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# Why is there no agrarian capitalism in Nigeria?

GAVIN WILLIAMS

**Abstract** It is widely assumed that the development of commodity production in agriculture will necessarily lead to the displacement of peasant producers by more strictly capitalist forms of production. I argue that no such transition can be assumed in general, nor can it be shown to be occurring in Nigeria. The first section identifies the various ways in which the peasantry are said to be transformed along capitalist lines. The second section examines conditions under which agrarian capitalism has been established, both in Europe and in Africa. It discusses attempts by governments and capitalists to subordinate peasant producers in Africa to their direction. The third section examines attempts to establish plantations, capitalist farms and state farms in Nigeria and considers what light evidence of inequalities among peasant households sheds on the possible emergence of capitalist producers from among the peasantry. It discusses whether rural development projects are likely to transform peasant production along capitalist lines and/or subordinate peasants to the requirements of capital and the state. I conclude that state support has provided niches for capitalist farming, but that Nigerian agriculture is not being transformed along capitalist lines and that both capital and the state have found it difficult to subordinate peasant producers to their direction.

## I. Theories regarding Capitalism and the Peasantry

### *Capitalists and Agriculture*

Like Simmel's classic question about the absence of socialism in the United States, this question presupposes that, that, as commodity production expands in the countryside, capitalist relations of production will develop there. In its simplest version, a combination of entrepreneurial initiative and economies of scale will enable better off farmers to expand their holdings and to displace poor farmers, who will be transformed into an 'allotment-holding' proletariat, supplying cheap labour to their proto-capitalist neighbours (Lenin 1899:172-87). Such an expectation runs against numerous historical examples of the ability of family farms to perpetuate themselves as the predominant form of farming enterprise, and of the difficulties of organising agricultural production on the basis of employing wage labour, even in otherwise thoroughly capitalist economies.

The 'transition to capitalism' in the countryside may take other forms. Lenin (1908) distinguished the 'American' path, in which capitalist enterprises supposedly emerge from family farms, from the

'Junker' path, in which 'landlords' employing serfs converted themselves into capitalists employing wage workers. An alternative possibility is for an urban bourgeoisie, deriving its wealth from commerce or political or public office to invest in food and crop production to take control of lucrative markets (de Janvry 1981: 109, 132[1]).

Capitalists may seek to profit from agriculture without taking over the business of production themselves. In the first instance, this simply means trading in agricultural commodities and in producing and trading the goods bought by farmers. Traders can appropriate monopoly profits if they can control the prices at which farmers sell their produce, and/or the prices at which they buy commodities. One possible way of doing this is for traders to make farmers depend on them for credit, for consumption needs or to meet production costs, in return for later delivering their produce to their creditor at a low, fixed price[2]. However, it is difficult for private traders to enforce such monopsonies, since farmers must be prevented from selling to other traders at a better price, or without repaying their loans.

Capitalists can dictate terms to rural producers if they can control the conditions of production, as well as the terms of trade, of rural producers. This can be done where the product has to be processed before consumption, so that the sugar miller or cotton ginner can, in the absence of effective competition, lay down the price of the produce. If the price falls too low, farmers can still switch to other crops or withhold their produce from the market. If, in addition, the capitalist controls access to land or irrigation water, he can require farmers to grow the crop he buys. He may further require the use of particular inputs, which he supplies, and even specific methods of production. Capitalists depend on state agencies to enforce their claims to property in land, the recovery of debts, purchasing monopsonies and the exclusion of recalcitrant tenants from 'their' land. Such necessary collusion is facilitated by joint ventures with the state, in which the state, for example, acquires a monopoly of the export of the crop or pays for and administers an irrigation scheme (Williams 1976: 149).

In all of these cases, capital seeks to control the conditions under which rural people produce commodities, either directly by employing them as wage workers or indirectly by controlling the means of production and distribution of peasant producers. Such control is never complete and always difficult to enforce. Workers and peasants offer both overt resistance, such as strikes, or hold-ups of produce, and covert forms of resistance, such as poor work, theft, harming stock or 'desertion' from employment by labourers, selling produce illegally or diverting irrigation water to unapproved crops.



*Peasants and Capitalism*

Peasants are commonly defined as a 'transitional' class (Saul and Woods 1971: 107; Deere and de Janvry 1979: 610). Specifically, peasant agriculture is assumed to be in transition to capitalism, in one form or another. The one alternative is for the state to step in and take over the business of production directly, or the conditions of peasant production or marketing, thus bypassing capitalism in favour of a transition to 'socialism', or complementing it by forms of state capitalism. Either way, peasants are on their way out.

Such a transition is rarely complete. Indeed, for a class on the way out, peasants have been around for a very long time. They continue to exist in advanced capitalist and state socialist societies as well as in underdeveloped countries. They have not proved easy to 'capture'[3], whether through the market or by the state. In what sense, then, are they 'transitional'? Since peasants are, by definition, 'in transition' they are to be understood not as what they are but as what they are becoming. In this view, actual peasant communities exemplify, in an imperfect form, the 'logic' of capitalism and thus of their subordination to its requirements.

Most peasant households live in unequal communities. Households do not only use family labour. They hire labour in to supplement family resources, and rent out some of their labour-power for wages. They must earn cash to meet many of their consumption needs, tax obligations and production costs and often depend on credit to meet their cash needs for at least part of the year. Each of these phenomena – inequality, wage employment, dependence on the market and need for credit – may be interpreted as evidence for the tendency towards capitalism among the peasantry (Lenin 1899:ch.2). Following the metaphysics of Aristotle and the logic of Hegel, the actual phenomena are explained teleologically by the pure and complete forms which they only manifest imperfectly.

If we reject such idealist ways of reasoning, other possibilities arise. Peasants may continue to exist within capitalist, and socialist, societies. Inequalities within and between households, the employment of wage labour alongside family labour, production for the market and the use of credit may be recognised as features of the peasantry, living within capitalist societies but organising their production along principles different from capitalist enterprises (Williams 1976: 144-5). The question then becomes, not 'what form does the transition to capitalism and elimination of the peasantry take?' but, 'under what conditions will peasant producers reproduce themselves as a class?' and 'what are the conditions necessary for the establishment and reproduction of capitalist enterprises?' or 'for the subordination of production by peasants to the dictates of capital?'

## II. African Perspectives

### The Creation of Agrarian Bourgeoisies

Historically, agrarian 'bourgeoisies' are rare. Where they have established themselves most successfully, they have originated from land-owning classes, commanding one form of unfree labour or another, such as the Prussian Junkers or South African settler farmers. In these cases they were able to carry through the transition to capitalist agriculture with the aid of state power, both at national and at local levels where they usually acted for the state themselves. Additionally, they were able at crucial times to call upon the state to support them with tariffs, cheap credit and subsidised or guaranteed prices (Gerschenkron 1940; Trapido 1971).

The classic instance of agrarian capitalism is England. There capitalist relations of production predominated in agriculture long before manufacturing was organised along capitalist lines. In the main areas of commercial production, farming was undertaken by tenant farmers employing wage labour on land rented from landlords, many of them profit-oriented 'improvers' who farmed as well on their own behalf. Arguably this was not the outcome of a transition from 'peasant' to capitalist production. Even in medieval England, commercial production was dominated by manorial farming[4]. Rural producers lacked control of their own land and depended on the manor and the commons for access to their means of subsistence. Enclosure of the commons deprived them of access to important sources of income, but it was their lack of adequate holdings which forced rural producers into the status of dependent wage earners.

It has always been difficult to turn unfree labourers into free wage workers. The abolition of slavery was followed by various institutions, designed to tie workers to their employment and enforce the authority of employers, such as 'apprenticeship', indenture or Masters and Servants legislation. In many cases, former slaves could not be compelled to work as wage labourers and had to be replaced by migrant or indentured labourers, or by sharecropping arrangements[5]. In South Africa, Kenya and elsewhere, settlers long had to rely on squatters, sharecroppers and labour-tenants, together with seasonal migrant workers on contract, in the face of resistance to wage employment and the availability of cultivable land. (Beinart *et al.* 1986; Cooper 1980; Rayner 1986; Trapido 1978; Bozzoli 1983; Keegan 1987; Kanogo 1987; Byres 1983; Williams 1989)

Even after the transition to wage payments has been achieved, agricultural labourers have lacked freedom of movement and contract. A variety of institutions were, and still are used to secure for capitalist farmers a pool of labour, able to meet their changing seasonal requirements at the lowest possible cost to the farmer. In England these included employment on an annual bond, dependence on the employer for housing and on the parish for entitlement to poor relief. Farmers could call on the wives and children of their labourers at harvest, and on migrants from poor rural areas, such as Ireland for seasonal labour. (Marx 1867:828-53; for Germany see Weber 1906; Hussain and Tribe 1981:1, 51-8). These were features, not of an 'original accumulation' of capital, but of the developed capitalisms of Victorian England and Wilhelmine Germany. They are central to agriculture in South Africa, the most advanced capitalist economy in Africa, and migrant workers, full-time and casual, legal and illegal are still critical to supplying labour to capitalist farms in the West and South of the U.S. (Burawoy 1976; Corrigan 1977; Cohen 1988:181-97).



#### *Settlers and Agrarian Capitalism in Africa*

In recent decades, a system of high-technology, high-yield capitalist agriculture developed in South Africa and Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe. Its capacity to produce maize and wheat for the domestic and export markets has given capitalist grain farming a strategic political significance. The historical premises of this form of farming were the dispossession and impoverishment of the indigenous rural population; discrimination against Africans in the provision of transport and marketing services; laws to enforce the obligations of servants to their masters and passes and prisons to limit their freedom of movement; the legal prohibition of share-, rent- and ultimately labour-tenancy; and the creation of state institutions and private firms supplying inputs, advice and subsidies to, and financing the development of irrigation facilities for, a relatively small number of large farms. (First 1958; Wilson 1971; Lacey 1981:ch.4; Bundy 1979; Palmer 1977; Mudekunye 1980).

The creation of capitalist farms, employing workers predominantly for wages, has proved to be difficult and incomplete. Squatters gained access to land reserved for whites in Kenya, as in South Africa, in exchange for cash, crops and labour. Farmers combined the employment of resident labour tenants with recruitment of seasonal migrants on contract. For decades, white farmers, supported by the state, passed laws to turn squatters into farm servants, first as labour tenants and then as wage workers. They cleared Africans' cattle, and often small stock, and African families themselves, from the land which whites claimed for themselves. (Plaatje 1916; Keegan 1987; Bradford 1987; Kanogo 1987).

However, competition among farmers for labour, and resistance by producers, continued to stand in the way of the replacement of squatting and of labour tenancy. In South Africa, it was only after extensive mechanization of agricultural production that it was possible to implement the provisions of the 1936 Natives Land and Trust Act to end labour tenancy, which was finally abolished in law in 1981. Rural squatters, labour tenants and African landowners have been major victims of forced removals in the 1970s and 1980s (Morris, 1976; de Klerk 1983; Surplus People Project 1983; Platzky and Walker 1985; Cobbett 1986). Nevertheless, the number of Africans resident on white farms, and the proportion farming on their own account as tenants, increased between 1951 and 1980 (Simkins 1983, 1984, cited Bradford 1988).

Similarly, in colonial Kenya large-scale capitalist farming developed from a combination of land alienation, prohibitions on African cultivation of specific crops, clearance of Africans' stock from 'white' lands, Masters and Servants and squatter ordinances, a pass system, settler control of local administration and state support for settler farming (Brett: 1973:ch. 6; van Zwanenberg 1975). This range of measures did not prevent Africans from increasing their overall production of crops (Cowen 1981a; Kitching 1980; Mosley 1983). Despite massive removals and repression during the Emergency, settlers failed to convert most of their Kikuyu tenants into wage workers (Kanogo 1987:152-4).

By independence, small holders had been given access to additional land in the White Highlands and the Rift Valley and relieved of colonial restrictions on the cultivation of tea and coffee and keeping grade cattle. The smallholder share of total marketed output rose from 20 per cent in 1959 to 51 per cent in 1968, and evened out in the 1970s. Smallholder production of tea, coffee, pyrethrum and sugar increased spectacularly (Senga 1976: 89-93; Njonjo 1981). Nevertheless, the large-farm sector, though surrendering some land to smallholders, survived independence. Assisted by state credits, Africans took over a large proportion of the large farms. Rangeland has been enclosed to promote capitalist ranches. Large farm, as well as small farm, production of exports, such as tea and coffee, increased and the large farms, supported by high state procurement prices and generous credit arrangements, continued to produce most of the marketed maize. (Hinga and Heyer 1976; Heyer 1981; Kelly 1986)

Kenya's 'agrarian' bourgeoisie has its origins in commerce, official salaries and politics. Many farm 'by telephone'. The settler state established the conditions for capitalist agriculture, which the Kenyan bourgeoisie inherited. Once established, capitalist agriculture has, with a little help from its friends, proved able to live alongside peasant smallholdings (Leo 1984:181-98).



As Ranger (1978, 1985) and Mosley (1983:ch. 3) have shown, the Zimbabwean peasantry has proved able to sustain and revive itself despite successive attempts to destroy it to make way for white capitalist farmers. After the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) in 1965, when many white farmers switched from tobacco to maize, white farms became the main source of food for both rural and urban people. In independent Zimbabwe, a few Africans with access to credit and political connections began to purchase 'white' farms. Government resettled many more, and numerous rural Africans appropriated white-owned and state lands to cultivate for themselves. Since independence, improved maize prices have elicited increased production from capitalist farmers, and from smallholders, whose combined output of maize and cotton nearly matches the contribution of capitalist farmers (Cliffe 1987).

Capitalist agriculture in colonial Africa took the form of plantations as well as settler farms. These required more than access to land. Government was expected to pay for roads and railways and to secure for the plantations a source of cheap, seasonal labour (Brett 1973:290-1). In Mozambique, a huge area was effectively reserved for recruitment by the sugar estates at Sena (Head 1980). Taxation, forced labour and administrative direction were variously used in different colonies to secure to plantations, mines, and settler farms a supply of migrant labour from rural areas.

### *Capitalist Farming in Ghana*

In Ghana, businessmen, civil servants and army officers all sought to profit from growing and trading in rice in the 1970s. Under Nkrumah's Convention People's Party (CPP) government, state managed 'co-operatives' were created to grow rice on mechanized farms in the north. The CPP's successors preferred to invest in large-scale capitalist farms which would reward their various supporters and would, they thought, produce a quicker increase in rice output than support for peasant farming. Businessmen, politicians and civil servants acquired land and bought machinery with bank credit. Bank credit increasingly went to urban residents and, particularly under the military government, to army officers and their clients. Cheap labour could be hired from peasant households in the North. Government guaranteed the market and a high price for rice.

At first the new policy seemed to be succeeding. In 1975 the government declared that Ghana was self-sufficient in rice. From then on, the conditions which had allowed the dramatic expansion of rice production by capitalist farmers began to disappear. Neither land nor labour continued to be available cheaply. Mechanized production was extensive and destructive of land. Yields declined, new land became scarcer and more expensive or available only in more isolated areas. The expansion of rice farming and of government expenditure in northern towns increased the market for local, staple foods in the Northern Region, offering peasants an alternative to working on rice farms as a local source of cash income. Wages for women and children rose and increasingly farmers had to rely on recruiting workers, mainly boys and youths, in the towns. (Shepherd 1979, 1981; Van Hear 1982, 1984; Konings 1986)

Capitalist rice farming had been financed from revenues and foreign exchange earned by the export of cocoa, as well as from aid loans for fertiliser and machinery. Government bought cocoa way below world prices, leading to a decline in exports and in revenues, at a time of rising prices for fertiliser and other imports. This led to a shortage of fertiliser and machinery, including spare parts. In 1976 it was costing more in foreign exchange to produce rice in Ghana than to import it. Aid agencies pressed for a reduction in subsidies for fertiliser and hiring machinery, and government tried to keep down the price at which it bought rice. Farmers were able to organise the sale of rice at higher prices themselves and thus to force government to raise their own procurement price. Capitalist rice farming in Ghana could not remain profitable without rising support from government. Farmers lacked the control over a rural proletariat otherwise necessary to ensure the profitability of capitalist farming.

Capitalist relations of production are not the natural outcome of expanding commodity relations. Whether in England, South Africa, Zimbabwe or Kenya they have been brought into being with great difficulty, at much cost and in the face of considerable resistance. These conditions did not obtain in northern Ghana.

## Transforming the Peasantry in Africa

### *Peasants and Governments*

During and, in some cases, before colonial rule, peasant households producing for sale as well as for their own consumption became the dominant form of organising production throughout most of rural Africa. Larger three-generational households have tended to give way to smaller two-generational units. Slavery and other forms of unfree labour in African societies declined as did the importance of reciprocal exchanges of labour. Compulsory labour was reserved to the colonial state, and those officials and foreign capitalists to whom it allocated labour. Command of family labour, and the purchase of labour-power for wages became the normal sources of rural labour.

Households sold commodities, including the labour-power of some of their members, to pay taxes and buy goods and came to depend increasingly on the market to acquire items of consumption, including a part of their food requirements. Households differed significantly in the number of their members, in their access to land and to outside sources of income, such as wages or trading activities. Relations within households, between parents and children and between men and women, varied according to people's respective access both to sources of income outwith the household and to their household's own resources as well as their obligations to its members (Whitehead 1986). However, dependence on the market, inequalities and wage employment did not necessarily mark the beginning of a transformation of peasant households into rural capitalists and landless proletarians. The peasantry emerged and reproduced itself, in most of Africa, as part of the international capitalist society into which colonial government and commerce had integrated them.

Some workers have been able to invest part of their wages in agricultural production. Kitching (1980) demonstrates how differences in earnings from wages, salaries and business shaped the pattern of inequalities in access to resources in rural areas of Kenya. In southern Mozambique in the 1970s, as in Lesotho, the main source of inequalities among rural households was differences in their earnings from mine labour, poorly paid as that was (First 1983: 129-33; Spiegel 1980; Murray 1981: 96-9).

The main contributions of colonial rule to the emergence of peasant production were to finance railways and, belatedly, roads and thus increase farmers' access to foreign and domestic markets (Hopkins 1973). Direct intervention by colonial authorities variously took the form of restricting African producers, promoting social differentiation by encouraging 'progressive' farmers, or trying to direct production by African peasants.

The growth of mining, colonial towns and settler farms initially created markets for African produce as well as a demand for cheap wage labour. Governments in southern and east Africa restricted the access of African farmers to land, crops, transport and marketing facilities in favour of settler farmers and in the interests of recruiting mine labour (Arrighi 1970; Palmer and Parsons 1977). Colonial governments sought to solve the problems caused by the shortage of land in the reserves by 'improving' agricultural production. Colonial administrators tried to limit the expansion of cultivation by African farmers and to restrict the size of their herds to protect the soil from the consequences of overcrowding in the reserves, and to save African 'communities' from the disruptive effects of commercialisation! They imposed 'improved' cultivation and stocking practices (anti-erosion measures such as contours and tie-ridging, dipping and stock culling). These practices were usually onerous and often mistaken. They provoked peasant resistance in South Africa and the British colonies in south, east and central Africa. (Beinart 1984; Lodge 1983:ch.11; Ranger 1985; Cliffe 1972; Coulson 1977; Iliffe 1979; Lonsdale 1968; Sorrenson 1967; Kanogo 1987:107-16; Throup 1987).

'Betterment schemes' in South Africa, like 'centralization' plans in Rhodesia, were introduced to increase agricultural production and to deal with soil erosion in the 'native reserves' without touching the source of the problem – the appropriation by whites of most of the country's land. On such schemes the land is surveyed, divided into arable, grazing and woodland and, ideally, allocated to families with 'economic farm units' – a meaningless notion which ignores changes in the size and composition of a family's labour force. Since there is nothing like enough land to go round, plots are instead divided into 'half-sized farm units' (South Africa 1955:118), which still leaves out many families who have to be content with a yard to grow maize. On top of this thousands of people have been dumped in the reserves without any land at all (de Wet and McAllister 1981; Yawitch 1982).

### *Betting on the Strong*

In Kenya the Swynnerton Plan marked a change in policy towards encouraging enterprising African farmers in order to promote agricultural improvement. The administration took advantage of the concentration of Kikuyu in villages under the Emergency to carry through its reforms. The declared intention of the Plan was to allow 'able, energetic or rich Africans .... to acquire more land and bad or poor farmers less, creating a landed and landless class. This is a normal step in the evolution of a country.' (Kenya 1954:10). Land in Central Province was reallocated in consolidated plots and registered. Households with 'non-viable' plots were settled close to villages the better to provide wage labour to larger farms and to settler farms. Extension, processing and marketing facilities were made available to larger farmers. The plan imposed rigid rules on the division and disposal of land by families, who duly responded by ignoring the rules. However, without dispossessing landowners, neither the size of plots nor the incomes they were assumed to yield could offer scope for the emergence of capitalist farming (Sorrenson 1967; Heyer 1981:101-7).

Kenya did see an expansion of peasant production and the creation of a stratified rural society in which most families felt they had a stake. However, this was only possible when political independence led to the opening of large areas of land for peasant settlement and to cultivation of export crops to Africans generally and not just to approved farmers. (Wasserman 1976:ch.6; Lamb 1974; Leo 1984; Heyer 1981).



Attempts in west and east Africa to 'improve' African farming through extension services and innovations such as chemical fertilisers or bullock ploughs concentrated limited resources on 'progressive' farmers, distinguished usually by their greater wealth, access to non-farm incomes and amenability to the advice of extension workers. They tended to monopolise access to officials and government resources, while providing officials access to the community. Not surprisingly, benefits and innovations did not 'trickle down' very far or very fast. Nor did 'progressive farmers' generally become dynamic capitalist farmers; they tended to combine farming with diverse investments in trade and education instead (Thoden van Velzen 1973; Kitching 1980:364-74).

A variety of government programmes have favoured the rural, and often urban, rich rather than the poor and have consolidated existing networks of patronage. This tendency has continued under the aegis of national governments and aid agencies, not least the World Bank, since independence (Williams 1981a; 1986; 1988). The consequence has been to confirm and extend inequalities within rural communities but not to transform the structure of class relations. However, in certain cases, in the colonial period and since then, states and international agencies have been able to promote and to regulate the production of crops which have to be processed before they can be used.

## Subordinating the Peasantry in Africa

### *Growing Cotton*

Governments have tried to subordinate peasant producers to their direction both by taking over the supply of inputs and the marketing of the crop and by settling farmers on land, including irrigated land, under government control. Administrative direction and compulsion were widely employed to get Africans to grow cotton in British, French and Portuguese colonies in Africa when market incentives failed to suffice. The British Cotton Growing Association (BCGA), which never grew any cotton but was a syndicate of British cotton manufacturers, got British colonial governments to encourage peasants to grow cotton. Recognising the capacity of Ugandan peasant farmers to deliver cotton cheaply to the market, they persuaded the Colonial Office to support cotton production and to refuse to protect white coffee and rubber planters. In 1928 they limited the exactions by Bugandan landlords on their tenants and guaranteed security of tenure to the tenants who cultivated the land (Mamdani 1976:ch.2-4).

The BCGA could not require farmers to grow cotton for low returns without controlling the land. The Sudan Gezira Board requires tenants to grow cotton as a condition of their access to irrigated land on the Gezira scheme. Tenants (or their sharecroppers) often give preference to producing millet and thus divert irrigation water and labour time from cotton to food plots. Historically, the Gezira scheme was an effective instrument for getting tenants to produce cotton for export. Now yields are low and deficits rising as the administration continues to insist on cotton production in the face of low cotton prices and rising costs. The 'success' of the Gezira scheme depended on the management's control of irrigated land, its monopsony over the sale of cotton and an adequate return to cotton cultivation (Barnett 1977).

### *Contract Farming*

State agencies and foreign firms have in several instances encouraged the production of processed crops under their own direction by 'middle peasants'. They have monopolised the purchase of the crop and controlled the production technologies. In Tanzania British-American Tobacco promoted the cultivation of flue-cured tobacco rather than lower quality tobacco which could be sold directly on the local market. The Kenyan government prohibited the processing and sale of sun-dried tea. On the SODEPALM project in the Ivory Coast palm nuts are cultivated which are not suitable for domestic use and must be sold to the factories which process them for export. (Boesen and Mohele 1979; Cowen 1981a:134-7; Marcussen and Torp 1982)

In post-independence Kenya, the expansion of dairy, coffee and tea production was accompanied by increasing equality in the shares of output among different households. All three crops are marketed by government-controlled cooperatives or authorities. They supply inputs, including cheap artificial insemination of cows, and demand high quality outputs, suitable in the case of tea and coffee for export. This requires intensive labour on small plots. In the 1960s, the size and expansion of tea and coffee holdings was restricted, in the case of coffee to meet international coffee quotas (Cowen 1981b).

Nucleus estate-outgrower projects, such as the SODEPALM project or the Mumias sugar scheme in Kenya (Holtham and Hazlewood 1976; Buch-Hansen and Marcussen 1982) combine production by wage labour on the processing firm's own estate with purchase from smallholders. These 'outgrowers' are required to use the inputs supplied by the firms, to follow recommended cultivation practices and to sell the crop to the firm which deducts the cost of the inputs and services supplied and government taxes. These controls



are easier to apply on irrigation schemes in which land has been allocated to tenants, on condition that they obey scheme rules. Under these circumstances, producers supply little more than their own labour to production on their own land. Some firms plough the land for tenants and may even take over the hiring of labour to carry out harvesting. In some cases, landowners or tenants employ wage workers or contract production to sharecroppers and thus simply receive a rent on their claims to land.

Such schemes are not conflict free. Tenants may seek to evade cultivation rules or use irrigated land or fertiliser for unapproved purposes. They depend on the scheme management and employees for the timely delivery of irrigation water, tractor ploughing services or fertilisers. They may have to bear the costs of cultivation when late delivery of services reduces their yields and incomes. Antagonisms intensify if the price of the crop falls relative to costs of production or alternative crops or other sources of income (Mulaa 1981).

Under certain conditions, governments and international firms have been able to subordinate peasant households to their requirements. This has been possible when they have controlled access to irrigated land or essential inputs and have monopsonised the marketing of a crop which offers a higher return to labour time than available alternatives. This has not precluded conflict over the distribution of costs and returns and the administration of the scheme. Far from there being a tendency towards more effective control of producers by capital, such control is always in danger of breaking down.

We have identified various conditions under which capital has been able to control the labour-power and product of rural producers, either as wage earners or as household producers. These conditions are not easy to create and are difficult to sustain. In particular, they rely on various forms of state support of firms and coercion of producers. They certainly do not represent the telos of African rural society.

## III. Nigerian Perspectives

### Capitalist Agriculture in Nigeria

If capitalist farming has never been successfully established in Nigeria it has not been for want of trying. The first attempt came from William Lever. He asked the colonial government of Nigeria to support his proposals for palm oil plantations on a number of occasions, without success. In 1907 he asked for land to plant oil palms and to establish oil mills. In 1920 he asked for freehold land and in 1925 Lever Bros. asked the government to guarantee a supply of labour and to grant them the exclusive right to buy and process palm nuts. In 1944 Unilever's United Africa Company wanted the government, which was concerned at the loss of Malayan and Indonesian production and a war-time shortage of vegetable oils, to guarantee the company's profits as well. (Udo 1965)

Governor Clifford answered Lever in 1920 in a classic statement (cited Hailey 1938:982)[6]:

> As ... agricultural industries in tropical countries which are ... in the hands of the native peasantry (a) Have a firmer root than similar enterprises when owned and managed by Europeans, because they are natural growths, not artificial creations, and are self-supporting, as regards labour, while European plantations can only be maintained by some system of organized immigration or by some form of compulsory labour: (b) Are incomparably the cheapest instruments for the production of agricultural produce on a large scale that have yet been devised; and (c) Are capable of rapidity of expansion and a progressive increase of output that beggar every record of the past... I am very strongly opposed to any encouragement being given ... to projects for creation of European owned and managed plantations.

In Nigeria, government did not need plantations to produce taxable export crops; peasant smallholders were doing so already (Hancock 1942:172-200; Usoro 1974:36-50).[7]

Lever did succeed in getting concessions to set up plantations and oil mills in the Belgian Congo and acquired the exclusive right to purchase palm produce in the zone conceded to him. The produce from plantations in the Congo continued to be expensive and very limited in quantity (Wilson 1954:I,167-79,235;II,320; United Africa Company 1952:19-30). Lever's primary concern in Nigeria was to get a monopoly, or at least a dominant position, in the market for palm oil, a critical input for his factories. The produce trading firms naturally did not want to be squeezed out of the market by their major British customer and pressed government to reject Lever's plans. Lever retaliated by buying his way into the produce trade through the purchase of the Niger Company in 1920. In 1929 Lever Bros. bought out their main rivals, African and Eastern to form the United Africa Company (UAC), which in turn became part of the Anglo-Dutch Unilever combine. After 1929 the export and import trade of British West Africa came to be dominated by six European firms, led by the UAC! (Mars 1948; Bauer 1954) In the 1950s UAC shifted out of produce trading into manufacturing. Although it acquired some plantations producing palm produce, rubber and kenaf, they never contributed much to Nigeria's total output nor did they prove very profitable. Thus UAC never became a major agricultural producer in Nigeria.

In the 1950s, regional governments tried to attract foreign investment in plantations and to set up their own. Investors showed little interest, particularly when the government marketing boards



appropriated a large share of the price of the crop. Some firms invested in rubber, which was not sold through marketing boards. Regional governments took over plantations. None were very successful. Their main problem was controlling labour, as their workers were particularly liable to desert in the harvest season (Are 1964; Forrest 1981:235-6). Cocoa plantations were run on the Spanish colony of Fernando Po, using mainly Igbo workers from Nigeria. 'Desertions' could be controlled more easily on an island.

### *State Farms and Foreign Investment*

Their dismal record has not discouraged governments in Nigeria from investing more money in large-scale state farms and supporting foreign investment in capitalist agriculture. Huge sums were allocated in the Third and Fourth National Plans to federal and state food production companies. The companies built offices, recruited staff and cleared land, all at great expense. They failed to contribute to food production (Forrest 1981:249-50; Koehn 1986:40).

The federal government sought to promote U.S. agribusiness involvement in Nigerian farming. It offered foreign investors in agricultural enterprises generous tax allowances and write offs and offered to use the Land Use Decree to acquire large areas of land for use by foreign firms. However, foreign capitalists have preferred to profit from supplying and managing projects; direct investments in agriculture have been slow to materialize. (Watts 1983:493-4; Oculi 1984; Koehn 1986:41-3).

The sugar estate and mills at Bacita have produced sugar for the Nigerian market successfully, if expensively, under the management of Bookers. Britain's Commonwealth Development Corporation (CDC) agreed to manage the federally-financed Savannah Sugar Company mills and estate. It has suffered from high costs, shortage of materials and equipment and poor financial and technical management resulting in long delays and massive overspending and underproduction. In 1982 the government took over the management of the project. The sugar produced continues to be far more expensive than imported sugar. (Watts 1983:497; World Bank 1987:2,73).

### *Nigerian Capitalist Farmers*

Rich people in Nigeria have always sought opportunities to profit from agriculture, as from other possible avenues of investment. They have looked to government to make their investments profitable. The main beneficiaries of government credit and extension programmes have usually been those described to me by cocoa farmers in Akanran in

1971 as farming 'with their feet' – between their town houses and the Ministry offices. Northern aristocrats took advantage of colonial irrigation schemes and of the project for introducing 'mixed farming' with oxen and ploughs under the supervision of the Agriculture Department (Palmer-Jones 1987; Forrest 1981:227).

During the colonial period, rich and powerful families were able to secure the services of various forms of unfree labour. Even after the abolition of slavery, some households retained clients or servants who provided labour in exchange for land to grow their own food and expected assistance with marriage payments and other necessary expenses. Rich Yoruba farmers used the labour of *iwofa* (children of debtors). Northern officials claimed the labour services of their subjects in the form of *gayya*, reciprocal or communal labour, as could some members of landowning (*oloko*) families from their tenants in Ibadan (Clough and Williams 1987:180; Beer and Williams 1976:136-7).

However, it was difficult to enforce discipline over such unfree workers. Thus most farm production depended on family labour and otherwise on wage labour. Wage labour, whether migrant or local, was generally drawn from farming households. Wage workers have generally been free to move and to sell their labour to the highest bidder. Wage labour is usually hired for brief periods for specific tasks to supplement family labour. Cash payments have been lowest for workers recruited for a whole season, but the farmer has then to provide all their food. It has proved increasingly difficult to recruit such farm servants (Berry 1975:ch.5; Lennihan 1983). Trade and transport offered more lucrative ways of profiting from agriculture than capitalist farming. Thus during the colonial period, peasant households rather than capitalist farms displaced the variety of previous forms of organising agricultural production in Nigerian societies.

In the 1970s businessmen, army officers, and civil servants, including the staff employed on agricultural projects, sought to profit from the rising price of food. The federal government's massive spending on agricultural projects gave them the opportunity to do so. They secured access to scarce imports, such as fertilisers and obtained contracts to provide food to institutions. They acquired large areas of land for farming and ranching, with and without the assistance of state governments and of River Basin Development Authorities. The Nigerian Agricultural and Co-operative Bank made huge loans to private firms and individuals and agreed to underwrite the loans which the federal government required commercial banks to make for agricultural investments (Wallace 1981a:254-8). Some loans have been diverted to more immediately profitable uses than producing food. State governments have subsidised the purchase or hire of tractors and the provision of land-clearing equipment. Mechanical bush clearing has caused widespread erosion (World Bank 1987:2, App. 11).



Many large farmers have found it difficult to maintain their equipment, acquire sufficient fertiliser and recruit and supervise enough workers to farm the large areas they had acquired (Koehn 1986:41). Mechanization of some tasks increased the labour demands of others. Since they needed to recruit a large number of workers at once, capitalist farmers often had to get them from the towns and pay more than ordinary farmers did. The World Bank (1987:2,138) neatly summarises the 'main obstacles' to large-scale agriculture, some of them 'exacerbated by lack of foreign currency' as

> locating suitable land in easily accessible areas, mobilization of necessary capital, particularly the foreign component, availability of machinery and equipment and inputs for land clearing and production operations, sources of reliable labour both skilled and unskilled, management capacity, and suitability and efficiency of the production technologies for the particular crops under the specific environment conditions.

Massive government investment in irrigation schemes has created opportunities for urban officials and businessmen to purchase irrigated land. Yields depend on timely access to water and to tractor services which can be secured with money and political influence. On the South Chad scheme capitalist farmers sent labourers to work on their plots under the supervision of project staff. The World Bank's Agricultural Development Projects prepared management plans for large-scale capitalist farmers and even assigned large farmers at Gusau in Sokoto State the exclusive use of extension workers. ADPs have opened up opportunities for capital-intensive cultivation of 'winter vegetables, cowpeas and green maize' using tubewell irrigation (Wallace 1979; Andrae and Beckman 1985; Palmer-Jones 1987; Beckman 1987; World Bank 1987:2,127).

Capitalist farmers in Nigeria tended to concentrate on producing high-yielding maize for consumption by imported chickens. They face high costs and therefore look to the government to subsidise their costs of production and to ensure a high and stable price for their product. Both maize and poultry farmers have suffered from sudden falls in prices when the demand for their products has not kept pace with rising supply. Maize farmers want high maize prices. Poultry farmers, who may grow their own maize, want cheap maize and in southern Nigeria preferred to buy cheap imported maize to relying on supplies from northern producers.

In 1979 and in 1980 farmers in Northern Nigeria found themselves unable to sell 'yellow' maize. The Grains Marketing Board (GMB) offered to buy maize at the low price of ₦150 per tonne from large farmers selling more than 50 tonnes (Wallace 1980:69). In the 1980-81 and 1981-82 seasons the GMB price of ₦210 per tonne did not attract any sales. There was a bumper harvest in 1982-83. The GMB purchased maize at ₦325 per tonne for sale to feedmillers at ₦240 per tonne, during a period of severe budgetary stringency (Idachaba 1985). In 1985-6 the GMB purchased large quantities of maize and sorghum (guinea-corn) from its licensed buyers and from favoured capitalist farmers, at one and a half to two times the harvest price in Funtua (Clough 1986:89-97).

In 1986 the government created a foreign exchange auction, thus devaluing the naira dramatically. This raised sharply the costs of imported food, but also of imported inputs, thus placing capitalist farmers, with their greater reliance on and access to these inputs, at a disadvantage relative to peasant farmers. Import licences were replaced by tariffs and by bans on imports of rice and maize in 1985, day old chicks and vegetable oils in 1986 and wheat in 1987. Poultry (and livestock) farming both declined in 1987 (AERLS 1987). The GMB was abolished in 1986, but this has not ended demands for government to purchase surplus grains nor the commitment of federal and state governments to do so.

Prior to 1986, several local and foreign firms had committed themselves to agricultural investments to persuade the government to release import licences and foreign currency to them. Andrae and Beckman (1987:43-51) examine a cotton plantations in Gongola State, set up by a textile firm, Afprint, on land provided by the Upper Benue River Basin Development Authority (RBDA). The plantation managers accepted that smallholders could produce the crop more cheaply, but the plantation would ensure the firm's access to cotton in a situation of continuing shortages and when it had set up its own ginnery, the firm would be able to get access to cotton from local smallholders and from outgrowers on its own land.

Liberal credit policies, favoured access to imports and direct subsidies, in a period of rising prices and expanding markets for high-value produce, created a stratum of part-time capitalist farmers, who have contributed little to agricultural production and almost nothing to producing staple foods. The current fiscal and foreign exchange crisis of the Nigerian state threatens its capacity to continue to subsidise capitalist farming and to ensure any but the most selected few necessary supplies of imported machinery, spare parts and chemicals.[8]

If these constraints of costs and of the organization of labour limit the development of capitalist farming from outside the rural areas, are we likely to see the emergence of a class of capitalist farmers from below, drawn from the peasantry, or from rural traders?



**Peasants, Inequalities and Differentiation**

Whereas capitalist agriculture failed to take root in colonial Nigeria, peasant smallholders came to predominate in the production of tree and arable crops and to expand dramatically the production for sale of crops both for export and for local consumption. How did the integration of rural producers into a national and international market affect the social structure of rural communities and their access to income and opportunities?

During the colonial period, peasant producers sold increasing quantities of cocoa, palm produce, groundnuts, cotton, rubber and sesame for export. Earnings from export crops expanded the demand for food, as well as for imported and locally produced manufacturers. Rural families came to depend on the market for a significant share of their consumption goods, including part of their food needs. In the North, the burden of taxes and, during the conquest and the world wars, government requisitions of grain and of labour increased rural people's vulnerability to food shortages and even, as in 1942-3, created famine conditions. (Forde and Scott 1948; Shenton and Watts 1979; Watts 1983:ch.5-6). People migrated between rural areas to earn wages and find land to grow cocoa, cotton and food. Many people moved between urban and rural areas and changed their occupations, from wage work to farming or farming to trading over their lifetime. Non-farm occupations provided a significant share of the incomes of many people engaged in agricultural production (Berry 1981; Tiffen 1976; Udo 1975).

Households relied primarily on the labour of their immediate families. Among the Hausa, conversion to Islam has led to the increasing seclusion of rural women and the breakup of the extended three-generational Maguzawa (non-Muslim) household. Married sons often continued to work for their fathers in *gandu* but, with the expansion of alternative sources of income, the extent of parental control over the labour and income of sons and parental responsibility to pay for their sons' needs has declined (Wallace 1978; 1979:ch.6; Smith 1955:20; Hill 1972:249-50; 1977:138-143; Watts 1983:213-8;403-4). By the second world war, few Yoruba cocoa farmers could continue to rely any longer on the labour of their sons and turned instead to their wives. Women's work on cocoa farms is rewarded by a gift when the harvest is sold. Women have preferred to earn their own incomes elsewhere, generating tensions between husbands and wives (Clarke 1979a; Roberts 1988).

Wage labour is employed extensively by Nigerian farmers alongside family labour and the extent to which peasant farmers have to depend on employing expensive wage labour has increased. Rich farmers generally employ more wage labour than do poor farmers, but poor farmers without sufficient family labour often have to employ wage workers. Many members of farming households supplement their income by earning wages. Farmers recruit wage labour from local peasant households, from rural migrants and sometimes from the urban poor. Many households employ wage workers and also sell part of their labour-power for wages, even within the same year. (Berry 1975:ch 5; 1987:214-6; Shenton 1987; Lennihan 1983:251-60[9]).

The government assumed a monopoly over the major export crops during the second world war, which was continued by the commodity marketing boards, and between 1954 and 1973 the regional marketing boards, until the boards were abolished in 1986. The boards consistently set prices well below world market levels.[10] The real prices paid to producers for export crops declined from the mid-1950s. Exports continued to increase until 1965. In the 1970s, the purchasing prices of crops sold to the marketing boards were generally less than farmers had received in the depression of the 1930s. Cocoa and palm kernel exports declined. Palm oil and groundnut exports disappeared as they fetched a better price on the domestic market than the marketing boards offered (Williams 1981b: Table 3).

In the 1970s, the oil boom encouraged a rapid increase in the urban population and thus the demand for food. Food prices rose more rapidly than the price of other consumer goods. Imports increased even more dramatically, notably meat, dairy produce, vegetable oils, wheat, rice and maize. The overvaluation of the naira subsidized the cost of imports to consumers who could get them. Transport and other costs made it difficult for farmers remote from Lagos and other southern cities to supply them more cheaply than imported food could. The military government responded to the rising import of grains by alternately raising tariffs to encourage domestic food production and cutting them to reduce food prices. In September 1979, the retiring military government banned rice imports. Their civilian successors placed imports under licence, opening very lucrative profits to their licencees. Farmers and traders were thus burdened with the risks of erratic changes in the supply and price of crops.

Despite the rise in imports, most food consumed in Nigeria continued to be produced there. Food producers were able to take advantage of the rise in food prices, particularly in northern areas with access to rural as well as urban markets in Nigeria and, until the government banned grain exports in 1984, across the border in the Republic of Niger. Devaluation of the naira and the abolition of the commodity marketing boards sharply increased the prices for cocoa and other export crops, and for cotton, and food imports have become much more expensive where they have not been banned altogether.



The reforms of 1985-6 have thus created conditions for the renewed expansion of peasant production in Nigeria.

To what extent has production for these changing markets affected the distribution of land and income among farming families? What light does evidence on inequalities among rural households shed on the question of whether, and to what extent, rural families are differentiating into richer and poorer strata and even forming distinct classes?

### *Evidence on Inequalities*

Information on rural incomes and landholding is fragmentary and dated. Estimates are uncertain and sometimes speculative. Measures of inequalities postulate coherent households as the basic units of residence, of production and of consumption in rural areas. No such congruence between kinship, residence, productive activities and consumption patterns can be assumed (Wallace 1979:11,13n3). Evidence of inequalities among households thus rests on a methodological fiction, one which we follow here. Such evidence ignores inequalities in the distribution of food and of other resources within households especially as between men and women and between adults and children. Variations in the assets and income of households partly reflect variations in the size and composition of households. Inequalities in off-farm incomes are more marked than inequalities in land or in earnings from agriculture; they may be a major source of inequalities in land, in cattle ownership and in farm earnings. (Longhurst 1980; Williams 1981b: 26-30).

Most of the available evidence is drawn from two areas, both with good access to roads and market and close to the universities whence academics have gone forth to study them. These are the cocoa-producing areas of the Yoruba-speaking Oyo, Ondo and Ogun states, and the sorghum, cotton, millet and groundnut producing areas of the predominantly Hausa-speaking Kaduna, Kano, Sokoto and Bauchi states. Evidence on the distribution of land among households, from studies undertaken between 1949 and 1979, is summarised in Tables 1 and 2.

### *Inequalities among Cocoa Farmers*

In the 1950s, inequalities in access to land and incomes were greater among cocoa farmers than among other farmers. The 1950 Cocoa Survey, summarised in Table 1, shows considerable variations in the inequalities of cocoa holdings among different areas. The distribution of land was most unequal in Ibadan, where cocoa had continued to be cultivated from before the first world war and where little new land was available for planting. Cocoa holdings were far more equally distributed in Ondo, where production was more recent and holdings were still expanding. However, in Owena, an area which had extensive uncultivated land suitable for cocoa production, a few large farmers cultivated an exceptionally large proportion of the cocoa land.

Table 1. *Size distribution of cocoa land among cocoa producing households. Ogun, Ondo and Oyo States.*

| Year | Source | Place | Sample Size | Mean Acres | % Cultivated by Bottom 40% of Households | Top 10% |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1950 | Agric.Dept.: | Cocoa belt | 15,237 | 3.5 | 10 | 40 |
| | | Ondo: | | | | |
| | | Ute | 951 | 6.7 | 16 | 31 |
| | | Ondo | 1,326 | 2.5 | 12 | 35 |
| | | Idoani | 638 | 4.6 | 13 | 34 |
| | | Ekiti | 880 | 1.7 | 12 | 33 |
| | | Owena | 310 | 6.5 | 11 | 45 |
| | | Ife-Ilesa, Oyo: | | | | |
| | | Ondo Road | 671 | 7.0 | 10 | 36 |
| | | Osu | 907 | 3.6 | 10 | 37 |
| | | Ibokun | 513 | 6.2 | 9 | 38 |
| | | Ile-Igbo | 195 | 4.3 | 9 | 39 |
| | | Ibadan, Oyo: | | | | |
| | | Gbongan | 918 | 4.2 | 8 | 43 |
| | | Ajia | 1,358 | 3.0 | 9 | 42 |
| | | Olojuoro Rd | 923 | 3.8 | 9 | 44 |
| | | Egba, Ogun: | | | | |
| | | Ilaro | 1,525 | 3.4 | 17 | 28 |
| | | Ota | 3,822 | 2.1 | 15 | 32 |
| 1951-52 | Galletti | Oyo/Ogun | 85 | 4.4 | 9 | 41 |
| 1969-70 | Olayemi | Cocoa belt | 180 | 6.7 | 14 | 32 |

See Table 2 (p.368) for sources and derivation of figures.

Farmers build up cocoa groves slowly. The establishment of new trees requires large amounts of labour and they only bear fruit after seven years (three or four with new varieties) so that farmers first establish a small area of trees and use the income from that to pay for the food and labour needed to expand the holding much further. Farmers who began to cultivate cocoa first in an area of forest were thus able to build up much larger farms than those who came later. Clarke's study of Ifetedo in Ife division showed that local people tend to have larger farms than migrants from beyond the cocoa belt who generally came later to cocoa farming and often began to farm after a period as wage labourers (Clarke 1979a; Berry 1975:ch.3)

Below about five acres, family labour resources are not fully used on cocoa production and returns to labour time are low. Above eight acres, under present conditions, labour tends to be used less intensively and yields per acre tend to decline, while labour costs rise sharply as the proportion of hired labour increases. Thus farmers will try to build up their holdings to more than five acres, but will find it difficult to increase their holdings much beyond ten and certainly beyond twenty acres. Traders and professional men often own the largest cocoa farms, but find problems in supervising their labour. (Clarke 1979a:372-82; Olayemi and Oni 1971)

Between 1950 and 1970 the proportion of small farms below five acres decreased and the average size of holdings increased (Table 1; Williams 1981b: Table 9.1). As suitable land became scarce and as the average age of cocoa farmers increased fewer new holdings were established. Farmers with small areas of cocoa, and their children, abandoned them for more attractive opportunities in the urban economy. Prosperous cocoa farmers were able to invest in secondary school education for their children; poorer ones seek less rewarding alternatives. Inequalities are perpetuated in the access of families to urban opportunities, but not in the differentiation of cocoa farmers themselves into distinct rural classes (Clarke 1979a:434-42; Berry 1986).

### *Inequalities in Rural Hausaland*

Studies of rural Hausaland reveal definite patterns of stratification in rural society. The aristocracy and office-holders are much richer than most farmers, with far larger households and more land than most commoner farmers. They have better access to education for their children and are able to appropriate and allocate the resources which the government supplies to the villages, such as fertiliser, tractor-hiring services and even famine relief (Matlon 1981:350-2; Kohnert 1978; Palmer-Jones 1987).

Hill (1972:ch.5; also Matlon 1981:346-8; Kohnert 1979) shows that apart from the aristocracy and office-holders, wealthy farmers are more likely to have sons in *gandu* than are poor farmers. They are more likely than other farmers to be able to manure land intensively, hire labour, own ploughs and cattle, trade in grain and other commodities and cultivate high-value crops, particularly on floodplains. They bring wealth to farming from lucrative non-farming occupations and invest farm incomes in other profit making activities. As Clough (1979) put it:

Every rich village farmer is, or has been, a trader, specialising in cotton-buying, grains, cattle, cloth or kola ... the main exports and imports of the village community ... It is difficult to find a rich rural trader who is not also a relatively large landowner.

Table 2. *Size distribution of land among farming households. Kaduna, Kano, Niger and Sokoto States.*

| Year | Source | Place | Sample Size | Mean Acres | % Cultivated by Bottom 40% of Households | Top 10% |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1949 | Smith | Zaria, 4 places[1] | 58 | 5.3 | 17 | 29 |
| | | 7 places (incl. 4)[1] | 109 | 4.8 | 15 | 26 |
| 1966 | Norman | Zaria: | | | | |
| | | Dan Mahawayi[2] | 103 | 10.1 | 13 | 33 |
| | | Hanwa | 64 | 5.9 | 11 | 27 |
| | | Doka[2] | 153 | 8.7 | 14 | 29 |
| 1967 | Hill | Batagarawa, N Katsina[3] | 171 | 5.6 | 14 | 32 |
| 1968 | Goddard | Sokoto: | | | | |
| | | Gidan Karma[3] | 103 | 11.4 | 17 | 27 |
| | | Kaura Kimba[4] | 170 | 3.0 | 12 | 27 |
| | | Takatuku | 98 | 7.6 | 19 | 26 |
| 1970 | Hill | Dorayi, Kano[3] | 544 | 2.2 | 12 | 38 |
| 1974 | Huizinga | Giwa, N Zaria | 103 | 7.4 | 13 | 32 |
| 1975-6 | Kohnert | nr Bida, Niger | 210 | 9.4 | 13 | 34 |
| 1976 | Ross | Hurumi, Kano | 50 | 5.2 | 18 | 31 |
| 1979 | Clough | Marmara, S Katsina[3] | 107 | 7.4 | 10 | 39 |

The figures for the share of the bottom 40 and top 10 per cent are derived from Lorenz curves drawn through the co-ordinates given in the sources used in Table 1 and for Huizinga, Hill and Kohnert in Table 2. In the cases of Smith, Norman, Goddard, Ross and Clough they are derived from the original evidence.

**Notes:**
1. Figures exclude land held by district heads (as in Hill's studies and the others cited here). Inclusion would raise the degree of inequality.
2. Figures exclude adjacent farm hamlets. Inclusion would reduce the degree of inequality.
3. Figures exclude landless (or, in Hill's studies, those with less than 0.3 acres). Inclusion would raise the degree of inequality, and significantly reduce the share of bottom 40%. In the most extreme case, Dorayi, this would be reduced to 6%.
4. These are areas of *fadama* (floodplain) farming. Figures are for upland only and exclude *fadama* land. The distribution of *fadama* land is more unequal than the distribution of upland.

**Sources**: Table 1: Galletti *et al* (1956: 150,643-5) for the Agriculture Department Survey and for their own (Galletti), Olayemi (1972). Table 2: Smith (1955); Norman (1967, 3: App. Tables B2, C2, D2); Goddard *et al* (1976, 3: Tables A2, B2, C2); Hill (1977: 122); Huizinga (1979); Kohnert (1979: 309); Ross (1987: 228); Clough and Williams (1987: 182). The tables are derived from Williams (1981b: Table 9.2). The estimates given there have been recalculated and corrected, and exclude in all cases landless or those with very little amounts of land. This explains some of the discrepancies between this table and those given by Collier (1983: 200, 204) and Watts (1983: 410); Watts has wrongly aggregated the entries for Smith and wrongly averaged those for Norman and Goddard. Tables 8.2 and 9.2 give additional information regarding the distribution of income, expenditure and land among farmers in the northern states. Information on the characteristics of the villages studied is given on p. 107.



Simmons' (1976) study of household expenditures in three Zaria villages 1970-71 identified in Dan Mahawayi and in Hanwa, but not in Doka, a few households, mostly traders and cattle owners, who spent considerably more than any others. A.R. Mustapha's (1987) recent study of Rogo, Kano in 1986, emphasises the dominance of a distinct stratum of very wealthy farmers with rural origins. They engage in capitalist farming on a large scale, combined with extensive investments in rural trading, transporting and manufacturing activities. They own all or most of the trucks, tractors, cars, motor cycles, machines, buildings, plots and many of the bulls, ploughs and cows in Rogo; they monopolised political offices in all parties between 1979 and 1983. They earn far more from farming, as well as from other activities, than anyone else.

The other households in Mustapha's sample with substantial, though much lower, farm incomes were those who diversified into sugar cane and horticulture on *fadama* (floodplain) land; the rest grew sorghum and maize, mainly for their own consumption. Those household heads with little land were all younger men, with no adult sons. From this group were drawn nearly all of those who devoted much of their time to working for others.

As Hill (1972:ch.11) has argued, rich men are more likely to be the sons of rich than of poor farmers, though poor men may well be from richer families. Wallace (1979:ch.7) identifies wealthy traders who began to acquire skills and to accumulate money during their fathers' lifetimes because their fathers were able to provide for their living and marriage expenses and to employ wage labour on the household's plots.

The majority of farmers are able to provide most of their household's needs during the year, but may have to borrow money for major expenses, like the marriage of their children, and to buy food in the rainy season (Clough 1980; 1986). They are vulnerable to the risks of diseases and the other uncertainties of rural life.

The poorest farmers tend to have little land of their own and to engage in menial occupations bringing low returns. Hill (1972:191; 1977:195) suggests that they are not only short of land but of the means – cash, manure and family labour – with which to cultivate it effectively and find it difficult to borrow money. They or their sons may join the rootless people in the cities (on whom, see Lubeck 1987).

The problems of the poor are exacerbated in times of drought. They are least able to adapt their planting strategies and they are most likely to have to sell stock cheaply and earn low wages to buy grain at high prices. Some farmers may be forced to sell land and leave the area. In Kaita in northern Katsina few did so in the Sahel drought of 1972-4, partly because of the opportunities provided for the better off by farming and for the worse off by wage earning on *fadama* lands in the district (Watts 1983:ch.6, esp.440).

The studies of rural Hausaland carried out in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s summarised in Table 2 demonstrate substantial variations, within definite limits, in the extent and patterns of inequalities among households as between different villages. In many cases, a significant share of these inequalities can be accounted for by differences in the size of households rather than in the amount of land or income they command per resident (Williams 1981b: Table 8.2). These studies do not provide evidence of a general trend towards increasing inequalities in the distribution of land in rural Hausaland, let alone of the dissolution of rural communities into distinct classes of capitalists and proletarians.

Some places with ample fertile land, such as Dan Mahawayi in Zaria, allow people with money, often acquired from trading, and access to family and wage labour to acquire and farm a much larger share of land than would be possible elsewhere. As the examples of Hanwa, Kaura Kimba and Dorayi suggest, the share of land cultivated by the poorest households, on the other hand, may be lower than elsewhere in places where land is scarce and difficult to obtain. However, scarcity of land inhibits the expansion of large farms and their maintenance over generations as most households hold on to the land they have. (Tables 1 and 2 and Williams 1981b:29-30,37-41)

## *A Pattern of Differentiation in 'Frontier' Areas*

The most marked inequalities may develop, as in the cocoa belt, where it is initially possible for the well off to build up large holdings when land is easily available, and where migration and natural increase of the population subsequently reduce the supply of land available. This is most likely to happen in an economic and political 'frontier' area in a period of rising prices and expanded production for the market.

This pattern is described in Tiffen's (1976) study of Gombe in Bauchi state. Gombe is a relatively sparsely populated area with several ethnic groups and numerous Hausa migrants. Young and newly arrived families lacked the cash and labour resources to cultivate more than a small area. Men with able-bodied sons were able to expand their holdings and, during the 1950s when cotton prices were high, to buy oxen and ploughs. This increased the area they could cultivate and the money they could earn, but required



them to spend more money on hired labour for weeding and harvesting. In the 1960s, farmers in southern Gombe bought increasing amounts of chemical fertiliser to improve soil fertility. As land became scarcer and as cotton prices fell in the 1960s, it became more difficult for poorer or younger farmers to acquire large holdings, ploughs and oxen. They were able to hire ploughs from richer farmers and to supplement their farm earnings by selling their labour power. In 1982, the wealthiest farmers in Gombe depended very little on family labour, but relied instead on wage labour, mainly paid for piece work or by the day, with a few permanent labourers (Beckman 1987:120), .

A similar pattern of stratification was identified by Clough's study of Marmara, a hamlet in southern Katsina, between 1976 and 1979 (Clough and Williams 1987). Clough found that the distribution of land there was more unequal than that identified in other studies of Hausa villages. (See Table 2). This degree of inequality results from the specific combination of circumstances under which production for the market expanded and population increased.

Like Gombe, and the forest areas in which cocoa is cultivated, southern Katsina is a 'frontier' area in several respects. Its market towns, villages and hamlets fell under the jurisdiction of the 'Native Authorities' in the colonial period. They lacked the strong aristocratic presence to be found in Katsina itself, or in the town of Malumfashi, the headquarters of the division within which Marmara falls. It was very sparsely populated until the colonial period, when it attracted migrants from northern Katsina and Kano Emirate to grow cotton, groundnuts and sorghum. It shares some of these characteristics with the neighbouring areas of Gusau in eastern Sokoto and western Kano.

This region gave more rural support than others to the radical parties, the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) in the 1950s and the People's Redemption Party (PRP) in 1979. A major reason for NEPU and PRP support was its resistance to the extortionate practices of the aristocracy and political office-holders. These practices, which bore particularly heavily on rural farmer-traders, were constrained by the reform of the 'Native Authority' courts and police by the military government in 1967. Marmara also falls in a religious 'frontier'. Most Marmara families have been converted to Islam during the last thirty years. Conversion to Islam has been associated with a decline in the size of households and an increased commercialisation of rural life.

Since the 1960s, Marmara farmers have benefitted from the expansion of demand for grain in areas further north. The oil boom, following the Sahel drought, accentuated the rising demand for grain and saw a shift from cotton and groundnuts to sorghum and maize

(Clough 1986). Farmers who have been able to rely on family labour which they supplement with wage labour have been best placed to take advantage of the increased demand and prices for grain.

Urban-based Licensed Buying Agents (LBAs) controlled the sale of cotton under the marketing board system. By contrast, rural traders were more able than urban traders to benefit from the growing inter-rural trade in grain. A combination of economic, social and political changes expanded the opportunities open to rural entrepreneurs and led to the emergence of a distinctive stratum of farmer-traders who were well placed to respond to changing market opportunities in farming, commerce and transport in rural areas.

In the last two decades, Fulani pastoralists have moved out of the area to seek better grazing further south. Farmers with money, labour and bullocks for ploughing were able to increase their share of the land used. Continued in-migration has made land scarcer so that it is difficult for migrants and for new households to build up the size of their holdings. The distribution of land as between migrants and local people is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. *Distribution of land cultivated. Marmara village 1979*

| Acres Cultivated | 'Local' Households | Migrant Households | All Households |
|---|---|---|---|
| 0-2 | 12 | 11 | 23 |
| 2-4 | 17 | 11 | 28 |
| 4-8 | 18 | 4 | 22 |
| 8-16 | 21 | 0 | 21 |
| 16-24 | 5 | 2 | 7 |
| 24-50 | 6 | 0 | 6 |
| All | 79 | 28 | 107 |

Source: Clough, field notes

In the future, it may become more difficult for more wealthy rural households and their successors to expand their holdings in Marmara. The share of land cultivated by the category of larger households may even fall. Wealthy households with many sons subdivide as the next generation of men establish households of their own. Even if they buy or rent land to add to their own inheritances, each young man will probably command less land than his father could.

## *Constraints on Differentiation*

As land becomes scarce, people will seek to protect their present and future access to land, and that of their children. In a densely-



populated area in Wudil, Kano state, Ross (1987) found that women and male emigrants maintain their claims to ownership of inherited land, while leaving their siblings free to use the undivided land, or to rent it out. In this way they maintain their claims on their siblings. The capacity of a few farmers to engross land by purchase is thus inhibited since inherited land must be divided among heirs if it is to be sold. At the same time, land can be allocated flexibly each year by loan or rental among different users. Not only is the ownership of land widely diversified, but at least in Hurumi, the village studied by Ross, the use of land is also widely dispersed among households (see Table 2).

Farmers faced increased costs of living and production in the 1970s. The cost of food and other consumer goods, expected marriage expenses and, as Beckman (1987:118) points out, the cost of labour-power all rose. These place a particularly severe burden on the poor. However, high wages also help poorer farmers to provide better for their food needs throughout the year and reduce their dependence on credit to buy grain before the harvest. Thus wage labour may enable able-bodied poorer farmers to maintain their foothold in the rural community rather than convert them into a rural proletariat.[12]

In rural Hausaland, as in the cocoa belt, the extent of inequalities of land cultivated among farming households has varied significantly among different areas, and among different villages. In some places, under specific combinations of circumstances, inequalities in landholdings and incomes have probably increased. It seems likely that, since the mid-1970s, increased trade from and between rural areas, combined with privileged access to state support, has allowed farmer-traders the chance to get richer and to increase their share of land and other resources in rural areas. As Mustapha's study shows, some have organised farming on a fully capitalist basis.

Earnings from wage labour and other activities may enable young men with little land to acquire more by borrowing and purchase. Where land becomes scarce, opportunities for the poor are restricted, but it also becomes difficult to expand large farms and to maintain them over generations. It is complicated and expensive to displace farm labour with machinery and chemicals. The transformation of farmer-traders into capitalist farmers is constrained by the continued opportunities for the rural poor to earn a living and maintain access to land and, consequently, the costs of recruiting wage labour and by the capacity of farmers to manage it.

## The Impact of Government Projects

Before 1970, governments in Nigeria spent relatively little on agricultural programmes. Credit programmes and extension activities tended to benefit richer farmers and were used by politicians to extend patronage to rural areas. They had little effect on most farmers, or on agricultural production. State settlement schemes were initiated to clear areas of tse-tse infestation, to resettle ex-servicemen, to control migration and impose order, to promote mechanised farming and to find work for school-leavers. Most failed dismally to achieve their goals. They spent large sums of money acquiring and clearing land, building houses for officials and settlers and buying and maintaining tractors. Settlers on the Niger Agriculture Project, and subsequently on the Western Nigerian farm settlements, resented being told where to live and where to farm, what to grow and how to grow it. (Forrest 1981:233-8; Williams 1980:142-3; Wells 1974; Beer 1975:ch.4-5; King 1981; Baldwin 1957:159-60; Olatunbosun 1971:422; Shenton 1987).

During the 1970s the Nigerian government initiated three costly sets of schemes designed to enhance the productivity of land and agricultural labour. The first aimed to rehabilitate the production of export crops in the southern, forest regions, beginning with cocoa. The second was the agricultural development projects (ADPs) which began in the northern savannah areas. The third was the irrigation projects in the far north of the country. The World Bank helped to fund and administer the first two; both sought to provide yield-enhancing technologies to farmers. The third requires the subordination of farmers to the goals imposed by irrigation scheme management.

Have these projects contributed to increasing inequalities and class differences among rural people? Did they subordinate farmers to the requirements of the scheme management, and thus of capital and the state?

### *Rehabilitating Cocoa Farmers*

Since 1971, farmers have planted large areas with new high-yielding cocoa seedlings under the aegis of the Cocoa Development Unit. The three oil palm rehabilitation projects achieved little; two were abandoned before completion.

The Cocoa Development Unit (CDU) required participating farmers to provide a plot of one hectare (2.47 acres) of suitable soil on which to plant the new seedlings according to the Unit's specifications. They were not to interplant them with kola trees and were required to apply fertiliser and chemical sprays at prescribed intervals and weed three times a year. The unit provided fertiliser and chemicals on credit. In 1978 it gave loans of ₦ 80 per hectare to hire labour, rather less than the extra costs of the greater intensity of labour imposed by the



scheme's specifications for spacing, weeding and chemical inputs (Clarke 1979b).

The limitations of plots to one hectare appeared to ensure that larger farmers did not benefit disproportionately from the scheme. However a hectare is more than farmers usually plant within a year. For poorer farmers, it is half or more of the land available for cocoa and for food (Clarke 1979a:361-4). The project's additional demands for labour constrained small farmers with limited cash resources from participating. At a time when labour costs were rising much more rapidly than cocoa prices, the project's labour requirements discouraged richer farmers from large investments in expanding cocoa production. Thus the scheme is likely to have consolidated the pattern we identified earlier of a decline in the number of farmers with the smallest holdings and of limits to the expansion of those with the largest. It did not check the continued decline in Nigerian cocoa production. The devaluation of the naira and the abolition of the Cocoa Marketing Board in 1986 led to a four-fold increase in the naira price of cocoa. This may create the conditions under which farmers commit themselves to planting the new seedlings (Williams 1988).

### *Developing 'Progressive Farmers'*

The three ADPs[13] initially established with World Bank funding were situated in the cotton and grain (particularly sorghum) producing areas of Gusau (Sokoto State), Funtua (southern Katsina, Kaduna State) and Gombe (Bauchi State). They were subsequently extended to cover the whole or part of most of the states of the federation. The ADP's originally aimed to increase cotton production by spraying and by increasing the use of fertilisers. They wanted to revive the production of groundnuts, hit by drought and rosette disease, and to introduce high-yielding varieties of 'yellow' maize. They started from yield-enhancing technologies for what they considered to be 'commercial' crops rather than from market demand, in this case for staple food, notably sorghum. The project's major activities were to distribute fertiliser and other inputs through the network of Farm Service Centres (FSC) which they established and secondly to build rural roads and dams (Williams 1988).

Following the logic of the market rather than the expectations of the project, farmers switched production from cotton to grain. There was a rapid expansion of production, using fertilisers supplied by the project, of 'yellow' maize. Farmers used much of the fertiliser supplied by the project to do what they were doing already - grow more sorghum for sale to the rural areas further north.

Lacking any way to reach all farmers directly, the projects focussed their 'smallholder' programme on what they called 'progressive' farmers, to whom they gave priority in the allocation of inputs and of extension visits and from whom the projects' benefits would somehow 'trickle down'[14] to the rest. In 1978 rich merchants, many of them also part-time capitalist farmers, bought huge quantities of fertiliser from FSCs throughout the project area at the expense of local farmers. This produced protests from farmers to the Funtua ADP which, in Marmara, were led by the local 'progressive' farmer-traders. In 1979 the Funtua ADP responded by reducing sales to capitalist farmers and merchants and seeing that fertiliser was more fairly distributed among village farmers. In Marmara, all farmers were allocated fertilisers, roughly in proportion to their landholdings. Rural protests led by the farmer-traders had, ironically, enforced an element of 'trickle down'. (Clough and Williams 1987).

The Northern Nigerian ADPs followed an explicit strategy of subsidising part-time capitalist farming and promoting the development of a stratum of commercially-oriented rich peasant farmers. As in the cocoa belt, their intervention only accentuated developments that were already taking place in the economic, political and social structure of the countryside.

### *Managing Peasant Farmers on Irrigation Schemes*

In the 1970s the federal government invested massively in constructing irrigation schemes in Sokoto, Kano and Borno States. They provided profits for contractors and suppliers and gave officials and businessmen access to irrigated land. What was their impact on peasant farmers? Did they widen inequalities and class differences among smallholders? Did they subordinate farmers to the requirements of the scheme management, and thus of capital and the state?

The irrigation schemes expelled farmers from their land. Compensation in land or in cash, has never been adequate, timely or, often, even forthcoming. Many farmers, deprived of the means to farm left to seek urban employment. On the Bakalori scheme in Sokoto state, farmers refused to allow contractors to destroy standing crops. Some refused to accept the infertile land allocated to them. Others were unable to cultivate their land for three seasons. Farmers demanding compensation obstructed contractors and disrupted the irrigation system until in 1980 the police attacked them, killing 24 people (Gwandu 1988:ch.5,n86;[15] Wallace 1980:65; Beckman 1985).

The damming of rivers for irrigation dams disrupted the cultivation of *fadama* downstream, depriving farmers of the opportunity of growing lucrative crops for sale and grazing cattle, and protecting their incomes in times of drought. The schemes thus reduced the number of people with the chance to cultivate irrigated land (Stock



1977; Wallace 1979; Adams 1983; Watts 1983: 431; cf. Adeniyi 1970)

The construction and management costs of the irrigation schemes, much of it paid in foreign exchange, are enormous. There is no way that they can be matched by the value of the crops grown. Nor will they grow enough wheat at any cost to displace Nigeria's rising wheat imports. There is not enough water to meet the demands of irrigation and other uses when the schemes are fully developed and there was never enough for the dams to preserve water from year to year in times of severe drought (Andrae and Beckman 1985; Palmer-Jones 1987; Apeldoorn 1981:138; Adams 1985). The schemes continue to give priority to growing high-value crops, such as wheat, rice, tomatoes and sugar, and to try and find ways to making farmers grow what they are told to grow in the way they are told to grow it.

Wallace (1979:ch.7; 1981b) shows that farmers who exchanged rain-fed for irrigated land on the Kano river scheme were not equally in a position to benefit from this apparent windfall. Irrigated farming is expensive and risky. Farmers have to pay for seeds, tractor use, fertiliser and water. They cannot rely on the scheme's management and employees to supply them on time. They have to abandon dry season occupations to grow wheat or pay someone else to grow it so many farmers have rented their land out to others who can pay for labour and the other costs of irrigated farming. Wheat and tomato prices vary year by year and fluctuate over each season. Farmers are instructed not to grow sorghum, their staple food, in the rainy season, since the harvesting of sorghum prevents the early planting of wheat which reduces yields. Lacking control of the land, the scheme authorities have been unable to expel farmers who choose to grow sorghum and disobey their instructions.

At Bakalori, management intended to impose disciplined crops and water management from the start. The land was flattened - leaving the top soil to blow away and it was intended that farmers would be allocated consolidated plots. Farmers were to agree that their tenure was conditional on obeying project directives. Faced by farmers' resistance in 1979 and the difficulties of identifying which plots belonged to whom, the management abandoned consolidation. It has not been able to make farmers grow wheat or rice; maize is the main dry season crop. (Andrae and Beckman 1987; Beckman 1985; 1987:127-30; Gwandu 1988; Palmer-Jones 1984; Williams 1988)

The irrigation schemes have proved very expensive and appallingly inefficient. They have disrupted farming and the lives of farmers within and outwith the schemes. They have benefitted contractors, foreign and local as well as 'scheme workers, ... locally powerful farmers, and ... rich and powerful outsiders.' (Palmer-Jones 1980). They have failed to subordinate peasant producers or even their own staff to their instructions, let alone to the requirements of capital and the state.

## Peasants and Merchant Capital

If Nigerian peasants are not being transformed into capitalist farmers and rural proletarians, and if the state has not been able to direct their production, have they been subordinated to capital through their dependence on credit and the market?

### *The Expansion of Export Crop Production*

Farmers have come to depend on the sale of crops to pay for necessary items of consumption such as food, cloth or marriage goods, and to meet tax demands. New items entered the consumption patterns of rural people; others which had been produced locally were now imported and bought for cash. Farmers who sold their crops at harvest depended on credit to pay for their needs over the year.

Between the two world wars, the volume of crops exported continued to rise, despite the fall in prices during the depression. This resulted in large part from an expansion of the areas where the crops were grown and an increase in the number of households producing them rather than just from an increase in the output of individual growers. Groundnut and cotton exports began with the building of the railway, which reached Kano in 1912 and were encouraged by the building of railway extensions and roads in the 1920s. Groundnut exports rose from 39,000 tons in 1920 to 326,000 tons in 1937. Only the exceptionally sharp falls in the price in 1921, 1934 and 1937 and the famines of 1914 and 1926-27 checked, in the next season, the steady increase[16]. Similarly cotton exports rose from 10,000 bales in 1920-21 to 49,000 in 1936-37, falling only in 1926-28 and after the sharp price drops of 1931 and 1937. (Williams 1981b:Table 2; Shenton and Lennihan 1981).

Cocoa farmers were committed in advance of the current price by the nature of their permanent tree crop. Throughout the 1930s new trees continued to be planted in Ondo province and exports rose steadily from 17,000 tons in 1920 to 103,000 tons in 1937. Palm produce had been exported since the nineteenth century. Palm oil exports rose in the 1920s and remained fairly steady during the 1930s, while the exports of palm kernels, which could not be consumed locally, continued to increase. (Berry 1975; Usoro 1974; Williams 1981b: Tables 2-3).



### *Middlemen and Money Lenders*

The foreign trading companies purchased crops and sold cloth and other imported items through hierarchies of Nigerian traders. Companies bought crops from African traders who advanced loans to their buyers who supplied credit to farmers to pay for food and labour in advance of the harvest. In return farmers were expected to sell their crop to the creditors, possibly at less than their market value.

The trade in most export crops and the main lines of imports was characterised by a pattern of oligopolistic competition. Periods of intense competition between firms, each seeking to expand their share of the market alternated with 'pool' agreements to offer no more than a commonly agreed market price and to divide their profits according to agreed market shares. (Shenton 1986:78-9; Bauer 1954:100; Mars 1948).

The firms' attempts to restrict competition were justified by orchestrating a moral panic among businessmen and officials about the 'exploitation' of the peasants by the speculative trading practices of 'middlemen' and 'moneylenders' who were leading the peasantry into debt. This panic reached its peak in 1937-38. Prices of export crops rose rapidly between 1935 and 1937, stimulating intense competition among the buying firms, only to fall again in response to the American recession in the 1937-38 season (Williams 1985; Bauer 1954:267-71; 347-53).

On 1 October 1937 a 'pool' agreement was signed between almost all the European trading firms buying cocoa, with the agreement of the Colonial Office, if not the approval of the governors of the West African colonies. In the Gold Coast farmers organised a hold-up and the Nigerian Produce Traders Union protested against the agreement (Beer 1975:224-32). The cocoa pool was suspended in 1938, though the firms privately agreed not to pay prices higher than those offered by the dominant firm, the United Africa Company (Shenton 1986:110).

The Nowell Commission appointed by the British government recognised that 'the legitimate interests of the sellers were prejudiced by the suppression of competitive buying.' They cited evidence 'that the intense competition between produce buyers has led them in some cases to offer advances at low rates or even without interest in order to secure an option on cocoa.' Indeed, farmers found it easier to default on advances. Nevertheless, the commission accepted much of the firms' claims regarding 'undesirable practices' including advance purchases and speculation against price changes by middlemen. It declared that 'Indebtedness among farmers is undoubtedly widespread and serious.' (U.K. 1938:87,147-9)

In 1946 Nowell's views were used to justify the establishment of a state monopoly of the export of crops (U.K. 1946: App. 1). The marketing boards would fix prices for a whole season and thereby, apparently, eliminate indebtedness among producers, tempted to extravagance by rising prices and 'driven to the money-lender' when prices fall, and would prevent the 'speculation and profit-taking by African middlemen' which 'deprives the farmer of the full return on his produce.' (U.K. 1946: 3)

Clearly traders were in a better position than farmers to time their sales to secure the best price. Nevertheless, farmers got better prices and cheaper credit when firms, and thus traders, were competing for produce. Collusion among buying firms would make credit scarcer and prices to producers lower.

Firms found ways of evading the restrictive terms of 'pool' agreements and were not always able to exclude competitors, notably Levantine traders (Bauer 1954: 228-59; Shenton 1986: 88-9). Their problem was not that the 'middlemen' exploited the peasants but that competition among themselves made it difficult to dictate the terms of trade to farmers. This could only be done if the state introduced a statutory monopoly, as it did in 1939. The war-time produce control board placed its management effectively in the hands of the European firms.

### *Cotton Growers and Buyers*

The British (later Empire) Cotton Growing Association (BCGA) sought, with state support, to encourage farmers to grow cotton for export and to displace local cloth producers. The Colonial Office granted the BCGA a buying monopoly between 1904 and 1924. This enabled them to set the price for local cotton, but it did not deal with local competition. Government subsidies failed to stimulate much cotton growing in the south. Nor was official encouragement sufficient to make farmers grow cotton in areas of the north where groundnuts offered a better return (Hogendorn 1978). In 1916 the government prohibited the planting in certain areas of other than American Allen cotton, which was unsuitable for use by local weavers (Shenton and Lennihan 1981: 54-5).

After 1924, foreign firms bought cotton from African buyers who were paid on a commission basis. They extended credit through rural traders and hamlet heads, to whom they often advanced money for farmers to pay their taxes which fell due before the cotton harvest. Both the firms and the government saw the 'advance' system as an 'abuse' which deprived the farmer of the full value of his produce and in 1935 sought to regulate the activities of 'middlemen'. In 'market areas' firms were required to buy cotton directly from farmers at



gazetted markets for the full price in cash. Only further afield, in 'buying areas' could traders legally buy cotton for resale to firms. Growers were prohibited from accepting advances. However, the firms needed the 'middlemen' to bring the cotton to market and the farmers needed credit before the harvest, so the regulations remained a dead letter (Giles 1937: 45-6; Shenton and Lennihan 1981: 56-8).

In 1935-36 cotton prices rose from 1.1d. per lb. to 1.6d and then fell again to 1.1d. Advances made in anticipation of a higher price were not repaid by farmers, causing the firms' buyers to bear substantial losses (Giles 1937:50-2; Shenton and Lennihan 1981: 57). In these circumstances, the government asked L.C. Giles to report on credit and marketing in Zaria province.

Giles (1937:52) found that credit was advanced against cotton deliveries with 'no agreement to sell at an unfavourable price.' There was scope for abuse. Hamlet heads might keep back part of the money advanced to pay farmers' taxes. Part of the advance might be in cash or salt which the farmer would have to sell at a discount to get cash. Traders might give debtors short weight for cotton or try to pay less than the current price. (Shenton and Lennihan 1981:60-1,nn17-18; also Watts 1983:246,264; Giles 1937:48,52) However, farmers might then insist on repaying the debt in cash and sell the cotton to someone else (Giles 1937:56-7; Watts 1983:559n30). The main abuse in the system was the demand for farmers to pay tax before the cotton harvest and the power of hamlet heads to extort money from farmers.

Giles identified various other forms of credit sales and transactions. Men borrowed from their wives to meet their household responsibilities. Farmers borrowed corn in return for twice as many bundles at harvest and, less usually, for cash, with interest. Traders bought crops in advance of the harvest. Groundnuts were bought at below harvest price but, in the case of corn, traders were often 'willing to give the same price for "futures" in order to achieve a supply at the cheap rate.' (Giles 1937:43-4). This corn was then stored against a subsequent rise in price. This strategy involved risks - in 1936 an early millet harvest caught traders with sorghum which could only be sold at a loss.

Giles (1937:69) concluded that 'village life is permeated with small-scale debt - and that it can never become a burden.' Interest charges were often heavy, but they did not compound from month to month, even when the loan was not repaid by the agreed date. Traders reckoned that 10 to 20 per cent of cotton loans were not recovered within the same season; some 5 per cent were never recovered. Debt recovery was constrained by public sentiment, by the weakness of Muslim judicial procedures, by the absence of a land shortage and the possibility of selling crops to or getting loans from other traders (Giles 1937:69-70).[17]

*Peasants, Licensed Buying Agents and Marketing Boards*

The commodity marketing boards were able to do what private firms had failed to do – dictate the price paid to producers. Between 1947 and 1970, they appropriated on average between 20% (groundnuts) and 42% (cocoa) of the value of the crop (Weeks 1974, cited Forrest 1981: 231). Their policies eventually led to the collapse of agricultural exports in the 1970s.

The marketing boards purchased crops through their licensed buying agents (LBAs). After 1954 regional governments allocated licences to their political supporters and thus, in the north, to officials of the Native Authorities. LBAs were assured access to credit, generous buying allowances and limited competition in the buying areas. Licensed cocoa buyers made several unsuccessful attempts to prohibit cooperatives and other buyers from paying above the minimum gazetted price (Baldwin 1954; Beer 1975: 158-9). The decline in export crop production reduced the returns to produce buyers and also the competition among them.

Rural traders, who bought cotton directly from farmers for sale to the LBAs, could only make small profits. Even in the 1970s, there was great competition from rural buyers for the farmers' cotton crop. Farmers did not pay interest on loans advanced against the delivery of cotton. The supply of credit depended ultimately on the LBAs. Limitation of competition among them may have reduced the extent of advances. Grain traders appear to have replaced cotton traders in the 1950s as the major source of farmers' credit in areas exporting both grain and cotton (Watts 1983:249-50; cf. Giles 1937:49-52 to Vigo 1965:Tables 2,6,10; Baldwin 1954:40).

The decline in the purchasing power of cocoa farmers since the 1950s increased their dependence on loans to pay for food, wage labour, chemicals and other expenses over the year. The level of loans in 1974 was modest: Clarke's (1979a:434-8) study of Ifetedo reports a mean of ₦40 (13% of cocoa sales) for farmers from Ifetedo and ₦32 (21% of cocoa sales) for tenant farmers (cf. Galletti *et al* 1956:485-545; Driessen 1971:45).

The marketing boards concentrated the benefits of trading in the hands of their political appointees. who allocated advances to their own agents and buyers. They imposed low prices on producers. They could not prevent farmers from selling their crops locally, or switching from cocoa or cotton to food crops and from farming to other occupations.



The abolition of the Cocoa Marketing Board led numbers of businessmen to buy as much cocoa as they could for export. Unable to tell one bean from another, they found that foreign buyers reduced the price offered for poor quality beans. Failing to realise the profits they anticipated, they have tried to form cartels. However, would-be cartels compete against one another and against independent traders. Cocoa farmers have been deaf to appeals not to accept prices above ₦6,000 when they were being offered over ₦7,000 in the 1987 season!

The Nigerian Textile Manufacturers Association failed to replace the marketing board with its own monopsony because textile firms preferred to make their own arrangements to purchase cotton. State governments have sought to restrict cotton buying to buyers and markets which they have licensed and even to prevent inter-state trading and to fix prices. Faced with a shortage of local cotton and high import prices thanks to devaluation and tariffs, manufacturers and traders are blaming one another for allowing prices to rise way beyond the level recommended by government and by the Cotton Marketers Association of Nigeria (Andrae and Beckman 1987:52-6).

*Credit and Marketing in the Rural Grain Trade*

To what extent are farmers in rural Hausaland dominated by the rural grain merchants who advance them loans and buy their crops?

Grain markets in the main producing and consuming areas are well integrated in that supplies are shifted among different markets in response to local variations in price, with a time lag. Large amounts of food are purchased, even in rural areas. Successful rural traders use money which patrons, often from towns, supply to them and they buy and sell grain through a network of their own clients. The need to dispose of large sums of money and to develop a network of clients makes possible some concentration in the control of trade from many rural markets and between distant markets. (Williams 1981b:44-5; Clough 1981; 1985).

Considerable profits can be made from storing grain over time and from long-distance trading in food crops. Pre-harvest prices may be as much as twice the previous harvest level, though traders cannot always rely on such an increase. In 1964, 1968 and 1979 as in 1936, the price did not rise, or even fall (Giles 1937: 56; Williams 1981: 112). The absence of institutional constraints on entry into food marketing, unlike crops sold only to the marketing boards, restricts the scope for profiteering. There are other buyers in or near the main markets. Since the colonial period the sale of grain to local, state and federal governments for 'strategic storage' and more recently, schools and army consumption has offered favoured traders access to lucrative monopoly profits (Watts 1983:225; Clough 1986).

Vigo's (1965) survey of four northern provinces in 1957 reported extensive borrowing of relatively large sums at high rates of interest. Some borrowing, especially to hire labour, reflected the prosperity of farmers using bullocks and ploughs or cultivating *fadama* in the dry season. In other cases borrowing, particularly for food, resulted from adversity, including the effects in Bauchi and Borno of drought and damage to crops by birds that year. Lenders could not enforce timely repayment of debts and had to leave them owing for another year, with little or no extra interest to be paid.

Clough's study of Marmara (1980; 1985) shows how credit and marketing relations are linked into a complex network of social relations. About half of all households had to borrow money to buy grain in the pre-harvest period. Cash loans are repaid at harvest with 50 per cent interest. More common are *falle* loans. As Table 4 illustrates, creditors advance money to the value of half the expected price at harvest of the sacks of grain with which they are to be repaid. This grain is not sold immediately but is stored for future loans to the same debtors, and for later sale at pre-harvest prices.

Table 4. *Guinea corn prices and falle loans, N per sack. Marmara, southern Katsina, 1975-79*

| Year | Peak July price | July estimate of harvest | Falle loan | Lowest Dec. peak | Peak July price | Year |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1975 | | | | 8 | 16 | 1976 |
| 1976 | 16 | 12 | 6 | 12 | 24 | 1977 |
| 1977 | 24 | 16 | 6-8 | 18 | 30 | 1978 |
| 1978 | 30 | 16-20 | 8-12 | 28 | 18 | 1979 |
| 1979 | 18 | 16 | 8-10 | 14 | | |

*Source*: Williams 1981b: 46, adapted from Clough 1980.

If creditors wish to continue the relationship, they must set aside money to lend the debtor the following year and can also expect to be called upon for short-term loans. Debtors sometimes pay less than a full sack and may hold the debt over for another year if they can expect to rely on other sources of help. Farmers need credit and are expected to repay it with interest, in cash or kind. The terms of the loan are limited by the farmers' capacity to repay and by competition among traders to buy their grain. Interest payment generally amount to a small share of farmers incomes but provide trading stocks and the possibility of substantial profits to their creditors.



## In conclusion

Rural Nigeria, like the rest of rural Africa, is thoroughly commoditised. Producers provide for their subsistence needs by selling crops, as well as labour-power and other commodities, and only partly from their own produce. There is no self-sufficient peasant economy or peasant society; peasant households reproduce themselves through their interaction with a wider capitalist economy. However, we cannot deduce from this a trend towards the displacement of peasant smallholders by capitalist producers.

The conditions necessary for the development of capitalist production in agriculture are complex and nowhere have they proved easy to meet. As William Lever and Governor Clifford both realised, it required more than just access to land and the freedom to recruit labour in the market. The countries in Africa where capitalist agriculture has been established most successfully demonstrate what is needed: a powerful and effective state with the capacity to coerce and to direct the allocation of labour-power, to subsidize production costs and to guarantee prices and market for produce. In Ghana, capitalist farmers were unable to sustain their control over labour-power and exhausted the land in search of quick profits. They could only make profits if the price of rice continued to rise and if the state met the increasing subsidies and foreign exchange costs required for their inputs.

Capitalist farming has been initiated in Nigeria, usually as a part-time activity, by traders, civil servants and army officers. Government, with commercial banks, has provided them with cheap credit and subsidized inputs. They have concentrated their efforts on poultry and a few high-value crops and on selling food at high prices to public institutions. Nigeria lacks the financial resources to continue to meet the costs of expanding capitalist grain production. Staple food production will still depend mainly on 'peasant' smallholders.

Nigeria's 'peasantry' is differentiated, both geographically and socially. Farming households vary with regard to their access to land, to family labour, to cash resources and to markets, as well as with regard to opportunities for trading and other non-farm activities. Patterns of differentiation are changing, and vary as between different areas and different periods. There is no evidence of a secular trend towards greater inequality in access to land among peasant farmers.

A significant stratum of farmer-traders has emerged in some areas of expanding commercial agriculture. Most of them continue to depend on their own labour and that of their households, alongside casual wage labour. They are linked to the rest of the village, and wider commercial networks by a variety of market, credit, patron-client and friendship networks.

Rural wage labour is drawn predominantly from peasant households. Earnings from wage labour help poorer farmers to meet household needs and maintain access to land. There is no large class of landless rural labourers. Nigeria's proletariat is urban, not rural.

The sources of the major inequalities in Nigerian society and the most significant forms of exploitation cannot be identified within rural villages but must be sought in the predatory activities of an urban-based bourgeoisie.

State funds and state power have been used to force farmers off the land to make way for irrigation schemes and other monuments to 'development' and to make farmers on the schemes conform to the requirements of the scheme management. Farmers have resisted expropriation and evaded management's directions. Farmers have been dispossessed, harrassed and disrupted but management has not been able to make them do what they want them to do.

Farmers depend on traders for credit to meet seasonal and extraordinary expenses. Competition among traders limits the scope for usury and profiteering and enables farmers to restrict their obligations to creditors and to make claims for their continued assistance. Farmers produce for the market but they are not subordinated to the dictates of merchant capital.

The debate on the impact of capitalism on the peasantry originally focused on the question: is peasant farming giving way to capitalist agriculture? Capitalist farmers might displace peasants from the land and convert them into wage workers, or peasants might themselves separate out into capitalist farmers and rural proletarians. Alternatively capitalism can incorporate peasants by subordinating them to credit and marketing arrangements in such a way that they lose control over the disposal of their produce and even over the production process itself. Nigerian evidence suggests a contrary picture.

There are capitalist farmers in Nigeria. They attract a large share of government spending on agriculture and their activities and their demands get much attention in the Nigerian press. However, their contribution to agricultural production, especially of export crops and staple foods, is marginal. For these Nigeria must continue to rely on peasant producers who still direct their own production and maintain a degree of control over the disposal of their produce.

The answers to the questions about the fate of the peasantry and the development of capitalism cannot be deduced from a theory of history (Marx 1877: 136), nor from the logic of capital or of the 'peasant economy'. As the agrarian history of Africa shows different conditions produce different results. These have been the outcomes of bitter and often bloody struggles. Capitalism has never subordinated peasants by competing with them in the market place but has relied instead on the force of the state (Marx 1867: 915-6) to carry out this task. It has rarely been done completely, has often been unsuccessful and, as the Kenyan case shows, has even been partly reversed. We might be better to ask how was it possible for capitalist agriculture to emerge in particular cases rather than to wonder why, in others, it has not.



## Notes

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William Beinart, Philip Corrigan, Mike Cowen, Judith Heyer, Chris Leo and Stanley Trapido offered valuable comments on the study of countries about which they know far more than I do. The arguments in this paper continue a debate with Bjorn Beckman, Louise Lennihan and Bob Shenton, whom I have to thank for intellectual stimulus and warm friendships. It draws on discussions with other scholars who have generously shared their work with me, notably Gunilla Andrae, Sara Berry, Julian Clarke, Tom Forrest, Georg Deutsch, Jay Jackson, Raufu Mustapha, Richard Palmer-Jones, Pepe Roberts, Tina Wallace, Mike Watts and Ann Whitehead. I am most indebted to Paul Clough. This paper draws freely on his empirical research and on his profound understanding of rural northern Nigeria. Our collaborative research was possible thanks to a generous grant from the Leverhulme Trust.

[1] The evidence de Janvry cites for this form of transition is slight.

[2] Under these conditions peasants may be argued, by extending Marx's (1867:645,1019-38) terms, to be 'subsumed' under capital, 'formally' if not 'really', that is, they are, or are coming to be, subordinated to the logic of capitalist development, maintaining the form of independent household producers (Banaji 1977; cf. Williams 1981a:31; Harriss 1982:290-4).

[3] The term is borrowed from Hyden (1980:205,255). The military metaphors are typical of 'devspeak', and reflect the origins and manner, as well as the language, of 'development' (Williams 1987).

[4] Langton and Hoppe (1983:19) summarise the argument as follows: 'English farming nurtured capitalism in the early modern period ( . . .) because of the peculiar structure of property relations in English agriculture. Essentially, it was because England lacked a landowning peasantry and contained a landlord class able to control the level of rental income.'

My outline follows Marx's (1867:part 8) emphasis on the importance of the coercive power of the state and the landed classes in securing control over rural producers, which is renewed in Brenner's (1976) account of the emergence of agrarian capitalism in England. I do not share Brenner's assumption, cogently criticised by Cooper (1978), that capitalist agriculture necessarily develops the forces of production more rapidly than other forms of production of agricultural commodities. Family farming in the United

States in the nineteenth century America is a case in point. Even in England, peasant farmers continued, and continue, to survive beyond the dates identified for their demise (Crow 1987).

[5] In 1867, the editor of the (U.S.) Southern Cultivator declared that the 'experience of the past two seasons has demonstrated that plantations on an extended scale, with free labour, cannot be made profitable.' (Reid 1973:110)

[6] A similar argument was put by Sir Hector Duff of the Empire (formerly British) Cotton Growing Association (Duff 1921:64 cited Andrae and Beckman 1987:11).

[7] Clifford followed the policies already established in Northern Nigeria by Temple and Girouard, which sought to secure peasant smallholders access to land by blocking legal recognition of private property in land, and discouraging banks from extending credit to agricultural producers. Previously, Lugard had sought to convert the aristocracy into a landowning class, and their slaves into a labouring class. This would require the administration to limit the capacity of slaves to 'desert' their masters or to move to other areas to aquire land. However, colonial rule had created the conditions which made it easy for slaves to abandon their masters and migrate to find land to cultivate for themselves (Shenton 1986:ch. 3; Lennihan 1982).

However, Northern Nigerian land policy did not block plantation agriculture, as Shenton (1986: 45) appears to suggest. The demand for concessions to plantations concerned the palm belt in the south. The critical constraint was not land to cultivate but labour to cultivate it (Lever cited Wilson 1954:164; cf. Marx 1867:932-3).

[8] Beckman (1988) criticises this argument on the grounds that capitalist farming has the political capacity to secure the government support necessary to sustain it.

[9] Lennihan (1983:272-6) identifies groups of transient agricultural wage labourers without their own farms and often without attachments to kin. Criticising this paper Lennihan (1987:265) argues that the poor hire labour for different reasons from the rich – poor men often employ others because they are the sole working males and that 'poor old men may employ labor for ridging while selling their own labor for less arduous tasks such as planting, transplanting, or applying fertiliser.'

[10] In the 1980s, some commodity marketing boards set prices higher than world market levels, but only because of the massively overvalued official exchange rate.

[11] Collier (1983: 203-6) draws on Williams (1981b: Table 9.2) from which Table 2 is taken (with subsequent corrections and the addition of observations from Ross's 1976 study), to suggest that there is evidence of a trend towards increasing inequalities in the distribution of land. Collier claims that the share of land of the bottom forty per cent of households falls, and of the top ten per cent rises, to a statistically significant extent, both as the mean size of landholding falls, and over time. He claims that, additional to the time trend observed, the mean holding size falls as population increases over time.

Collier's hypothesis is based on a multiple regression analysis which can be faulted on several grounds. He estimates shares of the bottom forty and the top ten per cent from nine studies, cited in Williams (1981b:Table 9.2) but not in Table 2. Four other studies from the same group of sources are omitted without explanation. Collier does not explain how he arrives at his estimates, but some are clearly implausible and inconsistent with one another. The distributions of land according to Luning's studies of Bindawa in 1960 and Sokoto in 1963 and Kohlhatkar's of Makarfi in 1962 are clearly very similar in all three cases, but Collier estimates large divergencies among them in the respective shares of the bottom forty and top ten per cent. Brian Williams (1984) provides better estimates for these cases, and explains how he reached them. Collier includes in his equations, but does not report 'regional dummy variables for Kano, Zaria, Katsina and Sokoto'. But southern Katsina has more in common with northern Zaria than with northern Katsina, and the Bida area is quite different from any of the others.



Collier's observations of trends over time depend strongly on the estimates from these additional studies, notably those by Luning and Kohlhatkar, whose accuracy is very questionable, as is evident from these authors' own accounts. Without them, it is only Clough's study of one village which suggests that the shares of land of the bottom forty per cent might have been greater in the 1970s than the 1960s; that instance is balanced by the addition of Ross's study whose findings were not available to Collier. The mean share of the top ten per cent from four cases between 1974 and 1979 is 34 per cent and the range 31-39 per cent; from seven cases between 1966 and 1968 the mean is 29 and the range 26 to 33. Brian Williams's analysis of the patterns of distributions in different studies suggests that even this apparent change may result from errors in the compilation of evidence in Norman's and Goddard's farm management studies. But in any case, these are all studies of different places; had these places been studied at other times, the time trends would have been quite different. As Collier (1983: 203) himself concedes, 'the time trend might be highly inaccurate'.

Which leaves us with the means; since there is a very weak correlation between the means observed and the times of observation, simple correlations will do. As is obvious if the mean land sizes are plotted against shares of the bottom forty and top ten per cent there is little, if any, correlation between them. This is also true for the studies of cocoa farms listed in Table 1 (B. Williams 1984). The lack of a strong correlation between measures of inequalities and mean sizes is not suprising if, as I argued in Williams (1981b) as in this article, changes in mean land size may be associated both with tendencies towards increasing inequalities and with opposite tendencies towards greater equalities, depending on the circumstances.

Collier makes the implausible assumption that relations among the variables measured were linear, and then extrapolates linear trends from the equations. His conclusions are explicitly 'highly tentative'. They are none the less spurious for that.

Watts and Lubeck (1983:129) paraphrase much of the evidence cited in Williams (1981b) and conclude that 'All this suggests a reproduction crisis among the rural poor who find themselves increasingly on Lilliputian holdings, incapable of fulfilling domestic food needs and resorting to wage labour to secure socially necessary income.' The evidence cited does not support this conclusion.

[12] For an alternative interpretation see Lennihan (1987: 266).

[13] The ADPs have been assessed by D'Silva and Raza (1980), Wallace (1980; 1981a); Beckman (1987). Clough and Williams (1987) discusses the Berg Report's account of the 'success of the ADPs' (World Bank 1981: 53), which is a synthesis of deceptive half-truths. Williams (1988) discusses the World Bank's own evaluations of the projects

[14] These terms were used by World Bank officials in letters (cited D'Silva and Raza 1980: 289) and in the Berg Report (World Bank 1981:53).

[15] Gwandu argues convincingly that estimates such as in Usman (1982:

88-94) which lists 126 names of people alleged to have been killed are grossly exaggerated.

[16] Shenton (1986: 95) argues that the fall of groundnut production in 1935 'was not a response to falling prices, but rather a result of the combined effects of poor crops and a regional food shortage during these years.' These circumstances would have increased food prices and accentuated the returns to growing food rather than groundnuts; it seems unlikely that relative prices did not have a significant impact on levels of production.

[17] Shenton and Lennihan (1981), and Watts (1983: 245, 440) pay less attention than Giles to the limits of the powers of middlemen and moneylenders over farmers.

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