

This work is licensed under a
Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-
NoDerivs 3.0 Licence.

To view a copy of the licence please see:
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MIDDLE PEASANTRY IN NYANZA*

By

P. Anyan'g Nyong'o
WORKING PAPER NO. 380

INSTITUTE FOR DEVELOPMENT STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI
P.O. Box 30197
Nairobi, Kenya



February, 1981

Views expressed in this paper are those of the author. They should not be interpreted as reflecting the views of the Institute for Development Studies or of the University of Nairobi. This paper is not for quotation without permission of the author, as specified in the Copyright Act, Cap. 130 of Laws of Kenya.

1. The Development of Agrarian Capitalism in Nyanza

Unlike the Central Province, the development of agrarian capitalism was very much delayed in Nyanza. For most of the colonial period, Nyanza remained a supplier of manual, professional and skilled labour to the rest of East Africa while, within the region, capitalist agriculture was confined to the Asian-owned sugar estate of Miwani. Attempts to encourage cotton production by peasant households was not very successful and reasons for its failure have been well documented by economic historians and agricultural economists.¹

Cotton had been introduced in Nyanza in 1908 by the colonial administration as a "cash crop" to be grown by peasant households. But, from that year upto 1930, there was very little success in this endeavour. Several factors account for this. One, cotton demanded a lot of household labour already engaged in food production either in cattle rearing or crop cultivation. Few peasant households could venture into this crop which was neither eaten nor was the price paid for it enough to buy food commodities in the market place. If anything, "cash" was then needed mainly for paying taxes and buying few manufactured goods that entered the peasant economy as agricultural tools (plows, pangas, nails etc) and consumables (soap, salt, matches, clothes etc).

Second, there were better ways of earning money other than by growing cotton, e.g. selling labour power for wages either to the state or private employers in agriculture and commerce, or selling food crops, e.g.

1. See, for example, Hugh FEARN, An African Economy: A Study of the Economic Development of Nyanza Province of Kenya, 1903-53 (Nairobi:Oxford University Press, 1961); Judith HEYER, "The Origins of Regional Inequalities in Smallholder Agriculture in Kenya, 1920-73". East African Journal of Rural Development, Vol.8, No.9 Sept: 1971; J. Lonsdale "A Political History of Nyanza, 1883-1945," (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Trinity College, Cambridge, 1964); Scott McWilliams, "Commerce Class and Ethnicity; the Case of Luo Thrift and Trading Corporation, 1945-1972" mimeo (1976).

maize,² for cash. Although Fearn argues that it is difficult to obtain any overall picture of the extent to which Nyanza Africans were in paid employment until the post-war period,³ Scott McWilliam has also noted that there were years during which both white settlers and the state were in great need for labour, and Nyanza provided an important reservoir which could be used without too much disruption of the indigenous economy.

While part of this labour was recruited voluntarily,⁴ a large fraction also left as conscripted labour for war and "farmed out" labour for settler agriculture. During the wars, Nyanza supplied a large part of the carriers and soldiers. By the 1940s and 50s, without young males needed to clear new land, soil impoverishment and declining yields simply served to accentuate the trend for households to invest less labour in agriculture, and heighten the search for wage employment.

The development of agrarian capitalism was also retarded by the restriction of the types of cash crops that could be grown by African farmers. In Central Province after this restriction was lifted in 1954, small-holder production of export crops -- especially coffee and tea -- went up tremendously.⁶

2. For example, between 1908-53, the amount of maize marketed leapt from 23,000 tons to 370,000 (Fearn, p.193). While these figures are for the province as a whole, and North Nyanza growers predominated Scott McWilliam has observed that the better seed maize distributed by state officials and new iron hoes ensured an over-all expansion extended to parts of Central Nyanza. By the 1930's, African producers came into substantial competition with European agriculture, on internal markets.

3. Fearn, *op cit*, p.54

4. By 1916, it was already established that young educated Luos left the region in search of jobs (Lonsdale, *op.cit*, pp.4-10).

5. McWilliam, *op cit*.

6. See, for example, Apollo Njonjo, "The Africanization of the White Highlands: A Study in Agrarian Class Struggles in Kenya, 1950-1974" (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Princeton University, 1977), Colin Leys, Underdevelopment in Kenya: The Political Economy of Neo-Colonialism (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).

In Nyanza, however, export crops marketed outside the region grew slowly (except for tea in Kisii) until the advent of sugar in the late sixties. If we take figures for Central Nyanza District alone (the present Kisumu and Siaya District where the 'Nyanza Sugar Belt' is located), we shall find that marketed exports outside the district remains very negligible until the seventies.⁷ Except for the Kisii highlands, the rest of Nyanza could not have grown the cash crops which boosted small-holder agriculture in Central Province due mainly to ecological reasons. Coffee growing was, however, tried in the higher altitudes of Central Nyanza: Northern parts of Kisumu and Seme Locations and in Gem. But the marketing of this crop was poor and, after a few years of experiment, peasants uprooted it in preference to maize, bananas and legumes.

The lack of loan capital to peasant farmers also goes a long way to explain the stunting of capitalist agriculture in Nyanza after the initial disappointments with cotton. As Scott McWilliam observes, agricultural development loans, initiated under the reform schemes of the 1950's, were terminated in 1963. The state ceased to issue further loans because, according to Ruthenberg, "repayments were 95 per cent in arrears compared with a national figure of 20 per cent".⁸ Loan capital was, after 1963, concentrated mainly in sugar production as settlement loans. But, as will be argued later, this loan was granted first and foremost to facilitate the buying out of white settlers and the transfer of the land to African small-holders who, then, would bear the responsibility of paying back the loans incurred by the state in undertaking this exercise.⁹

7. See Table 1.

8. McWILLIAM, *op. cit.*; H. RUTHENBERG, African Agricultural Production: Development Policy in Kenya, 1952-1965 (Berlin: SpringerVerlog, 1966), p.25

9. See also Leys, *op. cit.*; Garry WASSERMAN, Politics of Decolonization: Kenya Europeans and the Land Issue, 1960-1965. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); Earlier, the colonial government had argued that "it protected Africans getting into debt by making it difficult for them to borrow money; this put the African trade at a constant disadvantage." Oginga Odinga, Not Yet Uhuru (NRB: Heinaman, 1967), p.8a.

Moreover, as Table II shows, even within the first Decade of independence Nyanza did not fare well in getting AFC Loans.

The late advent of individual titles in land is also an important factor in the retardation of capitalist agriculture in Nyanza. When the Kenya Land Commission, chaired by Sir Morris Carter, wrote its report in 1933 to Her Majesty's Government, they devoted most of their time to land issues in the Central Province. This, they argued, was not because they attached more importance to the needs of the Kikuyu in respect of land than to the other tribes, but because

"The exceptional degree of individualism to which this tribe has attained in its conceptions of landholding, in conjunction with other considerations which we shall explain have rendered the just settlement of the Kikuyu land problems especially intricate, and have demanded examination in greater detail than has been necessary to other tribes."¹⁰

The question that was to be discussed with regard to Nyanza was, however, much simpler:

"Whether the Reserves of the 3 Kavirondo Districts, comprising a total of 3,114 square miles, are adequate to the needs of a population, estimated according to the Chief Native Commissioner dated 2nd June, 1933 to be 1,029,422 persons"¹¹

Unlike the Central Province, there was no land alienated for white settlement in Nyanza except for the case of a Mr. James Maxwell who, for a brief period of time, had a concession of 473 acres for cotton growing

10. H.M.G., Report of the Kenya Land Commission (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1933), p.4. "Other Considerations" here refer to impact of land alienation by white settlers in Kikuyu country, hence the proletarianization, semi-proletarianization and arrest of indigenous prianization and arrest of indigenous primitive accumulation in Kikuyu land.

11. Ibid, Part II, Chapters XI - XIV.

in Central Nyanza (L.R.No.653). There were also the Miwani and Muhoroni sugar plantations alienated to Asian capital without much displacement of indigenous peoples. During the Commission hearings however, the Luo claimed that the 3 Indian farms at Kibos necessitated the destruction of 37 - households before their establishment. Further, some 60 villages were moved from Indian farms near Miwani and about 40 villages from Mr. Ney's farm at Kibigori. The Commission, on the other hand, ruled that, "from the evidence gathered," these claims were not supported by the facts.¹²

In the final analysis, the report concluded, there would be no real land problem in Kavirondo if productivity was increased by modern methods of farming and if "the fertile land now lying unused" was cultivated properly.

"We may presume that changing conditions will necessitate some capital expenditure on the part of the native in order to obtain increased yields. In order that they may be in a position to meet such expenditure, it is necessary that their purchasing power be increased. How can this increase of purchasing power be obtained?"¹³

The Commission recommended the growth of cash crops by native households, noting that wages for which the labour from Nyanza was working within the region or elsewhere were too meagre to be saved for the development of capital. More "capital intensive" farming could also be undertaken in "the large areas of swamp land and fly-infested country of which no use is currently made"¹⁴ Little, however, happened in Nyanza regarding intensifying commodity production until after the colonial era.

12. Ibid, paragraphs 1131. See also Kenya Colony and Protectorate, Africa Land Development in Kenya, 1946 - 64.

13. Ibid, paragraphs 1099-1100.

14. Ibid, paragraphs 1108 - 1110.

The Commission had, significantly, ignored the demands of the Young Kavirondo Association (or "Mission Boys") who, as early as 1921, had argued in a Memorandum to the colonial Administration in favour of individual land tenure. The essence of this argument was that it would enable individuals to have access to loan capital for the purpose of developing productive forces. The Commission argued, however, that product forces could be developed without necessarily changing the land tenure-system (i.e. production relations) in Luoland. As it eventually turned out, mere encouragement to grow cash crops cannot result in a higher "purchasing power" if the relations of production inhibits the growth of such cash crops.

In Central Province, the story has been the reverse: it is not therefore a surprise when the majority of the studies on agrarian capitalism in Kenya have been concentrated in this area and the so-called "White Highlands."¹⁵ Even Colin Leys's study of Underdevelopment in Kenya: The Political Economy of Neo-Colonialism,¹⁶ though it advances arguments which are now open to criticism even within the problematic of dependency, does not fully appreciate the extent and consequences of the uneven development of capitalism in Kenya's agriculture.

"One would like to compare the socio-economic and political consequences of land reform in Kikuyuland with other parts of Kenya. Unfortunately, we are not aware of any systematic studies on land reform outside Kikuyuland," argues Njonjo.¹⁷

15. See, for example, M.P.K. SORRENSON, Origins of European Settlement in Kenya (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968); Land Reform in Kikuyu Country (Nairobi OUP, 1967); WASSERMAN, OP.CIT.; E.A. BRETT, Colonialism and Underdevelopment in East Africa (New York: NOK, 1973); J.W. HARBESON, Nation Building in Kenya: The Role of Land Reform (Evanston: NUP, 1973); M.COWEN, "Differentiation in a Kenya Location" (EASSC, 1972); "Patterns of Cattle Ownership and Dairy Production, 1900-1965," (University of Nairobi, mimeo, 1973); "Concentration of Sales and Assets: Dairy Cattle and Tea in Magutu, 1964-1971," (IDS, University of Nairobi, 1974); "Wattle Production in the Central Province: Capital and Household Production, 1903-1964," (University of Nairobi, mimeo, 1975); "Some Problems of Capital and Class in Kenya," IDS Occasional Paper No.26 (University of Nairobi, 1977); Apollo Njonjo, op.cit.; L.H. BROWN, Agricultural Change in Kenya (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968); Geoff LAMB, Peasant Politics (U.K. Division, 1974).

16. Op.cit.

17. Njonjo op cit Chapter 6

2. Resistance to Land Reform And Its Socio-Economic Consequences in Nyanza.

Both Apollo Njonjo¹⁸ and Geoff Lamb¹⁹ have argued that land consolidation and land re-settlement programmes led to a rapid re-structuring of rural society in Kikuyuland, changing the social content of its politics significantly during the sixties. Even earlier on, with the rise of nationalist politics in Kenya, divisions in Kikuyuland over support or nonsupport for Kenyatta (then a symbol of radical nationalism) cannot be analysed simply on the basis of loyalists versus nationalists, but more accurately on the basis of the social relations of production in Kikuyuland. For loyalty and nationalism were but the political expressions of these relations. If Mau Mau represented a struggle by a deprived peasantry for its land, then loyalists opposed it not because they were "the running dogs of the colonial administration," but because they, like the settlers, did not want their property in land to be taken away from them. The vicious struggle between the Kikuyu peasantry and the white settlers was bloody and ugly because they were struggling for the same scarce commodity: land. The Kikuyu had originally grabbed this land from the Masai and, now that the settlers had it, it was armed struggle that had to bring it back.

In so far as the re-distribution of land after independence meant the re-distribution of former white farms to the landless Kikuyu peasants, the landed Kikuyu capitalists (part of whom formed the loyalists) were prepared to have a rapprochement--indeed a class alliance--with the former backers of Mau Mau. This, indeed, is the move that changed the social basis of Murang'a politics and pulled the rug under the feet of the Kenya People's Union (KPU) populists. By the mid sixties, almost all land in Kikuyu country was consolidated, i.e. individual titles to land ownership was complete.

In Nyanza Province, however, opposition to land consolidation, due, partly, to a relative absence of landlessness as a political issue in colonial times, may give us some insight into the differences between Kikuyu and Luo societies albeit these are two social formations which had formed the hardcore of KANU (Kenya African National Union) and,

18. Ibid.

19. Peasant Politics Conflict and Development in Murang'a (London: Davison, 1974).

in the late sixties, also of the KPU.

....."It would appear," Argues Apollo Njonjo, that the KPU in Kikuyuland was a very different social movement from the KPU in Luoland. In other words, the KPU in Nyanza arose to conserve and to pre-empt class stratification. The KPU in Murang'a, on the other hand, was a class movement dedicated not to conserve the community from class stratification, but to extend the capitalist transition to engulf the protest and landless segments of the rural population by breaking up accumulated landed property... The roots of post-Uhuru ethnicity in Kenyan politics are traceable, in part, to the ethnic composition of commodity production. Among the most important social and political results of the commodity frontier in the former African Reserves, has been the lightening of regional economic inequalities, which in the Kenyan context also means ethnic inequalities....At the broadest level (these) are only a reflection of the inherent nature of capitalist development which thrives in and causes uneven development, whether of regions, social groups, social classes or national economies".²⁰

In essence, the class character of Kikuyuland was different from that of Luoland, and class antagonisms--sometimes assuming clan, regional or ethnic dimensions--manifested themselves differently within each of these social formations. At the level of national politics, the way in which certain social classes--usually the dominant ones--within each of these social formations (also referred to as tribes)²¹ sought to maximize power could have assumed tribal dimensions in terms of ideology and political mobilization. This, however, does not mean that their mission was to serve the tribe above their class interests; the latter, always remained paramount.

20. Njonjo, op cit, ch.6. See also I.L.O. Employment Incomes and Equality: A Strategy for Increasing Produce Employment in Kenya (Geneva: I.L.O., 1972), pp.80-81; Maurice GODELIER, Rationality and Irrationality in Economics (London: NLB, 1972); A.T. NZULA, I.I. POTEKHIN and A.Z. ZUGMANOVICH, Forced Labour in Africa (London: Zed Press, 1979).

21. See M. Godelier, Perspectives in Marxist Anthropology (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1977), pp.70 - 96 for a further discussion of the concept "tribe".

In the case of Nyanza, Scott McWilliam has argued that opposition to land consolidation was spearheaded by a class of indigenous merchant capitalists in Luoland. "It was the alliance between merchant capital (e.g. indigenous entrepreneurs in a company like the Luo Thrift and Trading Corporation) and peasant households---simple commodity producers-- against the development of capitalist farming which contributed substantially to the complete failure of the first consolidation campaign between 1956-62."²² Why should this alliance and anti-consolidation programme have been possible?

One, from the point of views of the merchant capitalists, the stumbling blocks to their attempts at capital accumulation were not the peasant households but Asian commercial capital, settler capital and the colonial state whose rules and regulations denied them both access to loan capital and to certain areas of trade before the 1950s.²³ It was, in fact, from the peasant households that they recruited share-holders in their companies and received clients for their flour mills. Without necessarily coming on the side of the colonial state they were busy fighting to open doors for them in commerce, the process of capital accumulation in commerce would have eventually forced the merchant capitalists into confrontations with household commodity producers over such issues as prices for cotton delivered to ginneries prices paid for maize bought by the company for sale outside the region, salaries for sons of peasants employed at company enterprises, etc.²⁴ As it were, the long resistance

22. Op. cit. p.10

23. See, for example, Oginga Odinga, op.cit pp.76.94.

24. Scott McWilliams reports a case of a labour dispute at Ramogi Press --a LUTATCO enterprise--in which the directors of the company stood firmly on the side of capital and recommended the wholesale dismissal of the "rebellious works." These were the "friends of the people."

to the growth of merchant capital by the colonial economy drove the emerging indigenous capitalists into an alliance with simple commodity producers, and opposition to land consolidation provided a real and "juicy" issue to cement this alliance so as to give political power to the merchant capitalists "for future reference."²⁵

Two, from the point of view of the smallholding peasantry, there was opposition based on fears of possible loss of inheritance rights. Access to land, hence its inheritance, was based on communal lineage rights and not individual rights. Within each lineage, there was a recognized "founder of the clan" from whom offsprings derived rights of access to land. Clans also had tenants at will or jodak who obtained use of land through clan elders, or Jodong gweng who based their power and authority as handed down from founders of the clan. In the event of land division for gaining individual titles, not only would there be authority clashed among Jodong Gweng, individuals within the community also feared the criteria which would determine what proportions they would get given equal blood ties. Since tenants at will had no rights except through the "sons of the soil", their fears and opposition to consolidation did not carry much significance.

25. Odinga reports to have agreed with Kenyatta that, during the fifties, the agenda for the African nationalists was to "seek the political Kingdom first." Economic power, Kenyatta argued, "will come when we have political power. Until we had snatched the reins of government we would not control the products of our efforts, he argued." p. 100.

But indigenous capital was more advanced in Kikuyuland, and Odinga did not realize after independence that the purposes for which the Luo petty bourgeoisie and merchant capital wanted the "reins of government" would clash with those of these up-country capitalists. The circumstances under which settler capital was removed from the power bloc controlling the colonial state ensured an alliance between landed up-country African capital (dominated by Kikuyu loyalists) with settler capital and the re-settled peasant producers in Kikuyuland.

According to Cherry Gertzel and John Okumu, "the move towards land

consolidation...and the introduction of individual rights, provoked Jodong Gweng to open opposition, largely because these changes seemed likely to entrench the chiefs as a new landed class and to increase their advantages over the rest of the community. This opposition was supported by a large section of the peasantry, who also feared the possible disadvantages of the new policy."²⁶

But Apollo Njonjo appropriately asks: "Why did the Jodong Gweng not team up with that component of the peasantry made up of members of the original lineage...who had inalienable rights of usage to overthrow the tenant peasant component?"²⁷

The argument advanced here is that this is, in fact, the alliance that was forged and championed by merchant capital. The latter, as McWilliam²⁸ and Lonsdale²⁹ have pointed out, had had its own class struggles with the chiefs with regard to the control of markets within the reserves and the tendencies for chiefs to act as the prefects of the colonial state, settler interests and even Asian traders. But the chiefs had not, by any stretch of the imagination, accumulated substantial capital through such prefect activities to be able to invest in agricultural capital. Nor could they in the process of land litigation, divest themselves of rules of blood ties which were to be used by the colonial administration to determine who had a right to what piece of the earth,

27. Njonjo, Thesis, p. 309.

28. Op. cit., p.12

29. Op. cit., p.329

That some chiefs, in certain cases, were identified with the colonial authorities and hence were in conflict with "the people" regarding land consolidation, Especially where they tried "to force the issues," cannot be denied. But this political conflict should not be taken as a general explanation for the pattern of class alliances among "the people" faced with land consolidation in Nyanza. "The people", as it were, was constituted through the politics of that particular conjuncture whose primary moves was the colonial economy itself.

Populists always strive to define "the people" to include diverse social strata within a social formation so as to mobilize them on a common political programme preferably against "the people's enemy" (or enemies) identified variously as an oppressor, an exploiter or simply an "outsider" intruding into the people's affairs. In political science literature, the Russian populists at the turn of the century have been taken to be "the classical" examples of populism. With the impact of capitalist development, various social strata among the peasantry, particularly the direct producers, faced ruination. As a solution to their problems, some of the intelligentsia offered alternative economic programmes to capitalism which were aimed at "saving the peasantry!"

Although these programmes were not always clearly articulated, they nonetheless appealed to the sentiments of the masses and won their proponents popularity. Russian populism, as Andrey Walicki³⁰ points out, denoted a theory advocating the hegemony of the masses over the educated elite; it opposed the westernization of Russia--either by socialism or capitalism--and called for an authentic economic and social system which would solve the problems of "all Russians," particularly the masses. As such, it was utopian, as "the masses", under capitalism, are not a single homogenous unit.

30. Andrey Walicki, "Russian Populism Reconsidered," London School of Economics, Conference on Populism, March 19-21, 1967.

The small immediate producers, while seeing populism as a genuine protest against the capitalist system which was ruining them, also demanded the abolition of the older feudal forms of exploitation. The intelligentsia, like the Narodniks,³¹ while sympathising with these "small men," failed, however, to give a scientific critique of capitalism and hence offer practical economic programmes that would be advancements over both the feudal system and the backward capitalism of their time.

It was Lenin who gave a more concrete historical and sociological critique to populism and the economics of the Narodniks by bringing out the real character of the development of capitalism in Russia then and which direction it was heading.³² Protecting the small producers on their land was not only detrimental to the development of capitalism, it also meant maintaining backwardness in Russia. In any case, Lenin argued, the small producers could not withstand the onslaught of capitalism. Differentiation of the peasantry was the logical outcome, and a necessary component of capitalist development.

"Of course, infinitely diverse combinations of elements of this or that type of capitalist evolution are possible, and only hopeless pedants could set about solving the peculiar and complex problems arising merely by quoting this or that opinion of Marx about a different historical epoch."³³

31. Lenin discusses the theoretical mistakes of the Russian populists (Narodniks) in the first chapter of his book, The Development of Capitalism in Russia (which also forms vol.3 of his Collected Works). There were four major problems with the Narodnik theorists; these concerned their argument that, in order to identify capitalist development, there has to develop a home market. In advancing this argument, they did not put into their proper perspectives issues regarding (a) the social division of labour, (b) the growth of the industrial population at the expense of the agricultural, (c) the ruin of the small producers and (d) the realization problem as elements of capitalist development, and hence of the development of the home market itself.

32. V.I. Lenin; "The Development of Capitalism in Russia," Collected Works, Vol.3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972).

33. Ibid., p.33

Lenin further cautioned against "writing off" populists from the revolutionary struggles in Russia. Although they had made mistakes of analysis, and had stopped short of exposing the real class nature of society, they had awakened the masses against the horrors of both feudalism and capitalism. This was useful as a political task. Even outside Russia, the destiny of the masses could not be entrusted just to those who can "expose them to horrors" but to those who can make them conscious of their real conditions and how to change them in the context of their time.

Populism in Nyanza, while mobilizing the masses against various forms of colonial oppression, produced no analysis of the condition of the masses in Nyanza. It was because land consolidation was interpreted as one of those colonial mechanisms of oppression and exploitation that various social strata among the peasantry, each uncertain of the outcome of breaking the old land tenure system, rallied behind the populists to oppose it. If the plan had been implemented in Nyanza in the 1950s as was envisaged, what would have been its outcome?

(a) The Capitalist Class

According to Cowen, the Swynnerton Plan³⁴ mainly stopped the growth of indigenous capital in Central Province. "By eclipsing the growth of source of wage labour power and by tempering rather than accelerating the concentration of land within the hands of the indigenous class, the Plan abraded against the accumulation of the indigenous class. We have shown that the Swynnerton-type plans of the 1950s were formed to expand commodity production upon smallholding production as a response to and not the effect of the autonomous accumulation of an indigenous capitalist class. We have also shown that the effect of expanded household production has been to forestall direct separation of household producers from their means of production. By forestalling the direct separation of household producers, the interventions of finance capitals have acted to better and not to promote the accumulation of indigenous capital within smallholding production",³⁵

34. R.J.M. SWYNNERTON, A Plan to Intensify the Development of African Agriculture in Kenya (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1954).

35. M. Cowen, "Notes on the Nairobi Discussion of the Agrarian Problem" IDS Sussex, 1979.

Sorrenson³⁶ notes that this process of accumulation by indigenous capitalists started in Kikuyu country as early as the 1920s. In Nyanza, there is almost no existing evidence of such a process having started so early. The so-called chiefs who have feared as collaborators with the colonial regime had shown minimal signs, even as late as the 1950s, of using their administrative powers to accumulate land. Among "the people" however, already existed pockets of accumulators not of hand but of commercial capital.³⁷ Land consolidation--or the concentration of land assets--producing a capitalist class, or arresting the development of such a class as it had done in the Central Province, was absent in Nyanza.

But in opposing the programme of giving individual titles to land owners, it would be interesting to find out the aim of the populists. Might they have been aware that, if the plan succeeded, the social structure of rural Nyanza would rapidly change, thereby wiping away the social basis of their politics? Apollo Njonjo suggests as much, although his hypothesis need not mean the active consciousness of the actors of the outcome of the historical struggles in which they were involved. But it is overwhelmingly evident that the struggle against land consolidation was a struggle against the advancement of the development of capitalist relations of production in Nyanza.

(b) The Survival of Small Peasant Households.

The Swynnerton plan involved consolidating land fragments into single holdings and issuing registered freehold titles to individuals. The larger householder would then be able to borrow from commercial banks or from the government on the security of their titles. The political implications of this development were quite explicit.

36. Land Reform in Kikuyu Country (London; OUP, 1967)

37. E.G. The Luo Thrift and Trading Corporation (LUTATCO). More m research is needed to find out the propensity of the middle class to move into commerce rather than agriculture as an area of primary accumulation in Nyanza. The contribution of Gavin Kitching (op cit) came to our attention after the completion of this paper.

The Swynnerton Report observed:

"Former government policy will be reversed and be able, energetic or rich Africans will be able to acquire more land and bad or poor farmers less, creating a landed and a landless class. This is a normal step in the evolution of a country."³⁸

By the end of the 1950s, the programme had been largely completed in Kikuyu country, and it had been followed up by the provision of extension services and credit facilities and, most important of all, by the removal of the ban on African-grown coffee. Thus land consolidation, in Kikuyu country, accelerated and expanded commodity production by African households. This development of commodity relations need not mean the development of capitalist relations of production based on wage labour;³⁹ household production may be expanded as an integral part of the development of capitalism.⁴⁰

The consequence of the delay in implementing the Plan in Nyanza was that this region continued to be "an exporter of wage labour" while, in its own countryside, the development of capitalist relations of production stagnated. Thus, when the sugar industry was started to expand commodity production among the indigenous peoples alongside estate capital, it was bound to encounter problems arising out of the backwardness of capitalist development in Nyanza.

The high density schemes in Muhoroni were started in 1965/66, for example, to settle the landless from Nyanza. But there was no way given the absence of land registration records, of determining who held what land, where and how much. Moreover, it was rather ironic that "the landless" were expected to pay registration fees, etc before acquiring land. Where would they have gotten this "initial capital" from?

38. Swynnerton Plan.

39. It is not commodity production itself that distinguishes a capitalist society from a non-capitalist or pre-capitalist society; it is the progressive growth of the social division of labour basically between capitalists and wage workers that distinguishes capitalism from other modes of production. (see Lenin, op.cit., Chapter 1).

40. Hence the importance of the history of this "progressive growth of the division of labour". (See also Cowen, Notes (1979)).

Bruce Roy McKenzie, then Minister for Agriculture, replying to a question on this issue by the M.P. for Nyando in the National Assembly on March 3, 1967, said that efforts were being made by the government to acquire land for resettling squatters in Muhoroni area.

"Also, with large sugar development going on in the area, there... is going to be more than enough employment for these squatters... if they are prepared to work in the sugar plantations."⁴¹

In other words, the settlement scheme for squatters (so-called) was mainly to provide a "catchment area" for labour needed in the large plantations. The peasant settlers, or "de-facto wage-workers" as Founou-Tchnigoua would call them,⁴² would partly reproduce themselves from their own settlement plots and partly from wage-earning in the plantations.

Arising from the Minister's reply, retorted Opposition M.P. Okuto Balla;

"Would he agree with me that Shs.800/- that squatters are supposed to pay is too high and some people are getting the land allocated to them under the disguise of squatters when they are not actually squatters? How can an unemployed squatter raise 800 shillings before he is settled?"

But Mackenzie asserted, "In other areas this has been done by many thousands of squatters."

The issue of who the settlers would actually be was already inherent in this debate; they would be people who could raise the 800/= (initial capital) and be able to subsidize their subsistence from the settlement plot with revenues from elsewhere. In the mind of the Hon. Mackenzie, such people had to be Professor Founou-Tchuigoua's "de facto wage earners"; from the Honourable Okuto Baba's perspective, they had to be those who could afford to accumulate landed property precisely because they were not squatters.

41. National Assembly Debates, 3rd March, 1967.

42. B. Faunou-Tchuigoua, "De Facto Wage-earners in the Gezira Scheme (Sudan), Africa Development, Vol.III, No.1, 1978.

(c) Expansion of a Middle Peasantry.

It was no wonder, therefore, that the new land-owners were those who could raise the money required and not necessarily the landless. A further question worth asking is whether, within the pre-capitalist land tenure system in Nyanza, there were in fact a social category called "the landless."

It is estimated that the majority of those who acquired land in the Sugar Belt settlement schemes were members of the rural and urban middle classes who were either wage-earners or petit businessmen.⁴³ Later, high-ranking civil servants and some well-to-do businessmen bought large scale farms sold by Asians or former white settlers. But no proper study has been done to reveal the social composition of these small and large-scale African settlers, from whom they bought their farms, to whom some of them have re-sold these farms since then, and hence the problems of capital accumulation (or capital formation) among the African farmers in the Sugar Belt.

Concurrently with the acquisition of land in the settlement scheme, land consolidation now started gathering force in Nyanza. But the ownership of a title to land did not necessarily lead to better use of this land. In situations where 2 or 3 active members of the household were already installed in the settlement schemes prior to consolidation, the latter led to the reduction in the level of output in the "home garden." Secondly, where more land was enclosed than could be cultivated by household labour there was a tendency for some of the land to lie idle for long periods of time, thereby reducing the level of food production within the local economy.

It might be argued that more land lay idle within the traditional pre-capitalist cultivation systems. But most of this land was used as common land for common grazing or, when used for planting crops, it relieved the pressure of already used land within the shifting cultivation system. Once consolidation or enclosure took effect, this practice of having common

43. Odada, op.cit.

lands more or less ceased or became very restricted. The result was that, whenever a peasant enclosed more land than he could effectively cultivate, part of this land now became absolutely idle. Alternatively, where all the land enclosed was used but without improving productive forces--or without intensifying production (enclosure need not necessarily mean the intensive use of that land)-- its productivity went down as the soil got rapidly exhausted.

Consolidation--just like settlement--did not, therefore, necessarily lead to a more rational use of land; acquisition "for the sake of acquisition" only led to some people owning "white elephants" while others became under employed on the little parcels of land that Swynnerton gave them. The argument that population increase (a general phenomenon in independent Africa) leads to amore intensive land use also need to be verified empirically. Peasants do not necessarily educate their children to be fellow peasants; they educate them to vote with their feet towards the neonlights of the towns and cities.

By the second half of the seventies, the results of land consolidation and the concurrent development of the sugar industry was further affecting food production in rural Nyanza in two ways. One, sugar was by now being grown in gardens where food crops were previously grown outside the Sugar Belt. Two, the length of time sugar was taking before harvest affected the possibilities of shifting cultivation within the consolidated land given the fact that productive forces generally remained static, hence shifting cultivation would be the only way to maintain productivity at a certain level.

Even in cases where household sugar growers ensured there was land for food crops, they rarely took into account the decreasing productivity as the land became over-used. Among those who had too small parcels even for subsistence farming, there has been a tendency in few cases, to sell to other peasants. But land transaction has actually been a "within class" affair; there is very little evidence that the sale of land in rural Nyanza is actually leading to its accumulation by either a middle or a rich peasantry.

There is, however, growing landlessness among those sons and daughters of peasants whose pieces of the earth are too small to be inherited by their many offsprings. In spite of this, there is no corresponding and equivalent increase in the number of people ready to regularly sell their labour-power for wages in agricultural production. Part of the reasons for encouraging small-holding agriculture under the current development plan is to "promote labour intensive land use and the absorption of more families onto the land to minimise rural-urban migration."⁴⁴ Implicit in regarding "the family" as a "unit of production" is that wage-labour is not free. The family therefore acts as a "unit of coercion" as well; i.e. the family forces its members, who would otherwise be "free wage workers", to spend their labour, power producing "what the family needs."

Mann and Dickinson⁴⁵ have gone a long way to explain the maintenance and persistence of family labour forms within agricultural sectors of advanced capitalist countries and why this necessarily constitutes obstacles to capitalist development. It is here argued that the peculiar nature of the productive process in certain spheres of agriculture is incompatible with the requirements of capitalist production and, therefore, makes these spheres unattractive to capitalist penetration. It is concluded that "the reason for the persistence of family farms is not to be found in the capacity of family labour for self-exploitation, nor in the application of technology per se; rather, the secret of this 'anomaly' lies in the logic and nature of capitalism-itself."⁴⁶

But what is this logic and is it applicable in the agricultural sector of non-advanced capitalist countries? Should we treat the persistence in the use of family labour in the corn fields of Iowa, U.S.A. at the same level as the persistence of family labour among the sugar growers in Mumias or Mutroroni, Kenya? Is it really correct to say that

44. G.K., Development Plan, 1979-1983.

45. Susan A. Mann and James M. DICKINSON, "Obstacles to the Development of a Capitalist Agriculture," Journal of Peasant Studies, Vol.5, 1977-78.

46. Ibid, p.468.

capitalist development appears to have stopped at the "farm gates" (does the Muhoroni peasant have a farm) of both?

Expansion of commodity production in Nyanza seems not to have led to the development of a middle peasantry--like the prosperous farmers in the corn fields of Iowa -- in Nyanza. Instead, there seems to be an assification of the small and poor peasants in both the highly commoditized sector of Nyanzan agriculture-- the Sugar Belt--and the former subsistence sectors. Land consolidation has therefore changed land tenure system-- and hence created individual private property in land--but has not created well-to-do landowners who can farm the land productively. Although the material basis of clan and other lineage relationships has been shifted by land consolidation, at the ideological level kin-group relationships still command that members of the family must be cared for even if they are not productive in the economic life of the family. These non-productive social strata therefore become expensive burdens on the rural economy.

Since it has been argued that the settlement schemes did not "attract" the landless but the monetized social strata, the schemes remain mainly the arena for the expansion of property-ownership by middle classes and the salaried civil servants. In cases, however, where middle class positions have actually been devalued, plots in the settlement schemes become mere sources of subsidizing wages to enable the middle classes maintain their class positions.⁴⁷ The conjunctural struggle in the seventies, and now coming up more openly in the eighties, is between these non-capitalist property owners in Nyanza, and capitalist classes within and outside Nyanza. This explains the eagerness with which the middle class in Nyanza embraced Moi, ostensibly to get access to state power as the mediating force for economic upward mobility.

Non-capitalist classes of property, argues Cowen,⁴⁸ may refer to the peasantry. They more certainly refer to what has sometimes been called the intermediate classes between capital and labour or the petit

47. See, for example, COWEN and KINYANJUI, Capital and Class (1977)

48. Cowen, Notes (1979).

bourgeoisie, old and new. The classes are non-capitalist because they are incorporated out of practices which serve to reproduce means of subsistence and not the means of production however much individuals of the classes may believe that they are accumulating capital. The classes are of property because they register claims to the ownership of land and other instruments of production to reproduce the means of subsistence.

The point we are here trying to drive home is that land consolidation and the expansion of commodity production in Nyanza (particularly Sugar) has led mainly to the expansion of non-capitalist classes of property and not a solid middle peasantry. There is only a small middle peasantry in formation, one which still fluctuates between subsistence farming and commercial agriculture mainly as a means of getting a commodity to buy other commodities for the subsistence of the family.

"It is this," Cowen further argues, "and not the degree of mechanization and application of biological and chemical sciences to production which distinguishes the household from the combined wage-labour processes of the capitalist enterprise. Household producers are subordinate to and not competitive with capital as a relation of production."⁴⁹

From his Central Province studies, Cowen defines the middle peasant as

"those which do not hire in wage labour and which, in the main, do not supply local agricultural labour in larger holdings. Generally, in the Central Province, holdings of the middle peasantry lie within the 3 to 7 acre group of the size distribution of holdings".⁵⁰

This definition may be compared to that of the ILO Mission; of the 475,000 smallholders who had commercialised their production, 250,000 had only "limited" success for a variety of reasons, including land shortage, absence of credit, etc. These farmers, who earned between 1,200 and 2,200 shillings per year, "may hire seasonal labour, but

50. Ibid.

rarely permanent, (and), in many instances payment for this seasonal labour will be in kind, or under some arrangements for mutual help."⁵¹

In other words the middle peasantry, as opposed to the poor and small peasants, depend mainly on household labour and "labour-saving" devices to produce its commodities to subsist. Unlike the capitalist farmer, he does not hire wage-labour on a regular basis. But like the capitalist farmer, he is a large producer of commodities and depends, for the reproduction of his family, on the exchange of his farm commodities for what the family consumes, and replaces his means of production from realizing the surplus value of the commodities he produces. Unlike the poor peasant or other non-capitalist property owners, he depends almost entirely on the income from farming for the survival of his family; he is predominantly an agricultural man.

Thus, when Apollo Njonjo argues that "while...the middle peasantry had benefited from the commodity frontier, we have shown that its income from coffee, tea and milk represented a small proportion of the total small farm income from commodity production,"⁵² he is obviously defining a class other than the middle peasantry. These social classes and categories who engage in farming to subsidize their main sources of income have, definitely, expanded in Nyanza; the middle peasantry has, however, suffered stagnation in the process.

The use of size of holding in the delineation of who is a small middle or rich peasant must be made with specific reference to ecological zones (or natural conditions) and type of crops grown. As Nail Charlesworth puts it,...

" where soil and climatic conditions create vast local differentials in the size of holding required for subsistence, any definition based on precise extent of landownership risks becoming meaningless when applied from one region to another"⁵²

51. Njonjo, Thesis, p.384; also ILO Report, p.37

52: Ibid.

53. N. Charlesworth, "The 'Middle Peasant Thesis' and the Roots of Rural Agitation in India, 1914-1917", Journal of Peasant Studies. Vo.1.7, No.3, 1980, p.262.

It is the middle peasantry, with secure access to land of its own, and sure control of labour power recruited principally within the family, that is the main bearers of peasant tradition. It is this comparative autonomy which gives it the 'minimal tactical freedom' to challenge authority,⁵⁴ to compete with big capital in the production of commodities. But, in the modern world, especially with the power that international finance capital wields, it is this middle peasantry which is most vulnerable to indebtedness to finance capital and hence the control of its productive forces by the latter. Its growth, security and independence is therefore hampered. And where it is in the early stages of evolution, its expansion may even be blocked, as seems to be the case in Nyanza.

54. See, for example, H. Alavi and E. Wolf, "On peasant Rebellions," in T. Shanin (ed): Peasants and Peasant Societies (London: Penguin, 1971).