

*Review*

## Prosperity, penury and polarization: Disaggregating the peasantry in the historiography of colonial Zimbabwe

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Underdevelopment and modernization theorists have long agreed that peasant agriculture was not universally damaged and curtailed, but the two schools remain very much at odds over the general trajectory of peasant agriculture during the colonial period. This dichotomy, however, is unwarranted. In the canonical literature there is a pervasive ambiguity surrounding the term “peasant,” an ambiguity that allows for contradictory assessments of the same historical process. An historical approach that “disaggregates” the peasantry along ethnic, geographic, gender, and class lines demonstrates that there was not a homogeneous Zimbabwean peasant experience during the colonial period, but several. Thus, there need not be any formal contradiction between the observations of the underdevelopment and modernization schools. Theorists from both sides have approached the peasant question with differing ideological precepts, and therefore assessed the same phenomenon in completely divergent ways. In short, Zimbabwean peasants experienced both penury and prosperity in the course of colonial rule.

**Key words:** Modernization, dependency, underdevelopment, colonial Zimbabwe, peasantry.

### INTRODUCTION

After many decades of fierce academic debate and vigorous policy contention, the two foundational historiographical theories explaining peasant history in the extra-European world remain strongly counter-posed if not entirely antagonistic. The specific case of Zimbabwe certainly provides no exception. Indeed, some of “underdevelopment” theory’s foremost proponents began their research with pioneering analyses of the Zimbabwean peasantry in the early 1970s, arguing that white settler colonialism severely undermined the viability of African agricultural production (Arrighi, 1970). Scholars

who adopted a “modernization” paradigm, asserted in contrast that underdeveloped countries could experience the same “stages of growth” as the advanced capitalist West, suggesting that peasant production not only survived the pressures of colonial capitalism, but even came to thrive. Such a dichotomy of views, however, is not necessary. A review of the foundational literature in the debate demonstrates that there is a pervasive ambiguity surrounding the term “peasant,” an ambiguity that allows for contradictory assessments of the same historical phenomenon. Once this ambiguity is

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recognized it is possible to transcend some of the limitations of the traditional historiography, for there was not a *single* peasantry but *different* and *distinct* peasantries. Specific amalgams of ethnic, regional, and class distinctions divided the peasantry itself and significantly influenced its experience of, and reaction to, white settler rule. These divisions, moreover, helped to shape, and were in turn shaped by, a process of historical change that was far from linear (Mosley, 1982: 390-408). Under colonial rule, Zimbabwean peasants experienced both prosperity and penury, albeit at different times and amongst different segments. The suggestion that peasant farming in Zimbabwe was universally damaged and curtailed during colonial rule is, therefore, just as erroneous as claims that projected an oasis of agricultural “modernity” in Rhodesia.

### Setting the stage: Contending historiographies

Underdevelopment and modernization theorists agree that Africa, from the “Scramble” to decolonization, experienced a condition of comparative economic underdevelopment. The point of contention between the two schools is the responsibility of European colonial rule and governance in bringing about this state of affairs. Did the introduction of capitalism serve as a beneficial and progressive influence, much like it supposedly did in early modern Europe? Or did colonial capitalism instantiate, even protract, socioeconomic underdevelopment? As Rodney (1981: 27), who first systematically applied the insights of then nascent underdevelopment theory to Africa, averred: “the operation of the imperialist system bears major responsibility for African economic retardation by draining African wealth and by making it impossible to develop more rapidly the resources of the continent” (Rodney, 1972: xvi).

In relating the broad theoretical debate to the specific historical experience of colonial Zimbabwe, an important point of departure is the work of Barber (1961) on the British Central African economy. Barber’s work is notable not only because it offered a sterling exposition of modernization theory in its own right, but also because it served as a lightning rod for criticism by underdevelopment theorists. Applying a classical model of development to Rhodesia, Barber argued that the dynamics of African labor could be explained with reference to two distinct sectors: the indigenous, low-productivity “subsistence” sector, and the high-productivity, European-transposed “capitalist” sector. Although Africans were initially slow to seize upon the “unfamiliar” opportunities provided by the new capitalist sector, after “a prodding from the tax collector,” amongst other inducements, Africans were willing to supplement and even abandon their traditional subsistence economies by becoming wage laborers in the capitalist sector (Barber, 1961: 93). Since “disguised

unemployment” in the subsistence sector was so extensive, labor supply kept more-or-less in pace with labor demand, and wages were depressed as a result.

The picture that Barber paints, then, is one of a benign and beneficial capitalism, affording Africans the opportunity to improve their lot via wage labor in non-“traditional” economic sectors, ensuring a standard of living beyond mere “subsistence”. In what became a seminal article on Zimbabwean underdevelopment, Arrighi (1970) sharply criticized not only the empirical assertions but also the normative foundations that underlay Barber’s work. Arrighi assailed Barber’s “*beneficial and rationalizing*” capitalism, arguing that African workers and peasant “derived little, if any, advantage from it” (1970: 199). Barber’s portrayal of capitalist growth as an “almost *spontaneous process*” moreover, disappeared what Arrighi considered to be central to the growth of the labor market: “open or concealed forms of coercion” (1970: 199). Despite Barber’s assertions to the contrary, the “subsistence sector” was not *initially* disadvantaged vis-à-vis the “capitalist” sector; rather, it was intentionally *made* so through the operation of non-market, political mechanisms which reduced peasant productivity and prosperity and effectively forced African agriculturalists into wage labor. It was only the systematic application of *extra-market measures*—land appropriations, taxes, rent, protectionist policies, etc.—that severely undermined and curtailed peasant agriculture and tipped the balance in favor of European capital.

Arrighi’s early writings on Zimbabwe had a profound impact on his own developing corpus of work and that of an entire generation. Many followed the intellectual trajectory that he traced alongside fellow African scholars and Africanists, most notably Immanuel Wallerstein and Samir Amin. They ambitiously expanded the concepts of dependency and underdevelopment, already popularized by themselves and Rodney, to develop a world systems theory which sought to explain the world-wide material systems and structures which entrenched inequality because entire nations and continents.<sup>1</sup> The contradictions of Africa, and colonial Rhodesia in particular, came to signify widespread problems endemic to the Third World as a whole, and therefore requiring global solutions, *Smith in Beijing* (2007), which unfortunately proved to be his final book before his death in, repeated

<sup>1</sup> At the time of Arrighi’s emerging success, Wallerstein was already a long-standing and respected scholar of African politics (cf. 1961, 1964, 1967), while Amin (born in Cairo) worked and continues to work for various academic and policy institutions on the continent (see 1969, 1972). Only Andre Gunder Frank, the fourth member of this intellectual collective respected for his pioneering and widely inspiring *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America* (1967), spent little time living and researching in Africa. Concepts of underdevelopment and world-systems theory, therefore, have strong roots in African experience and research despite being global in scope.

many of the essential themes originally expressed in his work on Zimbabwe. Animated, as always, by an abiding concern for redressing the plight of the poor peasants and global inequalities between nations, came to see the positive potential in the use by the *Chinese* state of extra-market measures—so long as these measures are intended ameliorate the negative effects of the market and protect peasant livelihoods. Although he was open to the possibility that Chinese socialism may be reinvigorated, Arrighi was explicit that what concerns him “is not so much the fate of the socialist tradition in China, as the broader implications of the Chinese ascent for inter-civilizational relations in the world at large” (Arrighi, 338). In this, Arrighi remains true to his previous work in world systems theory (1991), which was more concerned with the structures that reproduce international inequality than those that reproduce inequality within nations.

It is probably for this reason that Arrighi recalled, in an interview published shortly before his death, that he was far less upset than his one-time collaborator John Saul over the failure of African socialism: “For me, these were national liberation movements; they were not in any way socialist movements, even when they embraced the rhetoric of socialism. They were populist regimes, and therefore I didn’t expect much beyond national liberation, which we both saw as very important” (Arrighi, 2009: 65). Yet, as Saul himself has recounted (Saul, 2005), Arrighi’s apparent insouciance regarding socialism was more a product of latter-day political pessimism than a conviction confidently asserted at the time (Arrighi and Saul, 1973). Indeed, the regime type matters a great deal in determining the effectiveness of extra-market measures, whether undertaken in Arrighi’s newly-beloved China or the less salubrious conditions of the “liberated” Zimbabwe that to which Arrighi once devoted so much time.

In the 1970s, Arrighi’s underdevelopment theory became something of a new orthodoxy amongst scholars of Zimbabwean, and even African, agriculture. Good (1976: 606), for example, asserts that the “disintegration of the peasantry” was a hallmark of every colonial settler state. In Phimister’s (1977: 264) study of the Rhodesian district of Victoria, discriminatory government policies and economic policies combine to reduce the peasants to “marginal and dependent cultivators.” Kosmin (1977: 285), in his research on the Inyoka tobacco farmers in Rhodesia, was more illustrative: “[the] peasant economy [wa]s first fed then later strangled by capitalism.” Palmer (1977: 241) was even more definitive, writing that by the late 1930s “the agricultural economy of Shona and the Ndebele [in Rhodesia]...had been destroyed.”

The growing scholarly consensus surrounding underdevelopment theory was not universal, however. Responding to what he termed the new “conventional wisdom,” Mosley (1982: 395) revived the claims of modernization theory, arguing, in particular, that the

“colonial presence increased the effective pressure of population in African rural areas, [which] was a stimulus to agricultural output rather than the destructive force invoked by Arrighi and Palmer.” Mosley bolstered his claim with statistics demonstrating that African agricultural productivity, far from falling precipitously in the face of European assault, did not follow a linear path and was actually relatively high by the 1950s (1982: 392). For Mosley, the intense population pressure that colonialism engendered was actually a spur to peasant production because it forced the adoption of yield-augmenting production strategies (1982: 392). Indeed, while Mosley recognized that the peasantry did face discrimination (1982: 399)<sup>2</sup>, government policy emerges as the hero of the story, for “variations in grain yield stemmed from differences in the willingness of different regions to adopt suggestions made by agricultural demonstrators from the mid-1920s onwards regarding the cultivation of maize and other subsistence crops (1982: 397).” In marked contrast with the underdevelopment theorists, Mosley found a colonial-era peasantry that was not necessarily harmed by capitalism and, moreover, actually benefited from government policies.

### Here a peasant, there a peasant...

On the face of it, the observations and assertions of the underdevelopment and modernization theorists would seem irresolvable. How do we square Palmer’s assertion that the Shona and Ndebele agricultural economy was destroyed with Mosley’s suggestion that the agricultural economy persisted, even grew, until the twilight years of the colonial era? To be sure, the ideological foundations of the two schools seem to be fundamentally counterposed. Underdevelopment theory is based upon a Marxist or “critical” analysis of the capitalist economy and imperialism, while modernization theory is predicated upon the neoclassical models and liberal expectations of bourgeois economics. Considered further, however, this central difference in outlook between the two theories can actually shed light upon their contending empirical claims. Perhaps it is the case that Mosley and Palmer, in observing the same historical process and wrestling with similar data, actually see different things in the end. Ideology is a prism through which reality is refracted (and necessarily “bent” along the way). Preconceived ideas, expectations, and definitions, sometimes overtly stated and sometimes not, inevitably shape the scholar’s perception of reality. To what extent has this occurred in

<sup>2</sup> It must be added, however, that Mosley portrays the struggle as one between peasant and government, elaborating not at all upon the broader racial, social, and economic forces inducing such a struggle. This would seem to be just one example of the “anti-historical approach” which Arrighi attributes to economists. See Arrighi, “Labour supplies,” 227.

the scholarship on the Rhodesian peasantry?

A full answer, of course, would extend considerably beyond the parameters of this essay. One crucial aspect of the question will be investigated here: the definition of the "peasantry" itself. What is surprising about the literature is how infrequently such a definition is offered, and how less frequently still the definition on offer is actually acknowledged to be important for scholarly research. For example, Palmer's *Land and Racial Domination in Rhodesia*, while an excellent and comprehensive exposition of its subject matter, never offers a substantial definition of what the African "peasant" was and how, exactly, he differed from the Shona and Ndebele "agriculturalists" that preceded him. For a discussion of some of the problems and difficulties arising from the definition of "peasant" and "peasantry," see Ranger (1970). More recently, authors like Frederick Cooper have emphasized the fluidity of abstract sociological categories during later periods of substantive socio-economic disarray. "Stabilized labor never did conquer the labor market [of the 1950s and 1960s]," he writes. People used family connections to find jobs in cities and to preserve access to farmland at home. Families—even husbands and wives—could thus have more than one residence and often lived apart. Families have to think strategically about placing members in different locations (2002:124). As Sara Berry has written of agricultural change during this period and afterward in sub-Saharan Africa, there often arose conditions of "exploitation without dispossession", in which complex struggles over commercialization, political centralization, and social change interacted with the dynamics of domestic groups to determine the availability of labor within families (Berry: 155).

Yet, who we consider to be peasants (and who we do not) has significant implications for any assessment of colonialism's impact. Was the pre-colonial agriculturalist a peasant, and if so, should s/he serve as the baseline for comparison with the colonial peasant? Was the reserve-based agriculturalist, increasingly discouraged from selling surplus product within the cash economy, a peasant? What of the landowning African who may have even employed black labor? The answers to these questions have great import when determining whether the peasant economy was "universally damaged and curtailed," and if so, to what extent.

Indeed, two distinct definitions make an appearance in the underdevelopment literature. The first, offered by Palmer and Parsons (1977: 2) in the introduction to their edited volume of essays, is the broadest: "'peasants' are small agricultural producers who intend to make a living by *selling* part of their crop or herds, while 'proletarians' are wage earners in the hire of an employer." Within the same volume, the authors admit, some scholars opted for the "somewhat complex" definition provided by J.S. Saul and R. Woods (1971). Indeed, so "complex" is the

definition that only its most pertinent parts are reproduced here:

Peasants are those whose ultimate security and subsistence lies in their having certain rights in land and in the labour of family members on the land, but who are involved, through rights and obligations, in a wider economic system which includes the participation of non-peasants. It is precisely this characterization of the peasantry in terms of its position relative to other groups in the wider social system which has particularly important explanatory power in the analysis of development...Despite the existence of some prefigurings of a peasant class in earlier periods, it is more fruitful to view both the creation of an African peasantry, as well as the creation of the present differentiation among African peasantries, as being primarily the result of the interaction between an international capitalist economic system and traditional socio-economic systems, within the context of territorially defined colonial political systems. (Saul and Woods, 1971: 105).

Underdevelopment theorists offer a definition which, situates the peasantry in a precise historical period, in a specific interaction with classes external to it, and with a particular relationship to its means of production. Since the peasant class was itself a product of colonialism (and therefore did not exist before the colonial period), there is a clear baseline of comparison: a determination of whether the peasant economy was undermined and curtailed will only compare different phases of the colonial era, and will not include the pre-colonial "agricultural" economy. The definition also provides a barometer for assessing "undermining" and "curtailment." For the underdevelopment theorist, it is not enough to simply measure peasant output or productivity, but to also measure the peasants' "security and subsistence" based upon "certain rights in land and in the labour...on the land" and their "position relative to other groups." In other words, it is not necessarily a contradiction to claim that peasants experiencing higher per capita grain yields are nevertheless a "curtailed" and "undermined." The significant measure is how and under what conditions this higher yield is achieved, as well as how the higher yield compares with "other groups" (in the case of Rhodesia, the white farmers).

Much less complexity is to be found in Mosley's work. First, Mosley fails to provide a definition of the peasantry, thereby forcing the reader to construct one for him/herself. Thankfully, such a task is made simple by Mosley's frequent equation of the "African rural economy" with the "peasant economy," which suggests that he considers the peasantry to consist of any and every rural agricultural producer. With such a broad characterization, it is not surprising that Mosley measures "undermining" and "curtailment" in purely statistical terms: his sole measurement of the health of the peasantry is its per capita grain yield, irrespective of the means and

conditions under which it was produced and its relative standing against other sectors (i.e., the productivity of white settler agriculture).<sup>3</sup>

Determining which definition is “correct” or preferable is beyond the purview of this essay. The important point is that an assessment of the fate of the colonial-era peasantry is itself dependent upon the stable of ideas that are brought to bear upon the question. The underdevelopment and modernization theorists, in conceiving of the peasantry in very distinct ways, inevitably reach differing conclusions when assessing the same historical process. For those wishing to assess the peasant experience without subscribing to either theory, it is necessary, in the words of Ian Phimister, to “dis-aggregate” the peasantry: “the way in which different regions were incorporated into the wider economy was itself crucially influenced by the uneven spread of commodity relations. By specifying the process of rural class formation and differentiation, it is possible to reconcile evidence of immiseration with signs of prosperity” (Phimister, 1985-6: 240-1, 1988: 1-2). This differentiation created regional, ethnic, and class lines distinctions within the peasantry, divisions that yielded a diversity of experiences. If a more comprehensive picture of the colonial Zimbabwean peasantry is to be achieved, the observations of the dominant paradigm, then, must be supplemented with those experiences that run counter to the prevailing trend.

## PROSPERITY, PENURY, AND PLACES IN BETWEEN

Those underdevelopment theorists who have studied the breadth of Zimbabwean colonial history (in particular, Palmer and Arrighi) have observed two distinct periods: an “era of peasant prosperity” (Palmer, 1977: 71-3), running approximately from 1896 to 1908; and a period of decline thereafter, intensified especially during the depressions. The period of prosperity is credited to a favorable concatenation of factors. The seizure of Mashonaland and Matabeleland by the British South Africa Company led to the formal expropriation of vast swathes of territory; however, Shona agriculturalists were not immediately pushed off their ancestral land, and could therefore continue producing as before. Meanwhile, the military conquering of the Ndebele state, which had drained Shona surplus through tribute and raids, enabled the Shona to conserve a greater share of their labor-time. The resulting surplus, in turn, was marketed to a (new) captive market of white settlers and mine workers,

integrating Shona agriculture into the colonial cash economy and enhancing the average material standing of the Shona agriculturalists. Although onerous exactions did exist (rent on privately-held land and forced labor, to name the most prominent), such hardships were not so grievous as to prompt a significant shift from agriculture to wage labor (Arrighi, 1970: 202-3).

Even at this early stage, however, regional, ethnic, and class differentiations ensured that such “prosperity” was not shared by all. Amongst the Ndebele of Matabeleland a distinct process occurred depending upon class position. After the conquest of the Ndebele state the Ndebele upper-caste was expropriated of its land and cattle, effectively destroying the economic base with which it could have integrated itself into the emerging cash-crop economy. The Ndebele lower-caste, in contrast, was largely able to retain its usage (though not “ownership”) of the land just as it, like the Shona, was relieved of its previous burden of providing labor-time to the Ndebele upper-caste (Arrighi, 1970: 202-3). Those Ndebele chiefs who collaborated with colonial authorities during the Rising of 1896-7 were granted an exemption from harsh punishment and were allowed to retain and expand their (not inconsiderable) cattle herds (Phimister, 1985-6: 247).

Amongst the Shona, as well, internal differentiation was significant. “Better off” Shona acquired ploughs which not only enhanced their own agricultural output but also enabled them to sell their ploughing capacity to neighbors (Phimister, 1985-6: 247). For those Shona who managed to acquire relatively high-paying wage employment, “proletarian” status also enhanced “peasant” status, as they were able to reinvest a portion of their wage earnings into agricultural improvements, such as cattle, ploughs, and scotch carts (Phimister, 1985-6: 249). Indeed, the resulting stratification was so deep that a small layer of “black farmers” emerged. One such “farmer” employed eight full-time laborers and drew rent from a further fourteen Shona “squatter families” (Ranger, 1970: 59). Thus, despite the general trend outlined by the scholars of underdevelopment, there was penury (or at least a decisive lack of means) amid the prosperity.

The second phase of development identified by the underdevelopment theorists, beginning as early as 1903 but intensifying after the depression of the early 1920s, brought a harsh reversal of fortune to the Zimbabwean peasantry. Failing to find a “second Rand,” the British South Africa Company (BSAC) sought a supplementary mode of economic development that would be capable of accumulating capital and providing input to Rhodesia’s infant industries: white settler farming. The encouragement of white farming introduced a new political and economic dynamic into the colony, one which tipped the balance strongly against African peasant interests. Competing with the native peasant for land and markets, and seeking to draw a greater upon an ever-larger (and

<sup>3</sup> It must be stressed that this is not a criticism of Mosley’s method, his empirical findings, or his focus (the type of statistics that would allow for an ideally broad picture may not be available). It is, however, a criticism of his theoretical conclusion: by using such crude statistical measures to question the underdevelopment thesis, he fails to appreciate (or perhaps understand) the substantive points raised by the theory that he criticizes.

therefore cheaper) pool of native wage laborers, the new class of white farmers pressed for governmental policies that would not simply disadvantage the native peasantry, but would liquidate the peasantry as a group. Facing such pressures, it was anticipated that peasants would abandon commercial agricultural production and revert to wage labor on white farms and white enterprises or, alternatively, subsistence agriculture on land-poor and overcrowded reserves.

To this effect, a series of measures were introduced. In 1909, the BSAC imposed a rent upon all peasants on unalienated land, followed sometime later by a dog tax. In addition to rent and labor services, white landowners established a variety of exorbitant fees (for grazing, cattle dipping, etc) (Arrighi, 1970: 208). Land boundaries were drawn and redrawn in order to remove the best land from peasant usage, most significantly with the Native Reserves Commission of 1915 and the Land Apportionment Act of 1930. Finally, during the depression period, when peasant production was not vulnerable due to low agricultural prices, government intervention further depressed the terms of trade in whites' favor, most significantly through the Maize Control Amendment Act of 1934 (Palmer, 1977: 211-2). By the end of the 1930s, the cumulative result of such policies, accorded to the underdevelopment theorists, was qualitative undermining and curtailment of peasant agriculture. Whereas the sale of produce accounted for approximately 70 percent of African cash earnings at the beginning of the century, by 1932 it accounted for less than twenty percent (Arrighi, 1970: 216). Although some commercial agriculture persisted, the white farmer had won out over the peasant cultivator: wage labor and/or subsistence farming become the only viable economic choices for the native.

As during the "era of peasant prosperity," however, peasant differentiation produced experiences that defied, if only for a time, the broad trend of "proletarianization" and increasing poverty. Mosley (1983: 397) points out that an important regional factor is the extent to which agricultural communities adopted productivity-enhancing "centralization" measures advocated by the government's agricultural demonstrators.<sup>4</sup> For those peasants who had sufficient grazing land, a shift from produce production to cattle-raising afforded temporary relief, as white farmers continued to demand native stock as an input for their own cattle operations (Arrighi, 1970: 214; Phimister, 1985-6: 202-13). Although Kosmin asserts that the Inyoka tobacco industry "disappeared," this did not occur until the 1960s. To be sure, the Inyoka tobacco farmers were detrimentally affected by the depressions and the governments' "proletarianizing" measures; however, their

production of a niche cash crop allowed them to maintain a degree of independence and prosperity not enjoyed by most others (Kosmin, 1977: 279-85). The peasant producers of Chiweshe, without the population pressures of other districts, were able to expand their production and sale of maize during the 1930s by extending their acreage and widely using ploughs (Dopcke, 1989: 52). Even in such districts as Mazoe, where farmers possessed almost ninety percent of the land (Palmer, 1977: 262), rich peasants were able to stave off "proletarianization" through the negotiation of tenancy agreements. By agreeing to work on the white farmers' land in certain intervals, these peasants were granted "personal fields, usually with richer soils than in reserves" (Phimister, 1985-6: 253).

This article is primarily concerned with the empirical, and, in particular, the theoretical ambiguities that shaped early historiographical debates about peasant experience and welfare in the colonial Rhodesia. However, its theoretical emphasis on the need to "disaggregate the peasantry" can also be helpful in understanding the differential and disputed outcomes of the post-2000 land reforms. As various contributors to a special issue of the *Journal of Peasant Studies* (December 2011) devoted to recent land reforms have stressed, there have been multiple responses by those commonly referred to as "peasants." As Sam Moyo has noted, the reforms have fuelled new inequities in access to land and farm input and output markets (339). Even as many new farmers accumulate substantial new assets, others struggle all the more to ensure their basic social reproduction. Meanwhile, a group of so-called "middle farmers" has emerged who are producing, accumulating, and investing (Scoones et al. 2001; 967). As during the colonial era, a close examination of regional domestic networks, political connections, and myriad other factors is needed to assess the fate of post-colonial Zimbabwe's "peasantry"

## CONCLUSION

An historical approach which "disaggregates" the peasantry along ethnic, geographic, and class lines underscores the fact that there was not a single Zimbabwean peasant experience during the colonial period, but several. As a result, two important implications arise. First, there can be no doubt that peasant agriculture was *not* "universally damaged and curtailed" during colonial rule. Peasant agriculture underwent an initial period of prosperity, and even when significant hardships and dramatic changes occurred during the period of "proletarianization," such negative experiences were by no means uniform. Mosley's data even suggest that peasant agriculture, conceived narrowly in per capita yield terms, emerged from the latter period without having been significantly effected.

<sup>4</sup> Of course, it must be noted that such "positive" governmental measures were instituted alongside a much greater number of "negative" ones (such as the Maize Control Amendment Act), thereby reducing significantly their potential benefits. See Palmer, *Land and Racial Domination*, 202-213.

Even if underdevelopment and modernization theorists agreed that peasant agriculture was not “universally damaged and curtailed,” the two schools remain very much at odds over the *general trajectory* of peasant agriculture during the colonial period. Assertions that the peasant economy experienced “disintegration” (Good) and even destruction (Palmer) cannot be easily resolved with the Mosley’s observations. This problem highlights a second implication of “disaggregating” the peasantry, that of definition. The peasantry under colonialism was hardly a cohesive group, or even a unitary socioeconomic class. Under political and economic pressure, the stratum of commercially-successful agriculturalists that colonialism itself had produced began to fragment: the less successful reverted to wage labor and subsistence, while the most successful escaped the class altogether (the so-called “African farmers”). As historical materialists, underdevelopment theorists conceived of the peasantry in a very specific way, as a group possessing definite rights to labor upon land and existing in a certain relationship with non-peasant socioeconomic groups. The absolute value of peasant productivity is irrelevant to the definition. Bearing this definition in mind, it is quite appropriate for the underdevelopment theorists to claim that the peasantry experienced disintegration, even destruction, during the periods of their study. Governmental and economic policies resulting in widespread “proletarianization” undermined the peasantry’s standing vis-à-vis the class of white farmers and challenged preceding rights to labor on the land. Mosley, in contrast, adopts a much broader view of peasant agriculture, making no apparent distinction between peasant commercial production, peasant subsistence production, and African farmer production. For Mosley, peasant agriculture is simply native agriculture, and its fortunes can be traced through raw statistics. Thus, there need not be any contradiction between the observations of the underdevelopment and modernization schools. Theorists from both sides approached the peasant question with differing ideological precepts, and therefore assessed the *same phenomenon* in completely divergent ways.

### Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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