary: Apartheid in South Africa: Myths and Realities', *Bridgewater Review*, 4, 2 (1986), 21; and J. Frederick, *The Black Friend: On Being a Better White Person* (Somerville: Candlewick Press, 2020.
98. West, *The Rise of an African Middle Class,* 140.

Importantly for the state, some of the individuals selected to give evidence had sided historically with the authorities. Specifically, Charles Mzingeli, the erstwhile firebrand member of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union, had found a political home in the African branch of the Southern Rhodesia Labour Party, formed in 1939.[99] Crucially, the Southern Rhodesia Labour Party was home to white traders who stood to lose the most from African entrepreneurship and cooperative societies. A few months before the Godlonton Commission met, Mzingeli had led an effort by the Native Advisory Board to remove the African traders' right to sell vegetables in an African township of Salisbury. The municipality wanted a monopoly which 'created ill feeling, among African retailers, of certain individuals in the Township', such as Mzingeli.[100] Ironically, the trade unionist had 'openly and frankly spoke against profiteering at the market' by pointing out that 'African businessmen must be taught that running a business means serving a community, and must learn, too, to serve the community and themselves by collective buying if only they could'.[101] Paradoxically, despite the accommodationist politics of the Africans who gave evidence to the Godlonton Commission, they were also the correct constituency to speak on African entrepreneurship for most of them dabbled in business projects of various kinds.[102]

The views of prominent Africans, such as Jasper Savanhu and Mzingeli, both traders with general dealer stores in Bulawayo, are interesting. While Savanhu's evidence to the Godlonton Commission tended to flow with the narrative of the colonial officials, Mzingeli was more critical. Quizzed by the Godlonton Commission on whether he thought 'the African is sufficiently advanced to form cooperative stores on their own', Savanhu was sceptical, expressing his pessimism in the success of the venture in the African reserves.[103] Just like the colonial officials, Mzingeli felt that the cooperative societies would fail in the African reserves. He took particular exception to the top-down approach of the cooperative societies. He was also against the idea pushed by the 'experts' such as Rev Ibbotson on the relationship between cooperative societies and Africans, and those advanced by NCs such as Simmonds, that the African cooperative societies would require European stewardship. According to Mzingeli, African cooperative societies would not work because, 'the African people like anybody else, like to be responsible for their own affairs'.[104] Mzingeli rightly connected ideas on African cooperative societies to other measures of the state, such as destocking and Emory Delmont Alvord's 'good' agricultural practices that sought to control African lives.[105]

99. West, *The African Middle Class*, 158.
100. *The Bantu Mirror*, 'Black-Marketing in the Salisbury African Township', 1 January 1944.
101. *The Bantu Mirror*, 'Black-Marketing in the Salisbury African Township', 1 January 1944.
102. West, *The Rise of an African Middle Class*.
103. NAZ, ZBJ 1/1/3, Oral Evidence from Jasper Savanhu, Native Trade and Production Commission, 4 August 1944.
104. NAZ, ZBJ 1/1/2/1, Oral Evidence from Charles Mzingeli, Native Trade and Production Commission, 3 July 1944.
105. NAZ, ZBJ 1/1/2/1, Oral Evidence from Charles Mzingeli, Native Trade and Production Commission, 3 July 1944.

In interviewing Africans, the Godlonton Commission attempted to keep the narrative on African cooperative societies and entrepreneurship in harmony with the views of the NAD. During the oral hearings, the commissioners often gave lectures on what a cooperative society was and how it functioned and they liked to interrupt Africans who appeared to be well informed, such as Savanhu, who was the editor of the *Bantu Mirror*, the first solely African newspaper in Southern Rhodesia at that time, as well as Mzingeli, who headed a labour movement.[106] A condescending tone was characteristic throughout the questioning of Africans who appeared before the commission.

The evidence of the African delegation from the Shangani Reserve (which was one of the oldest and most impoverished of the African reserves in the country) is another example where the Godlonton Commission imposed its narrative of development over that of Africans.[107] In a statement to the Godlonton Commission, the group articulated a strong interest in their reserve developing into a township.[108] They 'considered it a dire necessity for decent townships to be established in the reserves'.[109] Although townships were not central to the colonial state's planning for the African reserves during the 1940s, they would be given centre stage during the late 1960s and 1970s as one of the core aspects of the Rhodesian government's growth point programme.[110] However, while giving oral evidence to the commission, some of the Shangani Reserve delegates shifted their position from that which had been stated in their written statement and now rejected the development of townships, thus demonstrating a degree of agency in the way they articulated their views during the course of the proceedings. Verbally, they pointed out that the idea of a township would prove unpopular with the older constituency of the Shangani African Reserve. As one of the delegates put it, 'that is, of course, the opinion of the other people, but we know it is a disturbing factor for the old people if we carry through these things [the matter of townships] now'.[111] Somewhat incensed by the vacillating stance of the Shangani African reserve delegation, Godlonton reprimanded the group in a patronising tone:

106. NAZ, ZBJ 1/1/3, Jasper Savanhu, 4 August 1944
107. B. Raftopoulos and A. S. Mlambo, eds, *Becoming Zimbabwe: A History from the Pre-Colonial Period to 2008* (Harare: Weaver Press, 2009), XI; and G. Hove, 'The State, Farmers and Dairy Farming in Colonial Zimbabwe (Southern Rhodesia), c.1890-1951', (PhD thesis, Stellenbosch University, 2015), 104.
108. NAZ, ZBJ 1/1/3, Oral Evidence from the Shangani Reserve, Native Trade and Production Commission, 21 August 1944.
109. NAZ, ZBJ 1/1/3, Oral Evidence from the Shangani Reserve, Native Trade and Production Commission, 21 August 1944.
110. The Growth Point Programme was part of the rural development agenda of the Smith government during the 1970s. Its purpose was to recreate urban amenities centered on industries. In a way, it was a recreation of past policies such as Separate Development.
111. NAZ, ZBJ 1/1/3, The Shangani Reserve,21 August 1944.

> Do you realise that this commission has to go back to Salisbury and make recommendations to the government? When you people cannot agree amongst yourselves as to what you want, it is very difficult. You have written down [that] you want townships, and now I gather that you don't want them. Those of you who would like townships in the reserves stand up [None stood up].[112]

While one can only speculate about the motives of the Shangani African Reserve delegation, what is clear was the ability of the Godlonton Commission, as an instrument of state power, to control the official narrative in line with Ashforth's argument that commissions were rituals whose performances served to authorise and reaffirm the state's narrative of development.[113] More importantly, some of the Africans that appeared before the Godlonton Commission 'performed' in a manner they thought would be acceptable to the state in general and the commissioners in particular. Allison Shutt arrives at similar conclusions in her work on racial etiquette in Southern Rhodesia.[114] To a degree, the Godlonton Commission managed to mute the voice of its African participants by speaking over them and through the sheer exercise of state authority.

Nevertheless, the Shangani African Reserve representatives managed to articulate their ideas about African entrepreneurship, which contrasted with those of the NAD. One of the delegates was a general dealer storeowner who was opposed to the presence of white traders in the African reserves or to their replacement by a state controlled African cooperative society. The Shangani African trader used the state's own policy on separate development[115] to legitimise why the state had to reserve the African reserves for African entrepreneurs:

> I hear the suggestion, but I am afraid I don't agree with it … the feeling of the African people today is that the African people want to go back to the reserves and carry on their own trades. The feeling is known to the NC that we don't want the white traders in the reserves. We want those people to leave the reserves and give us a chance to trade in our own areas.[116]

Two other prominent African politicians and traders shared the position expressed by the Shangani African trader detailed above. Aaron Jacha and Mathew J. Rusike's

112. NAZ, ZBJ 1/1/3, The Shangani Reserve, 21 August 1944.
113. Ashforth, *The Politics of Official Discourse*, 9.
114. A. Shutt, *Manners Make a Nation: Racial Etiquette in Southern Rhodesia, 1910 – 1963* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2015).
115. The colonial state's policy on African development, known as Separate Development in government corridors and anchored on the Land Apportionment Act (LAA) of 1930, generally governed the state`s stance towards African entrepreneurship in the African reserves and urban areas. According to this segregationist policy, Africans had to develop in their areas free from European competition.
116. NAZ, ZBJ, 1/1/3, Oral evidence from an African Trader part of a group of Africans from the Shangani Reserve Native Trade and Production Commission, 21 August 1944.

statement to the Godlonton Commission argued for the protection of African traders in the African reserves.[117] Jacha and Rusike had on several occasions come into conflict with the state. Jacha was a successful farmer in the African Purchase Area[118] and a former government clerk involved with the Southern Rhodesia Native Association (SRNA) while his brother, Rusike, was a minister at the Wesleyan Methodist Church and a member of the Native Missionary Conference.[119] The SRNA was a moderate political movement of the African elite active from the First World War while the Native Missionary Society was formed in 1930 by African church ministers and church workers.[120]

As West points out in his work on the African middle class, Jacha and Rusike, just like Mzingeli and Savanhu, belonged to the emerging African middle class with aspirations of gaining economic and political rights within the confines of the colonial space.[121] The two urged the state to ban white and Indian traders from the African reserves as per provisions of the Land Apportionment Act and Separate Development.[122] They argued that profits accruing to African traders went on to develop the African reserves as opposed to non-African traders who invested elsewhere.[123] Some African traders who gave evidence to the Godlonton Commission were also opposed to the idea of an African cooperative with a monopoly on trade. W. Tsiga, an African entrepreneur, expressed his displeasure with the idea of a cooperative society.[124] Tsiga was the proprietor of two general dealer stores in Goromonzi and in Harari, an African location in Salisbury. His business in Goromonzi specialised in trading maize.[125] Arguing that a state controlled African cooperative would cripple traders, Tsiga pointed out: 'I don't think it would be any good because that should be left to the people. What would those that are trading do if the government did it?'[126] Jacha and Rusike, on the other hand, did not entirely oppose the idea of the government assisting African entrepreneurs.[127] While they argued that 'commerce should not be carried out by the government,' they lobbied for 'the establishment of a central African wholesale store which will import goods for Africans'.[128]

117. NAZ, ZBJ 1/2/1, Memo from A. Jacha and M. J. Rusike, Native Trade and Production Commission, 1944. (n.d.).
118. This was land set aside where Africans with money could acquire freehold tenure.
119. West, *The Rise of an African Middle Class*, 153.
120. West, *The Rise of an African Middle Class*, 29.
121. West, *The Rise of an African Middle Class*, 29.
122. NAZ, ZBJ 1/2/1, A. Jacha and M. J. Rusike, 1944.
123. NAZ, ZBJ 1/2/1, A. Jacha and M. J. Rusike, 1944.
124. NAZ, ZBJ 1/1/2/1, Oral evidence from W. Tsiga, a Goromonzi African Trader, Native Trade and Production Commission, 4 July 1944.
125. NAZ, ZBJ 1/1/2/1, Oral evidence from W. Tsiga, a Goromonzi African Trader, Native Trade and Production Commission, 4 July 1944.
126. NAZ, ZBJ 1/1/2/1, Oral evidence from W. Tsiga, a Goromonzi African Trader, Native Trade and Production Commission, 4 July 1944.
127. NAZ, ZBJ 1/2/1, A. Jacha and M. J. Rusike, 1944.
128. NAZ, ZBJ 1/2/1, A. Jacha and M. J. Rusike, 1944.

## Conclusion

This article has examined the viewpoints of the state, white traders and African elites on African cooperative societies and black entrepreneurship submitted to the Godlonton Commission in 1944. It has noted that the colonial state pitched the notion of cooperative societies as a solution to the problem of marketing of African maize by white traders which was bedevilling the African reserves. Some officials of the NAD shot down the idea – because, I argue – of their racist assumptions about African entrepreneurial ability. These officials insisted on a controlled cooperative society with the state playing a significant role. White and Indian traders, represented by the powerful business associations, objected vehemently to the establishment of the cooperative societies. Although the Bulawayo Chamber of Commerce and the Mashonaland Kaffir Truck Wholesalers Association appeared to side with the state, in reality their submissions to the Godlonton Commission were meant to protect their favoured position in the African reserves. The views of African elites were mixed. While some supported the notion of cooperative societies others objected, preferring the position that the African traders be protected from both the cooperative societies and from the white and Indian traders.

While Africans managed to express their views to the Godlonton Commission, the questions that its officials asked and the way the inquiry transcribed their responses, followed along the lines of fundamental paternalism. The evidence from white and Indian traders and business associations such as the Bulawayo Chamber of Commerce, corroborated the position of the NAD officials and that of white liberals, but they were motivated more by the need to protect their business investments in the African reserves from African entrepreneurs.

This article contributes to the historiography on African entrepreneurship, cooperative societies, and to that of the workings of colonial commissions of inquiry more generally. It poses challenges to the literature that sees the failure of African entrepreneurs to compete during the colonial period as due to an 'African culture' that was characterised by poor business skills. Indeed, using new evidence drawn from the Godlonton Commission, the article corroborates findings by other scholars that African entrepreneurship suffered because of state policies that were hostile to the development of African commerce. At the same time, powerful white lobby groups did their best to protect the position of white traders in the African reserves. This article therefore contributes to the growing scholarship on African traders in Southern Rhodesia that charts the persistent presence of white and Indian traders in the African reserves and the concomitant underdevelopment of African entrepreneurship throughout the colonial period.

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