Trade and Traders. The Making of the Cattle Market in Benin
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Conclusions

In recent years, the cattle trade in West Africa has given rise to a substantial number of publications which range from brief accounts of consultancy missions to more thorough studies based on intensive fieldwork. The authors and initiators of these have studies justified their investigations by referring to the significance of the livestock trade in general and the cattle trade in particular for pastoral revenues, protein consumption, export earnings for Sahelian countries and West African economic integration. Successive waves of frozen beef imports from the world market only increased this concern. In acknowledging the very relevance of these studies, the first objective of our research was to deepen understanding of the cattle trade in West Africa: its actors, its functioning, its constraints and opportunities. From a scientific point of view, the present study aimed at focusing more on individuals and groups of cattle traders than had been the case in other studies. This would enable us to better comprehend their mode of operation and the determinants of their decisions and strategies. In doing so, the study attempted to link up with a growing body of literature on West African trade, the authors of which have consistently advocated the use of an actor approach for the analysis of trade and markets in Sub-Saharan Africa (Chapter 1). Accordingly, the second research objective was to obtain insight into the interplay between the levels of 'trade' and 'traders'. In other words, we wanted to assess the extent to which the decisions and strategies of traders are determined by structural factors such as the trade setting and market conditions on the one hand, and their personal characteristics on the other. In turn, the question was raised as to the degree in which the decisions and strategies of traders shape the patterns of the cattle trade and account for the changes. The research methodology was specifically designed to tackle this issue.

Unlike many other studies which focused on traditional livestock-producing areas in the Sahel, research for the present book was carried out in the Republic of Benin. This country was considered a useful site for fieldwork because of its substantial cattle population, the on-going processes of change in the fields of agriculture and pastoralism and its relatively small size which enabled us to cover virtually the whole internal trade and much of the external trade as well.
In this concluding chapter, Section 9.1 will summarise the main findings and demonstrate that the economic performance of the cattle market and the patterns of cattle trade in Benin have been the result of a complex, historically rooted process of interaction between the building blocks of the conceptual framework put forward in Chapter 1: the trade structure (including the trade setting and the trade itself) and the personal characteristics of traders.

It would have been difficult to reveal these interacting processes if the cattle traders were not central to the research design. Section 9.2 will therefore examine the value of the methodological choices which underpin the present study, by making reference to the range of economic and anthropological approaches which were introduced in Chapter 1. Finally, a few remarks will be made about the policy relevance of the study, future prospects for the cattle trade and possible fields of further research. In short, the present book provides a contribution to the knowledge of the cattle trade in West Africa, in particular in Benin, as well as to the methodological implications for the understanding of the role of traders in shaping patterns of trade.

9.1 Trade and Traders

Following the structure of the book, this section will set out by briefly synthesising the major features and changes at the level of the trade setting, the cattle trade and the cattle traders. Subsequently, it will proceed by interpreting the results in the light of interaction between actors and structure. In particular, it will be shown how distinctive groups of traders have employed their assets in the form of economic, social, knowledge and ideological capital not only to react to structural changes but to shape them as well.

The trade setting

The prime determinants of the non-market trade setting were the processes of change which characterised the fields of agriculture (cf. Section 4.1) and pastoralism (4.2) in northern Benin. The direct and indirect interventions of the state were examined too, but were found to be of lesser importance (4.4).

Broadly speaking, the agricultural history of northern Benin is dominated by the history of cotton production. Although efforts to increase cotton production date from the colonial era, it was only from the 1980s onwards that yields started to increase. This development has resulted in a considerable improvement in the economic situation of many rural households. However, within northern Benin, cotton production is largely concentrated in the area which has been characterised as the southern Borgou region. Here, most of the farmers' revenues from cotton cultivation are invested in cattle, a situation which has occasioned a considerable shift in herd ownership to the detriment of Fulani pastoralists and in favour of Bariba farmers. Parallel to expanding cotton production, a remarkable growth has occurred in the use of draught power in agriculture. Draught animals are now used by an estimated 75 per cent of rural households in Borgou province.

In the pastoral sector, the influx and establishment of pastoralists from Niger and to a lesser extent Nigeria and Burkina Faso was identified as a significant event. Subsequent waves of immigration occurred throughout the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s when Fulani pastoralists in the Sahel were pushed out by drought and otherwise deteriorating circumstances in their home areas, and attracted by available pasture in Benin. With regard
to the local Fulani pastoralists in northern Benin, an account was provided of changes in their livelihood. The ever-increasing integration in the market economy was specifically emphasised: consumption patterns and preferences have changed and a growing number of Fulani households have become involved in cotton production.

A final element of the trade setting concerns the role of the state and its direct and indirect interventions in trade. Despite a strong facilitating function in cotton production, the state never intervened significantly in the cattle trade nor in draught animal transactions. Like the colonial authorities, concern was expressed for a stable meat provision for southern agglomerations but the concentrated efforts of successive state ranches and marketing boards appear to have had negligible impact only and are considered generally as largely unsuccessful. The historic attraction of ‘foreign outlets’ such as Togo and Nigeria for Benin’s cattle traders is likely to have contributed to this. After all, it has always proved difficult for the authorities to control cattle exports which traditionally have consisted of fraudulent cross-border movements, a practice facilitated precisely by the mobility of the product involved, namely live cattle.

The cattle trade

Whereas the main long-distance destinations for cattle have remained the same throughout the century, the local and regional levels of cattle trade have received a major impetus. In addition to this, the cattle trade has become increasingly formal and transparent despite the observation that, today, a number of inefficient and non-transparent properties remain.

The analysis of the cattle trade revealed the changes in the structure of supply and demand which have occurred throughout the century (3.1, 3.3, 5.1, 5.4 and 5.5). In short, the long-distance outlets of beef cattle have more or less remained the same and notably include the cities of Cotonou and Porto-Novo (Benin), Ibadan and Lagos (Nigeria), Lomé (Togo) and to a lesser extent Accra (Ghana). Cattle trade patterns towards these cities were established around the beginning of the 20th century when demand for meat rose in the colonial export crop economies along the West African coast, a situation that would continue to exist until the period following the independence of several West African countries. Since the 1970s, the volume traded towards the respective coastal agglomerations has fluctuated according to increasing or decreasing oil revenues (Nigeria), shifts in exchange rates (Nigeria and Ghana) and economic crises or political upheaval (Togo). The economic crisis of the 1980s hit most West African countries and resulted in a per capita decrease in beef consumption. This pattern was confirmed by the reduced numbers of cattle being slaughtered in Cotonou, a situation which was aggravated as a result of imports of subsidised frozen beef from the European Union. With respect to the present-day situation, our market survey demonstrated that the exports of cattle towards Nigeria and Togo outweigh the number of cattle destined for the market in Cotonou.

In contrast to the long-distance trade, the structure of trade has been modified substantially in northern Benin. Whereas demand for cattle used to be largely dominated by long-distance traders, it has gradually diversified since the 1980s. According to the market survey, one third of all purchases has a ‘local’ destination today. A substantial number of these local-level transactions are draught animals. The remainder are composed of cattle purchased either for pastoral purposes, local slaughter or for resale elsewhere in the region. The diversified structure of demand has resulted in the segmentation of the cattle
market. It appeared from the market survey that various market segments could be
distinguished according to the nature of the buyer and the type and quality of cattle
concerned. A similar diversification was observed on the supply side. Whereas supply had
traditionally been dominated by the cattle sales of pastoralists, the supply of farmers'
animals and animals for resale supplied by traders had respectively come to account for on
average 21 per cent and 12 per cent of market transactions.

The increased importance of the local and regional levels of cattle trade (5.1, 5.3, 5.4)
has been compounded by the emergence of a substantial number of new formal cattle
markets since the beginning of the 1980s (4.3). The impact of these markets has been strong
in several areas, of which the following three stand out particularly. First, it was
demonstrated that the emergence of new markets caused a de facto multiplication of
possible exchange configurations, and therefore of arbitrage opportunities. For instance,
transactions could now be carried out not only between formal markets but also between
formal and informal markets. Second, the number of transactions at formal markets
progressively increased, to the detriment of informal exchange. Third, it was argued that
the nature of transactions at recently established markets was considerably more
transparent, given the non-traditional mode of market organisation of which the main
feature is the absence of middleman (dillali). Here, a market committee functions as a
'formal' substitute for the dillali (4.3). At the traditional cattle markets in northern Benin,
created before 1980, the dillali still continue to occupy a firmly established and historically
rooted position as middlemen between buyers and sellers. As such, they were observed to
have a significant impact on price negotiation (5.2).

The tendency towards higher numbers of cattle transactions carried out at formal
markets was considered as one of the components of a much broader trend of increasing
transparency in and formalisation of the cattle trade. Among the additional factors that,
throughout the century, have contributed to a more transparent and efficient cattle market
are improvements in infrastructure such as (feeder) roads and railways, as well as
improvements in transport and the availability of trucks. In addition to the increased
opportunities for arbitrage, the changes resulted in a subsequent reduction in marketing
costs. In fact, the analysis of marketing costs for long-distance trade destinations in 1996
revealed a relatively efficient situation with total costs not exceeding 11 per cent of total
investment (5.6). Moreover, it has become more convenient for long-distance traders who
possess sufficient working capital to purchase large numbers of cattle at formal markets in a
relatively short time-span. As a result, the period required to collect a cattle herd for
conveyance to a coastal market can be reduced which not only improves the rotation of
capital but leads to economies on transaction costs as well. Also, the opportunities for trade
at the local level provided access for smaller traders who did not have the working capital
needed to transport large herds to long-distance destinations. In other words, a partial
breakdown of some of the entry barriers for cattle trade has meant that more actors have
come to participate, leading to an increase in arbitrage activity. The remarks about the
increasingly transparent, efficient market were substantiated by repeated allegations of
decreasing gross margins on long-distance trade since the 1950s and the virtual absence of
'excess profits' today (5.7).

Notwithstanding the factors that indicated the increasingly transparent character of
the cattle trade, several features continue to confer on it a sense of informality, risk and
non-transparency. These were found to include the absence of price standardisation, the
position of landlords and dillali, the absence of a clear legal framework of trade regulation
or debt-default prosecution but also the absence of insurance, the risk of trekking live
cattle, the smuggling of cattle and the risk of theft because of a lack of banking services. For instance, an especially inefficient situation was encountered at coastal markets (Cotonou in particular) where sharp supply fluctuations (5.6) and indebtedness of butchers have conferred to the long-distance trade an unpredictable and high-risk character. The uncoordinated character of supply was partly attributed to the fact that trekking cattle hindered the timely reaction of traders if there were supply deficiencies. Besides, no coordination occurred on behalf of traders in terms of scheduling shipments of cattle towards the coast. At the coastal market itself, the function of the landlord-middleman, who is expected to assess the creditworthiness of butchers and care for debt-repayment, was observed to have decreased (5.6, 7.2). However, the traditional informal arrangements have not been replaced by formal arrangements such as contracts and legal prosecution. Traders therefore continue to rely upon their landlords to whom they are usually ethnically affiliated or share the village or region of birth (8.1). Thus, they can at least use the practical services such as accommodation, and expect assistance in solving unexpected problems in an urban environment to which they are typically unfamiliar.

The cattle traders

The major change that has occurred at the level of cattle traders consists of a significant increase in their number and diversity since the beginning of the century. This finding was partly attributed to the improvements in market transparency and the reduction of certain economic entry barriers. However, the explanation equally invoked elements related to the personal characteristics of (groups of) traders. In this respect, specific mention has to be made of ethnicity. It was shown that ethnicity and other identity markers have often served the purpose of differentiating between trading and non-trading groups, as well as between distinctive subgroups within a trading community. In both situations the aim is to establish or maintain commercial advantages or, as in the first case, to escape the so-called trader’s dilemma (2.1).

With regard to differences between traders and non-traders, similar processes have been unravelled in Benin. It was argued that the community of cattle traders evolved from being composed of small numbers of ‘foreign’ traders to contain large numbers of predominantly ‘local’ traders (Graph 4.1). During the initial stages of long-distance cattle trading in Benin, which developed at the start of this century only, local ethnic groups were somewhat reluctant to become involved. The cattle trade used to be performed by foreigners such as the Haoussa, Djerma, Djawando and Fulani from the Sahelian territories. These traders not only possessed the required trading experience and relations at the destination markets but were generally less subject to cultural constraints on commercial activities, as appeared to be the case for the Bariba and Fulani who constitute the main local ethnic groups of northern Benin. However, from roughly the 1940s, this situation would gradually transform (3.4 and 4.3). The profession of cattle trader ceased to be associated with predominantly foreign ethnic groups and a broader spectrum of local groups would progressively come to enter the cattle trade. On the one hand, this was the result of an increasing ‘openness’ of the market, the sheer expansion of trade itself and the concomitant occurrence of trade opportunities. On the other hand, it reflected broader changes in the societies of various ethnic groups in northern Benin, of which the relaxing cultural restrictions on and attitudes towards wealth accumulation as well as the modifications in agricultural and pastoral livelihoods constituted important outcomes. Although the
number of local cattle traders increased, it remained relatively low until the 1970s. From then on, however, additional factors provoked a steep rise in the number of local trade participants. It was shown that the adoption of animal traction among Bariba farmers and their investments in cattle progressively resulted not only in higher ownership patterns of cattle but in the appropriation of skills related to herd keeping and veterinary care as well. The possibility to purchase of draught animals at cattle markets began in the 1980s and facilitated a higher degree of familiarity with trade allowing Bariba farmers to develop trading experiences. Not surprisingly, they entered the trade in larger numbers, some as full-time professional traders but many others as occasional traders rotating their revenues from cotton production through cattle transactions at local markets (4.1). An analogous process occurred among the local Fulani, whose extensive pastoral activities and initial reluctance towards commerce had hampered a substantial involvement in cattle trading until the 1970s (3.4). However, continuing integration in the market economy and increasing sedentarisation, coupled with the practice of observing cattle trading and price bargaining among other traders, would ultimately occasion a rise in the number of local Fulani cattle traders as well. Among both Bariba and Fulani, a decisive role was reserved for so-called pioneering traders who were the first to enter the cattle trade. Through these 'role-models', others were given the opportunity to observe the practices and fruits of trading, and the pioneers thus had a catalyst effect.

The processes just described reveal that changes in the trade setting and in market conditions resulted in a relative decrease in entry barriers or entry requirements, a decrease through which higher participation rates of cattle traders were realised. These entry requirements were found to be composed of a combination of economic, social and knowledge capital (6.1). It was argued that the increase in trading opportunities at the local and regional levels provided access to the market for traders with a relatively small working capital. Parallel to this, the significance of social capital in the form of networks of personal relationships equally decreased in the case of 'impersonal' exchange at the new, formal cattle markets. Apart from a small working capital, the local trade did not require the establishment of network relations based on trust which were found to be indispensable for the long-distance trade. It was further noticed that whereas kinship relations were important as an entry mode to trade in providing the necessary capital and experience, they did not constitute a strong determinant of business success. Knowledge capital specific to the trade in cattle appeared to be appropriated by an ever-increasing number of potential participants, through the observation of and familiarisation with exchange processes at formal markets as well as through the general accumulation (among non-Fulani in particular) of skills related to cattle herding and veterinary care. Still, the improvement of access to the profession of cattle trader was shown to have worked out distinctively for various ethnic groups. It was explained why, as a result of this, patterns of entry occurred in different periods.

Even nowadays, potential participants were found to follow distinct entry paths (6.2) to fulfil the requirements which, though reduced, continue to exist in the light of specific features of the cattle market. For instance, prior to trade involvement, all traders need basic amounts of economic (money), social (herders) and knowledge (buying experience) capital, in the light of the value of cattle, the need to trek them and the absence of price standards respectively.
Until the 1980s, the rise in the number of notably local cattle traders appeared to be accompanied by a process of relative decline in the number of those foreign traders who formed the basis of the expansion of Benin’s cattle trade, a phenomenon which was qualified as the rise and fall of ethnic groups in the cattle trade (Table 4.1). While the numerical importance of certain ethnic traders would diminish (fall), new traders would appear on the scene (rise). However, notwithstanding the relative decrease of the numerical involvement of some groups, the absolute number of cattle traders has only increased over the century. In addition to the rise of local ethnic groups, a recent entry was made by immigrant Fulani traders from Niger (4.2). Pushed by deteriorating circumstances in drought-hit Niger and attracted by commercial and pastoral opportunities in northern Benin, the immigrant Fulani have engaged in the cattle trade mostly with the aim of reconstituting their decimated cattle herds. This group of traders appeared to have left its marks on current patterns of cattle trade in Benin (cf. below).

By the 1980s, the interplay between trade structure and groups of traders had resulted in a trade of which the main features were the substantial number of traders, the ever-increasing number of formal cattle markets and the significance of local trade. Furthermore, the cattle trade was found to have gained in transparency and efficiency in particular areas of operation. Nevertheless, it maintained a non-transparent and informal character in others. Given this situation, the following paragraphs will further elaborate on the interplay between trade and traders by demonstrating that subgroups of traders (distinguished by ethnicity, wealth or professional background) have used their personal characteristics in their responses to and attempts to capitalise on the above-mentioned market conditions. It will be argued that in some cases they did not succeed, while on other occasions they did establish new patterns based on the 'exclusivity' of a particular subgroup. We will show that the extent to which they have been successful in obtaining commercial benefits while at the same time preventing others from doing so, is closely related to the persistence of informal and formal arrangements in the cattle trade. At the same time, the new patterns of trade represent the crystallisation of traders' attempts to differentiate within the trading community in order to obtain commercial advantages (2.1) at a time when the distinction between traders and non-traders has become largely irrelevant.

Interaction

At the outset of this book we formulated three research questions to guide our inquiry into the determinants of decisions and strategies of cattle traders (1.3). The questions intended to assess the extent to which these determinants could be attributed to the structural level of trade or to the personal characteristics of cattle traders. The findings indicate that the decisions and strategies of traders pertain to a range of issues which, in the end, are directly or indirectly related to the purchase and sale of cattle. Traders have to decide what, where or when to purchase and sell cattle, and how to organise the broad spectrum of activities that facilitate this. The ultimate objective of traders is the accumulation of economic, social and symbolic capital which not only represent indicators of wealth but instruments of trade as well.

The capacity of an individual cattle trader to make decisions and the range of options between which he can choose, result from the specific combination of factors at the levels of structure and actor respectively. With regard to the latter, the decisions and
options are affected by the time-, location-, culture- and individual-specific configuration of personal characteristics. For the purpose of the present study, these were captured in the notions of economic, social, knowledge and ideological capital as well as individual qualities. The concept of symbolic capital was reinterpreted and extended to encompass the (ethnic) identity of traders as well; hence, the use of 'ideological capital'. Depending on the issue at stake, the characteristics were found to be specific for individuals or for groups of traders. The concomitant diversity in decision-making capacity as well as in options is essential to explain the ultimate nature of strategies which appear to cut across the lines of, among other things, wealth and ethnicity.

In addition to this, the decisions and strategies of traders are affected by the time- and location-specific configurations of the trade structure which encompass the market as well as the broader trade setting. The trade structure was found to represent a range of opportunities and constraints that condition the decision-making capacity and options of traders. To sum up, the ultimate decisions and strategies of traders are determined by the trade structure and filled in according to individual or group-specific features. Furthermore, the consequences of these decisions crystallise in changes in the trade structure which, in turn, reshape the capacity of traders to make decisions as well as the range of options between which they can choose. It is precisely this permanent process of mutually reinforcing changes at the levels of structure and actor that the present study indicates.

The research findings were interpreted in these terms when we attributed the major historical changes in the cattle trade to the complex interaction between macroeconomic factors in the trade structure and transforming attitudes towards trading at the level of ethnic groups. Hereafter, we will highlight additional research findings to further support our thesis.

A clear illustration of the interplay between our respective levels of analysis concerns the manner in which the cattle traders employ what we designated as 'ideological capital', in their attempts to obtain and maintain favourable trading positions. The ideological capital of cattle traders represents the set of norms, values and beliefs from which they draw when shaping their decisions. In more concrete terms, this comes down to the role of identity, whether this concerns an ethnic identity, an identity based on prevailing conceptions of prestige and status or other expressions of identity. Defined in this way, we preferred to use the term ideological instead of symbolic, the literature on the latter being too much confined to status in general and religious status in particular.

For specific groups of traders, their ideological capital affected the range of options from which they chose and equally set limits on the options of other traders. Consequently, ideological capital was put forward in the explanation for what was designated as the 'ethnic segregation' of the Cotonou and Lomé cattle markets (8.2). In short, a clear pattern was observed of Bariba and Fulani long-distance traders selling their cattle in Cotonou and Lomé respectively. It was demonstrated how the Cotonou market, from the 1980s onwards, became the dominant sales market for Bariba traders who laid a 'claim' to this destination. In their typical discourse, they tended to justify their predominant position by referring to their alleged identity as 'national traders' and to Cotonou as the 'national market'. Implicitly, the Fulani traders were considered 'foreign' and consigned to other markets. In turn, the Fulani traders stated their clear preference for Lomé as their main sales market, claiming to make more beneficial sales there. Chapter 8 elaborated further on the background of this phenomenon. It was concluded that the Bariba traders had been able to establish a dominant position in Cotonou because of the
structure of the cattle trade which, in turn, permitted the use of 'ideological capital' to justify this position. Notably the informal mechanism of dealing with butchers via affiliated landlords was put forward. The increasingly strong position of landlords ethnically affiliated with the southern Borgou region in general and the Bariba ethnic group in particular made the Cotonou market less accessible for Fulani traders from the 1980s onwards. The latter had seen their landlords gradually disappear from this market.

It is crucial to note at this stage that explaining the phenomenon of ethnically segregated markets would have been difficult through a conventional economic analysis based on demand, supply, prices and even the goal of profit maximisation. The role of ideological capital indicates different incentives behind traders' decisions. Despite the fact that the non-transparency of the landlord system was put forward to explain the ethnic segregation of certain coastal markets, the structuring of trade patterns along ethnic lines had equally generated its own momentum, outside our range of conventional explanations based on the economic rationality of market imperfection and entry barriers. With regard to the ethnic segregation of the Cotonou and Lomé markets, many Bariba traders reasoned that if other Bariba traders sold in Cotonou, why should they attempt to sell in Lomé? For them, it had become a matter of habit based on 'being Bariba' and feeling most 'secure' in that situation. Often, the status quo was justified by referring to this habitual practice, and the 'conservative' type of reasoning was thus reinforced repeatedly. The phenomenon of 'purchase specialisation' shows a similar use of ideological capital.

The case of 'purchase specialisation' (8.2) revealed the combined usage of ideological, economic and knowledge capital. Specialisation refers in the first place to the big traders who have increasingly focused on formal markets for the purchase of cattle. For them, this was mainly prompted by convenience, given the number of animals available. As a result, it has become the small traders in particular who tend to purchase at informal markets. For them, the emergence of new formal cattle markets created the opportunity to capitalise on price differentials with informal markets (farms, pastoralist villages or transhumance sites). The profits involved did not structurally interest big traders. The specialisation is nowadays reflected in the jargon of traders who employ the term revendeur to label a small trader specialising in informal market purchases at the local level, while commerçant continues to represent a big trader whose prerogative is the long-distance trade. In second place, a certain degree of ethnic specialisation occurred at informal markets. While small Fulani traders focus on purchases in pastoral villages or at transhumance spots, the small Bariba traders tend to purchase on farms. In fact, the small Fulani traders use their comparative advantages (knowledge capital) to obtain a dominant position with regard to purchases in pastoral villages and camps. The group of immigrant Fulani traders from Niger was particularly eager to do so. Unlike their counterparts who were involved in the early phases of Benin's cattle trade, these foreign traders had to establish themselves in a different framework characterised by high rates of 'local' participation. Their attempts at operating in particular niches by building upon their specific knowledge capital can be considered an attempt to deal with this. They compensated for their position as (often mistrusted) foreigners and their lack of relations (social capital) by their knowledge of living en brousse and their skill in continuously searching for available cattle and trekking them over considerable distances. Few non-Fulani traders were able to do so and were consequently pushed into marginal positions. Moreover, the Fulani traders attempted to ethnically appropriate this part of the market. They were convinced that the comparative advantages exclusively pertained to Fulani by making statements such as '... le Peul a hérité ce commerce...' (the Fulani has inherited this trade) with which they emphasised their alleged lead in
pastoral experience. Interestingly, similar knowledge and identity claims used to be laid on the trade in draught power animals by Bariba traders (see below). The phenomenon of purchase specialisation finally occasioned a significant change in the structural level of trade in the sense that it resulted in the creation and intensification of patterns of local trade, formal as well as informal, and contributed to an enhanced market integration of Fulani pastoralists.

In contrast to the specialisation trend in the area of informal market purchases, strategies based on knowledge capital have ethnically de-specialised in other domains. In this respect, the trade in draught power animals and the trade in breeding bulls are prime examples (8.3). In short, it was demonstrated that entry barriers in the form of agricultural and pastoral knowledge capital were easier to overcome for the Fulani and Bariba respectively, given their increased accumulated experiences in each of these domains. Ethnic claims used to be laid to both types of strategies and the *batta* case in particular resembled an ethnic monopoly based on a pastoral skill entry barrier. However, the increasingly 'transparent' character of the market and the expansion of pastoral skills and relations among the Bariba have successfully challenged this monopoly. The same situation is true for transactions of draught power animals, with animal traction becoming an everyday reality for a growing number of Fulani households. Today, Fulani traders have linked regions of demand and supply for draught animals through complex cattle-trekking patterns and thus new patterns of trade have become established (8.2, 8.3). Moreover, the knowledge of farmers' demands for draught animals and pastoralist demands for breed animals, has led a group of innovative cattle traders to capitalise on this and create a new trade between southern markets (around settlement areas of Nigerian pastoralists who raise cattle breeds which are particularly good for breeding and traction) and northern agricultural, cotton-producing zones. In fact, the quality of the animals they supply has attracted an apparently latent demand among farmers since sales have grown substantially in recent years. Accordingly, it has become clear how the traders have created new patterns of trade using a combination of their traditional knowledge plus newly acquitted skills.

Having explained the extent to which ideological as well as knowledge capital at the level of individuals or groups of traders contribute in shaping cattle-trade patterns, some concluding remarks will be made on the role of social capital, which we have primarily been dealing with under the heading of 'trade networks'.

The role of trade networks has to be understood in the light of earlier remarks on the persistence of certain inefficiencies characteristic of the market. In this respect, the significance of trade networks is evident in the light of a deficient legal framework which regulates the export of cattle and the absence of institutions which take care of merchandise insurance. Hence, the conveyance of cattle to foreign destinations requires the cross-border smuggling of cattle trekked by specialised herders. The risks involved, the difficulty and sensitivity of trekking cattle, as well as the economic capital at stake, necessitate the existence of trust relationships with herders, which, in fact, substitute for 'modern' ways of insuring the transport of the merchandise (8.1). The network configurations and strategies for establishing and maintaining trust relations were dealt with in the previous chapter. The existence of cattle exports has largely been facilitated by these networks. Dealing with the shortcomings of the trade setting would otherwise have been too complex or too expensive. In addition, the networks have also had repercussions for the spatial outcome of trade patterns through the very specific itineraries they cover (Map 5.6).
The social capital of a trader also consists of preferential purchase or sales contacts and other relationships which benefit the carrying out of commercial activity. Together with the number of labour contacts (herders), we were able to examine differences in the extent of networks among the cattle traders. Following this, an important question to ask here is in what ways traders with extensive networks can capitalise on them and whether traders with small networks are prevented access to certain segments of the market. In the literature, trade networks have often been accused of representing oligopoly situations. The answer contributes to our understanding of the interplay between the trader level (networks) and the trade level (imperfect markets, oligopolies). It is argued that nowadays traders with extensive networks are less capable of benefiting from them than they were in the past.

Of course, the significance of trust relationships in the export trade is clear, and crucial for traders who have invested considerable amounts of working capital. However, this situation does not imply that access to the export trade is restricted to them only. Traders who lack the means to invest in trust relationships and who possess a relatively small working capital do participate in the export trade through collaborative arrangements with big traders to whom they are affiliated through kinship, friendship or shared village of origin (8.1) which, of course, equally qualifies for a trust relationship. The costs and benefits of this common type of arrangement were dealt with in the previous chapter. It was further explained that traders invest in personal relationships to obtain price advantages, access to transport, and trust. Prestige or status (reputation) appeared to be a useful preliminary condition for the initiation of a relationship. In turn, one of the components of 'prestige' was the extent of a trader's network. Other determinants of prestige included religious status (having obtained the title of El Hadj for instance), real estate, size of cattle herd, or the length of a career. The relatively small group of traders who were commonly perceived of as of 'high status' were identified by others but equally identified themselves as 'big traders' (grands commerçants). The majority of participants in the cattle trade were able to indicate whether a trader was a grand commerçant or not. This phenomenon of group identification, i.e. the ideological capital of a subgroup of traders, can be exploited to obtain commercial advantages (through emphasising differentiation within the trading community). In the past, the absence of price standardisation, the scarcity of formal markets and the position of the dillali made it possible for big traders to capitalise financially on their social network capital. Investments in strong relationships with cattle owners (8.1) were later converted into financial rewards through a regular and secure supply of cattle and favourable positions in price bargaining. The grands commerçants had a strong market position. However, our analysis of changes in the market, the trade setting, and among traders has made clear that similar opportunities for big traders have gradually been reduced, although they have certainly not disappeared. For instance, the role of social capital (networks) has decreased in the area of cattle purchases because the emergence of formal cattle markets has reduced the reliance upon highly personal exchange relationships with cattle owners and favoured impersonal on-market exchange (8.2). On the other hand, it was observed that a widespread reputation as a grand commerçant continued to provide access to network relations which consist of contacts with foreign traders who visit the markets of northern Benin. The big traders were found to invest heavily in these relationships to prevent others from 'accessing' them. These relations not only reconfirmed their status but could be financially rewarding as well when the home markets of these foreign traders were visited in return. Thus, even though the importance of social capital has diminished in some areas, it remains of weight in others.
The preceding paragraphs have displayed the complexity of the interplay between the three levels of analysis which constituted the point of departure of the analysis. What has also been shown, is the value of investigating a variety of variables at each level in order to facilitate the comprehension of the linkages between them. With this remark we link up with Section 9.2 which further elaborates on the methodological insights obtained from this study.

9.2 Methodological remarks

This final chapter sets out to synthesise the essential elements with which the answers to our research questions were formulated. Having done this, it will be useful to examine the extent to which the methodological premises have effectively enabled us to collect the appropriate type of data and to guide the analysis in such a way as to gain insight into the research question. The present section therefore highlights the strengths and weaknesses of our methodological approach. It discusses the extent to which the choice of combining an actor-oriented with a more 'structuralist' approach has added explanatory value that would have been lacking if either one had been employed exclusively, or had proven unsatisfactory in covering specific areas of inquiry. Reference is made to the new institutional economics approach, its similarities with our methodology and the contributions of our findings to the insight of making institutional variables operational.

The degree of detail from which we have been able to draw conclusions on the complex issue of interaction between actors and structure implicitly recognises the advantages of the methodological choices made. First, the decision to focus the analysis on one particular sector, i.e. the cattle trade, facilitated a detailed analysis of the interaction between the trade and traders. The structure did not encompass the wider 'economy' (which was incorporated under the heading of 'trade setting') but was represented by a specific market for which detailed parameters could be established which, in turn, provided a means to link up with the organisation and strategies of traders. Second, it has proved valuable to consistently separate the different levels of analysis and to break them down into constituting variables, according to the actor - structure dichotomy. This enabled us to investigate in detail the contribution of both the structural level (trade and trade setting) and the actor level (individual and groups of traders) in moulding the decisions and strategies of the latter. Furthermore, the impact of these strategies on the patterns of the cattle trade could be identified accordingly.

With regard to singling out relevant variables, the methodological design for the present study borrowed heavily from two approaches: the structure-conduct-performance methodology and the actor-oriented approach. With respect to the latter, the framework proposed by Grégoire and Labazée laid the foundation for most of the concepts that have been investigated. The distinction between economic capital, social capital and symbolic capital proved to be a useful starting point for understanding the strategies of traders as well as their short and long-term objectives. To this, we added the notions of knowledge capital and ideological capital which appeared to be crucial assets as well. Through these concepts we could comprehend the ways in which traders employ their personal assets in dealing with the 'set of constraints imposed upon them by the trade environment ...' (Lambert & Egg 1994, 240). In addition to constraints, however, it was demonstrated that the market provided opportunities on which the cattle traders capitalised depending on their individual...
or group specific configuration of economic, social, knowledge and ideological capital. On the one hand, the background of these constraints and opportunities could be clarified by investigating developments in the agricultural and pastoral trade setting. On the other hand, they came more systematically to the fore via our analysis of market variables derived from the structure-conduct-performance framework.

It was explained in Chapter 1 that the components of SCP not only constituted a tool to organise data collection but an instrument to analyse market performance as well. Originally, the model was taken to consist of causal relations in which the structure of a market was thought to explain the conduct of traders which, in turn, determined the performance of the market. Increasingly, though, this deterministic nature was found to be unsatisfactory and the dynamic interdependence between the components started to be emphasised. The market performance was found to influence both the market structure as well as the conduct of the traders. To some extent, the recognition of dynamic relations between the components of the model confirms our notion of the interplay between trade (structure) and traders (actors), whereby the level of trade (including the trade setting) is taken to comprise the market structure and market performance together. On the other hand, the findings of the present research have tended to confirm our argument that the exclusive application of SCP methodology to answer the research questions would have been too limited. In particular, it would have limited our scope with respect to the analysis of the conduct of traders. Whereas SCP methodology specifically asks 'what' strategies traders employ in a typical range of marketing functions such as purchase, sale, finance or transport, the present research considered these as an outcome and made an attempt to dig somewhat deeper and find answers to questions formulated around 'how' and 'why' traders make particular decisions or perform particular strategies (or not). Among other things, this enabled us to distinguish between a variety of trader groups on the basis of variables (such as knowledge or ethnicity) which exceed the typical distinction between, roughly, wholesale and retail traders, so common in SCP-based studies. Hence, the gap in the conduct component of SCP was filled by variables borrowed from economic anthropology.

With respect to the remaining SCP components, our assessment of market performance might appear somewhat 'poor' to economists. First, a year-round market survey was carried out to establish a picture of basic parameters such as supply, demand, prices and trade flows. In view of the absence of similar data over a much longer period, these parameters were put in historical perspective using qualitative information obtained from interviewing traders. Hence, long-term changes in the cattle trade could be unravelled. The identification of changes and tendencies at the structural level of trade assisted in focusing the interviews on the role and contribution of specific subgroups of traders and in seeking explanations at the individual level. Second, instead of a detailed financial analysis of the effectiveness and efficiency of the marketing channel, the assessment of market performance focused particularly on marketing costs and profitability of trade, and examined these in an historical and West African perspective (5.6). Again, the qualitative information obtained from traders enabled us to assess these findings over a long period of time and to draw conclusions about arbitrage activity and market transparency. The goal of adhering to the research objectives limited the analysis to these basic parameters. In other words, we tried to deal with the structural level of trade in a way that highlights the relevant variables which could subsequently be connected to the strategies and mode of trade organisation at the level of traders. A fully detailed analysis of market performance would incur the risk of shifting our scope away from the interaction between trade and traders.
Still, the analysis of marketing costs and profit margins was found to leave an explanatory gap where the trade flows towards the markets of Lomé and Cotonou were concerned. Only by widening our scope to the personal characteristics of traders in general and the use of ideological capital in particular were we able to put together sufficient building blocks for an understanding of this phenomenon. However, a question that could be raised at this point is: what, if any, are the costs involved in making use of ideological capital? This brings us to one of the limitations of our approach. In short, it restricts the analysis to direct marketing costs (Table 5.9) which implies to forego a quantification based on a much broader definition of transaction costs (1.2). For instance, we recurrently emphasised the role of trade networks as institutions which assist the trader in coping with certain constraints in minimising risks in a weak institutional environment characterised by the absence of contracts, banking services and a deficient legal framework of trade regulation. Trust was highlighted as an important binding factor of these networks. To what cost? A quantification of the costs involved in maintaining a network and a quantification of the benefits obtained through it would establish a more precise image of the trade network as a transaction cost-minimising arrangement. In fact, we did quantify the role of the traditional institution of dillali (5.2). In bringing together buyers and sellers, the dillali can be seen as a typical example of a transaction cost-minimising institution. However, his day-to-day practices revealed a contrasting picture and his strategies were found to increase the price of cattle artificially. The remarks on transaction costs minimising arrangements bring us, of course, to the new institutional economics (NIE). Even though the NIE approach was not explicitly taken as a starting point for analysis, its definition to a large extent reveals a similar focus as in the present study, the main difference being that we did not label the various arrangements as 'institutions'. This becomes clear when we recapitulate Ensminger's definition:

'.. Institutional economics combines an individual actor-oriented perspective with rich attention to institutional constraints, and it specifically addresses the relationship between market forces, indigenous institutions and economic performance... The underlying assumption is that individuals attempt to change institutions to serve their ends more effectively, whether these ends be ideological or materialistic..' (Ensminger 1996, xiii).

What, then, are the insights that can be obtained from the present study in view of the NIE approach to the study of trade and markets? First of all, there is confirmation of the geographical and sector specificity of institutional arrangements which appear to be specific for northern Benin (the organisation of recent cattle markets), for West Africa (the trade networks) or for the cattle trade (the dillali). Secondly, a wide variety of institutions set .. the rules of the game ..' and '.. structure repeated human interaction ..' (North 1989, 1321). Among many others, these included the (unwritten) rules that govern the processes of exchange and bargaining at traditional and recently created markets, at formal and informal markets, the status of traders which determines relationships with others but also membership of an ethnic group which sets limits to participation in particular market segments. It is crucial to note that these institutions determine the rules of the game. However, in specific circumstances these rules are defined and claimed by a specific subgroup which automatically means that others are excluded. Here, we touch upon the issue of power in the market (cf. Harriss-White 1998b; White 1993). In that respect, the present study clearly addresses the capacity of certain subgroups of traders to enforce 'rules' which exclude others, as well as the extent to which they have been able, or not, to
maintain this position. In conclusion, the present study has demonstrated that institutional arrangements of whatever nature are not exclusively transaction cost-minimising devices which improve efficiency in trade, but they are employed for other purposes as well in the sense that groups of traders make consistent attempts to alter institutions so that they serve their interests more effectively.

Whereas the SCP framework has often been blamed for its shortcomings with respect to policy relevance and predictive value, the institutional approach is much more appropriate in signalling institutional deficiencies and possible areas of intervention. In this respect, the deficient legal framework of trade regulation not only helps to explain the nature of institutions (such as networks) set up by the traders themselves, but also identifies room for improving interventions by the state.

9.3 Final remarks

The last section of this book consists of two parts. In the first place, it examines the policy relevance of the study results. Second, it will tentatively explore the prospects of cattle trade in Benin as well as elsewhere in West Africa in the light of expected tendencies in supply and demand.

Policy relevance

Throughout the years, direct interventions by the state in the cattle trade in Benin have proven largely unsuccessful (4.4). Notwithstanding this, the findings of the present study identify specific areas in which the state might intervene in a more indirect manner. Not surprisingly in this era of Structural Adjustment and retrenchment of the state from agricultural marketing in general, the type of intervention proposed at present is predominantly geared towards the provision of an appropriate and transparent institutional framework of trade regulation. In other words, the state as 'facilitator' and not as 'market player'. It is argued here that there is room for substantial improvement in the legal framework which sets the relevant regulations for cattle trade. The deficiencies of this framework have come to the fore in various chapters. The legal framework was found especially inadequate and non-transparent in the case of cattle exports as well as in the case of debt repayment by butchers at coastal markets.

First, the absence or insufficiency of regulation as well as its obscurity of application to a large extent explain the existence of trade networks through which the cross-border smuggling of cattle is organised. In order to evade customs officials, cattle are smuggled on the hoof. This represents an inefficient situation since the absence of cross-border truck transport obstructs a timely response to supply fluctuations at coastal markets and, above all, considerably increases the likelihood of losses due to theft, disease and loss of cattle. To improve the transparency of cattle exports and to encourage the use of truck transport for export destinations, two lines of policy can be envisaged. First, measures should be applied which aim to enhance the confidence between traders and customs officials, which is notoriously low in the cattle trade. Although extremely difficult, it is closely related to the second policy, i.e. the establishment of a clear and simple package of export regulations and taxation. This package should be unambiguous and made known to every cattle trader. A similar policy has proved successful in Burkina Faso, where the implementation of an export policy based on low taxation and straightforward regulations encouraged traders to
truck their cattle over the border to Côte d'Ivoire. This improved the government's tax base and made the cattle trade more transparent. Providing traders with the opportunity to arrange all 'red-tape' procedures at their home market proved an encouraging measure as well. Yet, it is a condition that the legal framework in the importing country should be equally clear and straightforward. Finally, with regard to Benin, it would imply a stance on behalf of the authorities which comes down to 'acknowledging' its position as a net cattle-exporting country. The present study demonstrated that this has probably been the case throughout the century, despite occasional efforts 'to keep the animals aboard'. Few indications exist of insufficient supply at the market of Cotonou and the sheer size of the cattle herd in Benin is likely to rule out such situations in the future. Instead, the export of cattle should be considered a potential stimulus for regional development in the north.

Second, the deficient legal framework is evident at the coastal markets. The absence of contracts, the lack of organisation among traders and butchers, and the difficulties related to the prosecution of debt defaulters all contribute to a complex situation characterised by risks of delayed, partial or unpaid debts. Due to credit sales, the working capital of traders is typically tied up for several weeks. The severe and structural problems related to debt default among butchers have substantially eroded the traditional debt-guaranteeing function of the landlord-middleman. Hence, a proper legal framework of market regulation would have to control the access of butchers to coastal cattle markets. For instance, basic entry requirements could include registration (license), the deposit of collateral or restriction to a debt ceiling. Of course, the enforcement of such regulating measures might lead to butchers' activities going underground. Its success will therefore depend on the sales attitude of the cattle traders as well. As a first step, the use of simple contracts for the sale of cattle could be encouraged, as has recently been the case at the Lomé cattle market. These contracts state the sale price and the delay of debt reimbursement agreed upon by trader and butcher. Non-respect of repayment terms should be consistently punished. The use of contracts would provide the ground for local authorities to prosecute those who default in debt repayment but its implementation will have to result from close co-operation with the community of landlords.

In addition to these specific aspects of intervention, the findings have indicated a possible facilitating role of the state in other areas as well. We will briefly pass in review some more general fields which indicate an opportunity, or lack of it, for state intervention. First, there is the question of the availability of credit. The majority of cattle transactions in northern Benin are financed by the private capital of traders. The required collateral and administrative procedures for obtaining a bank loan are prohibitive for most traders. Second, market infrastructure and feeder roads need improving. Many cattle markets even lack a basic infrastructure such as a fence, a well or a ramp for loading cattle onto trucks. Some markets succeeded in generating the required revenues themselves to finance basic infrastructure. At a regional level, the absence or poor condition of (feeder) roads makes the use of truck transport expensive on many itineraries. Third, there is the availability of market information. The lack of market information was not mentioned as a constraint by the majority of traders. In general, traders have their messengers and use other informal sources of information. Besides, it is extremely complex to supply accurate and timely information to traders, the majority of whom cannot read or write and live in rural areas which lack communication infrastructure. Only the use of 'rural radio' may be a promising and accessible alternative, not only to communicate market data but information on regulations as well. Notwithstanding this, the availability of basic market information can
be useful for policy makers for a better understanding of the fluctuations and trends that are occurring in the market. A final element concerns grading. The implementation of weighing and grading systems, however fruitful they appear at first sight in standardising prices and in limiting the necessity for traders to inspect the quality of each individual purchase for themselves, has never been successful at the cattle markets of West Africa. The suspicion of traders has always been considerable to a system which would allegedly reduce their opportunities of obtaining a favourable price. In addition, the phenomenon of market segmentation is highly likely to complicate the standardisation of prices (5.2). Finally, it would be unrealistic to standardise prices in northern Benin without applying the same standards in Cotonou or on export markets.

Prospects for cattle trade

The final paragraphs of this book tentatively explore the future of the cattle trade in Benin as well as in similar areas throughout West Africa.

First of all, demand for meat is likely to increase in the foreseeable future, especially in the 'poles of demand' which constitute the ever-expanding urban agglomerations of the West African coast and the Sahel. This expectation is primarily based on short and medium-term trends in demography. According to a recent study, the West African population will have doubled by the year 2020 (WALTPS 1995, 2). A second factor, though much less predictable, concerns the purchasing power of West African consumers in general and that of the urban population in particular. An indication of the significance of this factor is the rough calculation that an 0.5 kg increase in the annual per capita beef consumption in Nigeria would translate into an additional demand for approximately 400,000 cattle. Tentative scenarios of future demand for cattle, based on current levels of herd growth and off-take rates, point to the expected incapacity of the West African cattle supply to keep up with rapid demographic growth rates (Sidibé & Josserand 1993). In this light, we might well witness the return of beef imports from outside West Africa when the governments of coastal countries become concerned about the protein supply of their urban populations. In principle, we may argue that there is nothing wrong with this provided that the imports occur in a non-dumping environment. However, it is worthwhile exploring the cattle supplying capacity of the various West African livestock production zones as well. The present study has highlighted the potential of a non-traditional livestock-producing area such as northern Benin. Despite the lack of data about developments in herd off-take and in absolute numbers of cattle traded, an image emerged of a region in which the cattle trade has, at various levels, become increasingly dynamic. Crucial to the expansion of the cattle trade were the combined and mutually reinforcing developments in trade, agriculture and pastoralism which included the intensification of livestock keeping, the establishment of immigrating pastoralists with their cattle herds, the expansion of cotton production, the increased use of animal traction, the growing number of traders and the emergence of new cattle markets. The findings equally pointed at the likelihood of these tendencies to further crystallise in the future. With respect to the cattle trade, for instance, several initiatives were registered to assist the creation of new cattle markets. As has clearly been the case in the past, these new markets will attract and provide opportunities for new cattle traders. Moreover, the (new) cattle traders are likely to exploit their specific configurations of economic, social, knowledge and ideological capital to actively capitalise on patterns in demand, such as an increasing demand for draught animals or meat, as well as on patterns in supply such as the increasing willingness of Fulani pastoralists to sell cattle by which they finance their involvement in cotton production.
Although a quantification in terms of rates of commercialisation among cattle owners (farmers as well as pastoralists) remained outside the scope of the present study, the developments that have been dealt with certainly justify the assumption that off-take rights may well be higher in this area than in the traditional livestock-producing zones in the Sahelian areas further to the north. An assessment of the findings of recent reports on the impact of the CFA franc devaluation of 1994 on herd off-take rates (Quarles van Ufford 1998) pointed at the apparent limitation of pastoralists in northern Burkina Faso and Mali to realise higher levels of herd exploitation in a sustainable manner. This might be attributed to the character of the prevailing pastoral mode of production which is less intensive than that in areas further to the south.

Altogether, this tentative exploration of future trends in the supply, demand and trade of cattle has highlighted the likelihood of areas comparable to that of northern Benin becoming major centres for the cattle trade. In fact, in the 1980s alone, the coastal countries' share of regional cattle numbers went from less than 60 per cent to about 70 per cent (Josserand 1993, 78). At the same time, possible areas for further research can be identified, such as the quantification and background of tendencies in herd off-take in various livestock-producing zones, and also the analysis of developments in agriculture, pastoralism and trade in regions such as southern Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger or in the northern parts of Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria (cf. WALTPS 1995, 9). Of course, numerous studies on tendencies in agriculture and livestock keeping in these areas have already been published, but it would be of great significance to scrutinise and complement their results in the light of consequences for and contributions of the cattle trade as well as for the cattle traders who, after all, are essential vectors of change and transmitters of incentives to producers. To achieve a better understanding of these contributions and consequences and the ways in which traders 'make their market', the use of an approach which focuses on the strategies of cattle-trade actors such as Oumarou and Sabi Ibrahim, whose careers the present study has detailed, will prove particularly fruitful.
References

For the present research documents belonging to the files of the National Archives at State Archives Reference in London the author were consulted. They are referred to at AMI, followed by a further reference through which they can be traced in the archives.

Further references


Although a quantification in terms of rate of commercialisation among cattle owners (farmers as well as pastoralists) remains outside the scope of the present study, the developments that have been described would certainly modify the assumption that the effects of stock depopulation will be higher in the region than in the traditional livestock-producing zones in the Sahelian area further to the north. An assessment of the findings of recent reports on the impact of the GBA trade devaluation of 1994 on herd off-take rates by Djelbeni (1995) pointed at the apparent limitation of pastoralism in northern Burkina Faso and Mali to realise higher levels of herd exploitation in a sustainable manner. This might be attributed to the character of the prevailing pastoral mode of production which is less intensive than that in areas further to the south.

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