

## RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND PEASANT ALIENATION?

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IN THE MARXIST dialogue concerning development there is an inconsistency. Urban poverty and social ills are readily attributed to the direct alienation of the working class and the 'reserve army' of unemployed. But rural poverty and the failure of agricultural development projects have not, to my knowledge, ever been explained in terms of the alienation of the peasantry, even by those who 'take the part of peasants',<sup>1</sup> although Abrahams has recently noted long-standing rural alienation from the colonial state and its successors in Tanzania.<sup>2</sup> The systematic and increasing impoverishment of African peasantries tends to be related, firstly, to an undeveloped rural technology, and thereafter to relations of articulation with a different mode of production. But class relations, class domination and class conflict are never invoked to explain the ongoing failure of rural development in much of the Third World. Why not? After all, 'alienation' has become something of a catchword in the later twentieth century, and is used by Marxists and non-Marxists alike to explain a host of ills ranging from juvenile delinquency to inter-ethnic violence, and anything else which those in power may find threatening. So why is the failure of rural improvement excluded from its coverage?

### THE PROBLEM OF ALIENATION

To answer this question, one must start by sorting out the components of the concept of alienation. Firstly, there is the strand of Western romanticism which holds that rural folk, living and working close to nature, do not suffer the *industrial* phenomenon of alienation. In part, this perception derives from Rousseau in the older, pre-Marxist version of this myth,<sup>3</sup> and in part it stems from Marx's specific views on how alienation is constructed under the regimen of industrial capitalism. Both of these aspects relate, in turn, to the basis of knowledge from which man attempts to control his environment through the development of science and technology. Rousseau's 'noble

<sup>1</sup> G. Williams, 'Taking the part of peasants: Rural development in Nigeria and Tanzania', in P. Gutland and I. Wallerstein (eds.), *The Political Economy of Contemporary Africa* (London, Sage, 1976), 131-54.

<sup>2</sup> R. G. Abrahams, 'Law and order and the state in the Nyamwezi and Sukuma area of Tanzania', *Africa* (1989), LXIX, 365-70.

<sup>3</sup> J. J. Rousseau, 'Discourse on the origin of inequality' [1755], in G. D. H. Cole (trans.), *The Social Contract and Discourses* (London, Dent, 1963), 143-229.

savage', in his direct confrontation with a nature that he could not control but had to adapt to, was spared the consequences of technological intervention between himself and his environment. And the fact that even while he was opposed to this environment he was not separated from natural reality, Western intellectuals such as Durkheim have interpreted as being directly reflected in 'primitive' belief systems and social organization.<sup>4</sup>

Hegel, however, in contrast to Rousseau, saw this opposition of man and his environment as problematic, a parallel opposition to that between the spiritual and the material, and he resolved this problem by postulating a derivative, dialectical relationship between the two, which saw matter as a somewhat inferior manifestation of 'spirit', a kind of self-alienated spirit.<sup>5</sup> Hegel's approach thus destroyed the dualist view deriving from Rousseau that the material was the negation, or even absence, of the spiritual, in an approach from which it was possible to reintegrate spirit and matter, the ideal and the real, ultimately essence and existence, in a philosophy by which policy might be ordered. This philosophy, according to Avineri, was the chief reason for the student Marx's initial attraction to Hegel.<sup>6</sup>

However, according to Feuerbach,<sup>7</sup> Hegel's reconciliation of man and nature through his dialectical synthesis of essence and existence, depended on holding time and space constant and led to an abstracted idealism. As Marx puts it, 'it is self-evident that the true way is turned upside down'.<sup>8</sup> So before such a thesis could actually form the basis for action in the world, it required what Feuerbach called 'objectification' or to be stood on its feet rather than its head.<sup>9</sup> Hence Marx, following Feuerbach's lead, set out to destroy Hegel's original 'idealism' and to replace it with a 'materialist' conception of the relationship between essence and existence.<sup>10</sup> In Marx's hands, then, 'alienation' became an objective separation of man from his work and not, as Hegel envisaged it, a subjective distancing of men from the universal spirit (or, in a particular manifestation, from the universal state). But there is also, in Marx's handling of this concept, a sense in which workers must be subjectively aware of their own alienation, in order that they may combine forces to alter their situation.

<sup>4</sup> E. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (London, Allen and Unwin, 1915).

<sup>5</sup> S. Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1968), 6.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.

<sup>7</sup> L. Feuerbach, 'Vorläufige Thesen zur Reformation der Philosophie', *Anekdoten zur neuesten Deutschen Philosophie und Publizistik* (1843), II.

<sup>8</sup> K. Marx, 'Critique of Hegel's *Doctrine of the State*' [1843], in K. Marx, *Early Writings* ed. L. Colletti (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1975), 99.

<sup>9</sup> K. Marx, *Capital: Volume I* [1867] (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1976), 103.

<sup>10</sup> K. Marx, 'A contribution to the critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*' [1843-4], in Colletti (ed.), *Early Writings*, 243-57.

For Marx, then, alienation is generated by the material relations of production. Where the direct producer is separated from the means of production, by class relations based on the private ownership of productive property, he is *objectively* alienated simultaneously from the means of production, the objects and the products of his own labour. According to Marx, this separation occurs only in industrial capitalism, where workers are dispossessed of all but their labour-power, which they must sell on the labour market in order to survive. This labour-power is purchased by those who own the means of production in return for a wage which is barely adequate to subsist upon and which conceals the appropriation from the worker of the real value of his labour. The wage system in this way sustains the continued separation of labour from the means of production, thus reproducing the classes of labour and capital. The consequences of this objective alienation include (potential) class conflict, poverty and (relative) deprivation, as well as the failure of the worker to identify with his labour product, and muted protests in the form of absenteeism and industrial sabotage at this devaluation of human labour. These latter two results, like overt class conflict, become more important as labour becomes subjectively aware of its structural position in the capitalist system.

However, Marx also noted a second aspect of alienation which is likewise subjective but which must be overcome in the growth of class consciousness. This aspect arises from the separation of workers from one another in the production process. Wage employment individualizes workers in their class relations with capital. Each worker confronts capital on his own, in competition with his fellow-workers to remain in employment, especially in crises.<sup>11</sup> This individualization of labour's class interests, especially when combined with the fragmentation of jobs in industrial production, leads to the subjective alienation of workers from their fellows. This subjective alienation must be overcome, in the growth of class awareness, before workers can take action as a class to redress their structural disabilities. Until this subjective alienation of workers from one another is overcome, therefore, there will be no overt class conflict.

For Marx, then, alienation is generated specifically by industrial capitalism, and will disappear with its generating capitalist relations of production when socialism is instituted, even though the productive technology will be carried over into the new, transitional mode of production in virtually unchanged, but socialized, forces of production. Concerning this assumption that alienation is a specifically capitalist product, two sets of critics disagree.

Non-Marxist critics argue that the alienation of labour derives not from capitalist relations of production, but from industrial technology

<sup>11</sup> K. Marx, *Capital: Volume III* [1894] (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981), 210-34.

with its inevitable and very specific division of labour. In this view, alienation will characterize any industrial society, irrespective of how labour is organized in the productive process. However, this view holds that the manifestations of alienation can be reduced by using 'make-through' techniques which involve a single worker in all the phases of manufacture and thus allow him to identify with the final product.

The second set of critics, who largely identify themselves as Marxist, level a more thoughtful and fundamental criticism against the association of alienation specifically with industrial capitalism. They point out that the relations of production are not changed merely by altering the law of property and taking the means of production into state ownership.<sup>12</sup> Such changes as nationalization, they argue, may merely serve to mystify either the continuation of existing, or the development of new, exploitative relations based on class. Chinese Communist Party intellectuals like Wang Ruoshui (who has since been expelled from the party) followed up the logical outcome of these earlier observations to argue that, like capitalism, socialist society is fatally flawed because it too has created alienation of labour, resulting in popular disaffection from the system and social ills.<sup>13</sup> This concept of 'socialist alienation' remains predicated on class relations, not on industrialism, and therefore lends itself to extension in new directions, in ways that the non-Marxist critique does not.

### THE WIDER APPLICABILITY OF THE CONCEPT OF ALIENATION

In this article, therefore, I shall attempt to extend the concept of alienation, based on class relations, in two different but related directions. Firstly, I shall consider the possibility that alienation may exist in peasant societies, specifically in Southern Africa; and secondly, I shall examine some problems of contemporary rural development in Zimbabwe against the conceptual background of a potentially alienated peasantry. In other words, I shall explore the possibility that pre-capitalist and non-capitalist societies may also exhibit 'alienation' predicated on class relations. This attempt is only partly heretical in Marxist terms, for Marx and Engels did note that 'the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles'<sup>14</sup> and I prefer this formulation to Engels's later misguided idea, based on

<sup>12</sup> For example, M. Dijas, *The New Class* (New York, Holt, Reinhard and Winston, 1957) and N. Poulantzas 'On social classes', in A. Giddens and D. Held (eds.), *Classes, Power and Conflict* (London, Macmillan, 1982), 101-11.

<sup>13</sup> Wang Ruoshui, 'Writings on humanism, alienation and philosophy', *Chinese Studies in Philosophy* (1985), XVI, iii (special issue ed. and trans. D. Kelly).

<sup>14</sup> K. Marx and F. Engels, 'Manifesto of the Communist Party' [1848], in R. C. Tucker (ed.), *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York, W. W. Norton, 1972), 335.

anthropological evolutionism, that certain societies may be regarded as 'pre-class' systems.<sup>15</sup>

My heresy arises, then, not from problems of class but because, for Marx no less than Rousseau, alienation could not arise in pre-capitalist systems since, according to his analysis, labour was not here separated from the means of production. Even where slavery existed (as in the ancient Mediterranean city-states), even where legal ownership was vested in one class (as in feudal systems), Marx argued that the producers had direct access to the means of production based on their historical rights of usufruct which were vested in their class identity. Labour rather than surplus value was thus appropriated directly through *corvée* and similar systems or indirectly through a surplus product (in tithes, crop-shares or rent). Hence the specific class relations and conditions of labour necessary to produce alienation did not exist: nor, therefore, did alienation.

This argument is based, in part, on the assumption that in pre-capitalist systems production is seldom an individualized affair; or, if production is individualized, consumption is collectivized (either directly or via redistributive mechanisms).<sup>16</sup> Hence, although one may identify 'exploitation' in such societies, of women by men or of youth by their elders, this exploitation is not based on class relations and cannot, therefore, generate alienation as a class-based phenomenon. I argue, in contrast, that this view is only one of many possibilities, and has been generated by a perspective on society which is informed by the specific position in it of older males, as informants, recorders and theorists.

### PEASANT SOCIETIES IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

Very few peasant societies today, especially in Southern Africa, can legitimately be considered 'pre-capitalist', since virtually all have been 'penetrated' to varying degrees by the ripple effects of capitalism (for example, through labour migration) if not directly by capitalist relations of production. But the inappropriateness of the term 'pre-capitalist' in this context does not rest solely on contemporary relations of articulation linking peasant systems with the outside world. It goes back further, to arguments about who should be called 'peasants' in the first place.

American anthropologists of a 'substantivist' persuasion, such as Fallers<sup>17</sup> and Bohannan and Dalton,<sup>18</sup> not only distinguish 'non-market

<sup>15</sup> See also M. Bloch, *Marxism and Anthropology* (London, Oxford Univ. Press, 1983).

<sup>16</sup> C. Meillassoux, *Maidens, Meat and Money* (Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981).

<sup>17</sup> L. Fallers, 'Are African cultivators to be called "peasants"?', *Current Anthropology* (1961), II, 108-10.

<sup>18</sup> P. Bohannan and G. Dalton (eds.), *Markets in Africa* (Evanston, Northwestern Univ. Press, 1962).

economies' from 'market economies' but within the latter differentiate those with 'peripheral markets' from those based on 'the market principle' (which appears to be the non-Marxist equivalent of 'capitalism'). 'Peasants', in this view, are found only in systems based on the market principle. Other agricultural producers, even in West Africa with its long-established daily and periodic markets, qualify only as 'cultivators' in economies that allegedly are not fully monetized, in which the majority of exchanges are classified as 'redistributive' rather than 'economic', and in which accumulation is hindered by levelling mechanisms. 'Peasants', in contrast, are seen by Redfield's<sup>19</sup> followers as producing systematically for a larger economy, based on the market principle, and using a formal currency rather than barter to mediate their own exchanges as well as those with the larger system.

This 'substantivist' view is useful for obfuscating class relations in most systems but would disqualify virtually all peasants from the category by which history has known them. A less restrictive definition, in contrast, would admit many African farmers, in the past as well as the present, to comparability with 'peasant' in other parts of the world.

In pre-colonial Africa there were extensive trade systems dealing in slaves, minerals and indigenous as well as imported manufactures. This trade has itself underpinned the conceptualization of a specifically 'African' mode of production.<sup>20</sup> Markets for these goods (as well as for foodstuffs and livestock) certainly existed, even though they were not necessarily constrained to specific market-places designated as such and barter was more common than the use of designated currencies. Using Zimbabwe as an example, then, the term 'peasant' is appropriate, both in the past and in the present, to describe those producing for their household provisioning, in part through these market exchanges. For centuries the people of Zimbabwe have been involved, through trade, in larger economic systems. In the past, surpluses of grain and tobacco were regularly traded against one another.<sup>21</sup> There existed at least one metallurgical centre which produced a variety of iron manufactures specifically for trading purposes.<sup>22</sup> The pre-colonial trade in ivory, gold and slaves was probably much older than the indigenous iron industry, while the massive stone architecture in many parts of the country testifies to a system that was able to mobilize labour

<sup>19</sup> R. Redfield, *The Folk Culture of Yucatan* (Chicago, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1941).

<sup>20</sup> C. Coquery-Vidrovitch, 'Recherches sur un mode de production Africain', *La Pensée* (1969), CXLIV, 3-20.

<sup>21</sup> B. Kosmin, 'The Inyoka tobacco industry of the Shangwe people', in R. Palmer and Q. N. Parsons, *The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa* (London, Heinemann, 1977), 268-88.

<sup>22</sup> J. M. MacKenzie, 'A pre-colonial industry: The Njanja and the iron trade', *NADA* (1975), XI, ii, 200-20.

for 'public works'. The 'surplus-orientation' of the ancestors of Zimbabwe's present population was also seen in their prompt response to the new markets for grain created at the turn of this century by the establishment of settler farms and mines.<sup>23</sup> Southern Rhodesia was not the only settler system in Africa which had to destroy indigenous surplus production in order to ensure the survival of its colonial competition.<sup>24</sup> To judge, or even to classify, the past by reference to its contemporary remnants is misleading, as Kosmin reminds us with reference to today's underdeveloped Gokwe area which three generations ago was the centre of the Zimbabwean tobacco industry.<sup>25</sup>

To deny the status of peasant to those who in the past produced surpluses because their descendants have been reduced to peripheral, dependent poverty in the present is misleading on two counts. Firstly, it ignores the reality of their past participation in the pre-colonial trading systems. Secondly, it ignores the fact that, in the present, their successors are inextricably tied into the national economy, which was certainly based originally on the market principle even though, as Habermas notes, state intervention in advanced capitalist economies — and, I would add, settler and independent economies in Africa too — now prevents the free operation of this principle.<sup>26</sup> From an economic perspective, then, the case for the peasant status of Zimbabwe's rural people is reasonably clear, contrary to substantivist views.

The case for rejecting the contemporary classification of peasant economies as 'pre-capitalist' hinges on their present articulation with industrial capitalism (and their past participation in international trade previously articulated them with merchant capital, therefore suggesting a similar line of argument). This articulation can, in turn, be used to explain any contemporary alienation on the part of this peasantry. In Southern Africa in particular, where the historical depth of this articulation stretches back over one hundred years, this rural periphery of the international capitalist system can indeed be expected to have been alienated as a direct consequence of its exploitation by capital, both local and international.<sup>27</sup> In this view, the interests of capital have systematically undermined all rural, peasant structures, from the extended family to indigenous

<sup>23</sup> R. Palmer, 'The agricultural history of Rhodesia', in Palmer and Parsons, *The Roots of Rural Poverty*, 221–54 and T. Ranger, *Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War in Zimbabwe* (Harare, Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1985).

<sup>24</sup> C. F. Keyter, *Maize Control in Southern Rhodesia 1931–1941. The African Contribution to White Survival* (Salisbury, Central Africa Historical Association, Local Series 34, 1978).

<sup>25</sup> Kosmin, 'The Inyoka tobacco industry of the Shangwe people'.

<sup>26</sup> J. Habermas, 'Problems of legitimation in late capitalism', in P. Connerton (ed.), *Critical Sociology* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1976), 363–87.

<sup>27</sup> See A. Foster-Carter, 'Can we articulate "articulation"?', in J. Clammer (ed.), *The New Economic Anthropology* (London, Macmillan, 1978), 210–49.

manufacturing and customary law. The pre-capitalist economies of this region have been deliberately stripped of their former autonomy and reduced to a dependence on capital to reproduce themselves in disabled, attenuated form as appendages to the dominant mode of production which, in its ongoing search for profit, relieves itself of the social costs of reproducing its own workforce by off-loading these costs on to peasant institutions. Labour migration, monetization and commoditization have all combined to cast the world's peasants in the role of the international lumpenproletariat. Of course the peasants are alienated — by international capital.

But this is neither my argument here nor a view which Marx espoused. His attitude to the French and Indian peasantries seems to have been that their class demise under the civilizing impact of more efficient capital would be an inevitable as well as a desirable outcome, for only off the base of the capitalist mode would the transition to a more humane social organization be possible. 'The capitalist ruthlessly forces the workers to produce for production's sake . . . In this way, he spurs on the development of society's productive forces, and the creation of those material conditions of production which alone can form the real basis of a higher form of society.'<sup>28</sup> This attitude, indeed, has served in socialist states to justify policy measures to destroy peasantries and to replace them with a rural proletariat. Even in Maoist circles, where the positive contribution of peasants to socialist revolution (in conjunction with the working class, and usually under its leadership) is held as an article of faith, the transformation of the peasantry is also on the agenda. But since these views do recognize the peasantry as a class in itself, they also imply that alienation among the peasantry, on a class basis, is possible. So let us examine the possibility of rural or peasant alienation in more detail.

### THE OBJECTIVE ALIENATION OF PEASANTS

Non-Marxists, especially economic anthropologists oriented to 'substantivism' and thereby claiming attenuated kinship with Marxists, deny that 'exploitation' exists even in peasant economies which are based on the market principle.<sup>29</sup> Orthodox and neo-Marxists, in contrast, are willing to acknowledge the possibility that exploitation may exist in peasant societies (specifically through appropriation of the product)<sup>30</sup> but generally argue

<sup>28</sup> Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 739.

<sup>29</sup> G. Dalton, 'How exactly are peasants "exploited"?', *American Anthropologist* (1974), LXXVI, 553-61.

<sup>30</sup> W. Roseberry, 'Rent, differentiation and the development of capitalism among peasants', *American Anthropologist* (1976), LXXVIII, 45-58.



that any beginnings of class differentiation among peasantries are insignificant by comparison with their opposition, as a class, to capital.<sup>31</sup>

A more reasoned theoretical argument, consonant with Marx's own approach, might instead consider the differential significance of different aspects of objective alienation, all of which arise from the social relations of production. In industrial capitalist contexts, while recognizing that these two aspects are interrelated, Marxists emphasize more the separation of workers from the means of production than the distributive outcome of the appropriation of the workers' total product as the cause of their alienation. In this view, the distribution of the product, like alienation, is determined by the relations of production. Alienation does not generate these relations of production, it merely reinforces them.

In contrast, in rural economies (most) peasants do have direct access to and control over the land as the means of production. Any Marxist analysis of rural alienation and its origins must, therefore, consider the appropriation of the surplus and not-so-surplus product. Roseberry, for example, shows theoretically how rent as an appropriative mechanism may create internal differentiation within a peasantry with respect to their access to land.<sup>32</sup> Under-appropriation of the full surplus permits the peasant himself to start accumulating through trade, lending money and buying up land. Over-appropriation may drive him into debt and landlessness. But given climatic and other fluctuations, a truly efficient appropriation of the total surplus, without endangering peasant subsistence, is very rarely and only accidentally achieved in the proportional appropriations of rent as a fixed proportion of crop output. Without stating this explicitly, such approaches imply that, if rural alienation exists, it presumably arises because rural relations of appropriation actually generate the relations of production among the peasantry. These relations of appropriation are not originally or necessarily based on differential access to the agricultural means of production but (as in ancient China and under contemporary marketing monopsonies) may be defined by the state.<sup>33</sup>

This deduction is somewhat embarrassing and may explain why rural or peasant alienation is so rarely discussed, for it implies an origin for peasant alienation quite different from that identified by Marx in the context of industrial capitalism. It inverts the causal relationships between production and distribution, as joint aspects of the relations of production, and thereby suggests that objective alienation in the countryside is not

<sup>31</sup> J. Saul and R. Woods, 'African peasantries', in T. Shanin (ed.), *Peasants and Peasant Societies: Selected Readings* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1971), 103–14.

<sup>32</sup> Roseberry, 'Rent, differentiation and the development of capitalism among peasants'.

<sup>33</sup> See A. P. Cheater, 'Socialist transformation and rural development: Reflections on selected aspects of the Zimbabwean conundrum', in B. H. Kinsey (ed.), *Agrarian Reform and Rural Development in Zimbabwe* (London, Sage, in press).

comparable with its urban cousin. Certainly farmers are not alienated from the product of their labour in the same way as urban workers are. Even when forced to sell on the futures market,<sup>34</sup> peasants identify with their crops and livestock as the products of their own sweated labour. Nor are they subjectively terrorized by the simple tools and animate sources of energy which they have traditionally used to produce their crops.

However, peasants may vigorously resist new productive technologies which the state seeks to impose on them, as the contemporary dispute in Bikita district (southern Zimbabwe) illustrates. Expensive state investment in an irrigation network based on the Rozva dam has been unanimously rejected by its intended beneficiaries. 'These people have come out into the open and told us not to force the scheme on them but that we should let them dictate the trend of development in Bikita.' The peasant position is based on an expressed fear of losing land as result of this 'development', and of having the regimen of year-round cropping imposed on them. State and party officials have described the peasant reaction as based on 'sheer idleness' and thus 'disgraceful'.<sup>35</sup> Their understanding of the peasant perspective is, at best, limited.

### SUBJECTIVE ALIENATION AMONG PEASANTS

Notwithstanding these differences between town and countryside with respect to their objective alienation on a class basis, when we turn to the 'superstructural' and subjective aspects of alienation, the similarities are striking. At the core of the industrial worker's personal experience of alienation is his perception of his powerless, defenceless position in the system of capitalist relations of production. Those who control the means of production, in whatever system, are thought not to experience such powerlessness, at least not to the same extent.

Yet peasants are ranged against nature, as Rousseau recognized but Marx, following Hegel's lead, tended to ignore. It is not necessary to take a Hobbesian view of rural life to note, with Malinowski,<sup>36</sup> that while 'pre-capitalist' producers do what they can, within the limits of their technical knowledge, to ensure their production, they also have recourse to magic and religion in an attempt to propitiate the uncontrollable forces of nature on which their output ultimately depends (though, as Weinrich has noted

<sup>34</sup> M. Watts, *Silent Violence: Food, Famine and Peasantry in Northern Nigeria* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, Univ. of California Press, 1983), 242-5.

<sup>35</sup> *The Herald* [Harare], 23 May 1990, 7; 2 Aug. 1990; 5 Aug. 1990; 6 Aug. 1990, 1.

<sup>36</sup> B. Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays* (New York, Doubleday Anchor, 1954); B. Malinowski, *Crime and Custom in Savage Society* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1926).

of southern Zimbabwe,<sup>37</sup> irrigation has tended to displace rain rituals). The concept of a 'normal' season is subordinated to the significance of 'good' and 'bad' seasons among small agriculturalists.<sup>38</sup> Hence there is a perception of powerlessness among peasants, as among alienated industrial workers in the capitalist mode. It may be argued that peasants perceive the cause of their powerlessness to lie in the supernatural while industrial workers recognize a human agency, but one should perhaps remember that, as cause, 'the system' may not be perceived that differently from 'God'.

In any case, there is a second aspect of power which is entirely human in both cases. In the capitalist mode, both power and authority lie with capital — power through the ability to offer employment and subsistence, authority through the legal right to organize labour for production. From their structurally over-determined class position, to use Althusser's terminology,<sup>39</sup> workers are quite right to regard themselves as powerless against a legally-constituted system of domination to which they are subordinated. But if we imply that, because peasants control their own means of production, they are not equally subordinated to human sources of power and authority, we mislead ourselves. Very obviously we would mislead ourselves on this issue in the systems of slavery and feudalized clientship of past pre-capitalist systems in Africa.<sup>40</sup>

Historically in Southern Africa (and probably more widely) the weight of political authority on the people has varied, from its virtual absence among the San through the loose control and easy mobility of the Shona to the terror of Shaka. Today these traditional systems have all been transformed in their subordination to modern state control. But that is not to say that traditional systems of control have been replaced completely by state institutions. Miller has shown the ongoing local-level influence of chiefs and headmen in Tanzania even after the formal abolition of their posts;<sup>41</sup> and more recently it would appear that the Tanzanian authorities may once more be looking to age-grading as a mechanism for the control of (party-based) youth groups.<sup>42</sup> The relationship between state power

<sup>37</sup> A. K. H. Weinrich, *African Farmers in Rhodesia* (London, Oxford Univ. Press, 1975).

<sup>38</sup> See E. Colson, 'In good years and in bad: Food strategies of self-reliant societies', *Journal of Anthropological Research* (1978), XXXV, i, 18–29.

<sup>39</sup> L. Althusser, *For Marx* (New York, Vintage Books, 1969).

<sup>40</sup> J. Buxton, 'Clientship among the Mandari of the Southern Sudan' [1957], in R. Cohen and J. Middleton (eds.), *Comparative Political Systems* (New York, Natural History Press, 1967), 229–46; J. Maquet, *The Premise of Inequality in Ruanda* (London, Oxford Univ. Press for International African Institute, 1961).

<sup>41</sup> N. Miller, 'The political survival of traditional leadership', *Journal of Modern African Studies* (1968), VI, 183–98; N. Miller, 'The rural African party: Political participation in Tanzania', *American Political Science Review* (1970), LXIV, 548–71.

<sup>42</sup> J. Copans, personal communication, 1983; see also R. G. Abrahams, 'Sungusungu: Village vigilante groups in Tanzania', *African Affairs* (1987), LXXXVI, 179–96; Abrahams, 'Law and order and the state in the Nyamwezi and Sukuma area of Tanzania', 362.

and traditional authority is complex and ever-changing, and there are many examples on the African continent of each trying to use the other in its own interests. Conflicts between different types of authority are frequent.<sup>43</sup> In particular, newly-independent central states resent any diminution of their authority, as I have noted for Zimbabwe,<sup>44</sup> even under the auspices of official policy on 'decentralized' local government. Recently, a senior minister described 'the decision by most small-scale commercial farming areas to form their own rural councils' after Zimbabwe's independence, as 'a mistake, which had divorced them from central government'.<sup>45</sup>

### PEASANTS AND THE STATE

So how do these different sources of power and authority in the countryside create peasant alienation? In particular, how do peasants view the intrusion of the state into their previously relatively autonomous domain? Here, I would suggest, there is much ambivalence. On the one hand, peasants regard the contemporary state as legitimate, not least because it represents their liberation from colonial domination. On the other hand, they deeply resent being told what to do by the state (or ruling party), legitimate or otherwise. Their position, I would suggest, resembles quite closely that of the young Marx as described in his assessment of the Prussian state in the early 1840s. Following the failure of the newly-installed Prussian monarch (Friedrich Wilhelm IV) to fulfil his pre-coronation promises, the young Marx came to view the state as containing 'a real contradiction between its essence (reason) and its existence (unreason)'.<sup>46</sup> Embedded in the unreason of the state's existence is the alienation of its own reason, which alienation can be fought by the state's citizens only through 'the politics of practical reappropriation' of their rights against the state.<sup>47</sup> Althusser, of course, has argued that there is a major epistemological break (based on his alleged abandonment of the Hegelian dialectic)<sup>48</sup> between Marx's early and mature writings, but this view has been disputed, among others by Avineri.<sup>49</sup> On this particular philosophical issue of the state, Avineri would appear to be correct, for Althusser himself quotes the mature Marx as noting that the

<sup>43</sup> See, for Zimbabwe, G. K. Garbett, 'The Rhodesian chief's dilemma: Government officer or tribal leader?', *Race* (1966), VIII, 113-28; J. F. Holleman, *Chief, Council and Commissioner* (Assen, Royal van Gorcum, 1969); and A. K. H. Weinrich, *Chiefs and Councils in Rhodesia* (London, Heinemann, 1971).

<sup>44</sup> A. P. Cheater, 'Anthropologists and policy in Zimbabwe: Design at the centre and reactions on the periphery', in R. Grillo and A. Rew (eds.), *Social Anthropology and Development Policy* (London, Tavistock, 1985), 58-72.

<sup>45</sup> *The Herald*, 14 Sept. 1990, 1.

<sup>46</sup> Althusser, *For Marx*, 225.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> See A. Callinicos, *Marxism and Philosophy* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1983), 90.

<sup>49</sup> Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx*.

transformation of the state under communism would be problematic and 'one does not get a flea-hop nearer to the problem by a thousand-fold combination of the word people with the word state'.<sup>50</sup> This position appears little different from his stance on the Prussian state thirty years earlier. And in contemporary Africa, when discussing the problems of rural alienation and failed development, Marx's remark seems as applicable to 'populist' states as to those seeking 'socialist transformation'.

The 'politics of practical reappropriation' by the peasantry of its rights against the state, probably underlie most if not all 'peasant revolts'.<sup>51</sup> In colonial Southern Africa, there are many examples of such attempted reappropriation: the Eastern Cape in 1857; Southern Rhodesia in 1893 and 1896-7; and Natal in 1906. On a smaller and less well-known scale, minor 'disturbances' and 'insurrections' occurred all over the region. There also exist examples of reappropriative action more recently in independent African states, of which the best-known is probably the Lenshina sect's confrontation with the Zambian government in the mid-1960s.<sup>52</sup> Again, however, as in the colonial period, I suspect that most action of this type has been more localized, even privatized — of the type that seeks to subvert from within influential national structures in order to achieve local gains rather than to confront the state directly.<sup>53</sup> Emphatically one should not assume that public gestures of symbolic solidarity between peoples and states reflect their real interrelationships, even if the public acknowledgement that 'I know there is a government in Harare but to tell you the truth I don't know for who',<sup>54</sup> is infrequent.

State interests diverge from those of rural peasantries in ways that reflect objectively different, class-based conflicts in the development process.<sup>55</sup> These class conflicts, I suggest, generate peasant alienation, and the lack of rural development in Africa is one manifestation of the ongoing class struggle between rural people and the state. Where development projects fail, for a while or permanently, one important reason for this failure can almost always be traced back to the issue of which class controls the

<sup>50</sup> K. Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme* [1875] (Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1978), quoted by Althusser, *For Marx*, 181.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. E. R. Wolf, *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* (London, Faber, 1971).

<sup>52</sup> W. van Binsbergen, *Religious Change in Zambia* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981). N. Long in his *Creating Space for Change: A Perspective on the Sociology of Development* (Wageningen, Agricultural University, 1984) notes that their harassment and exclusion from state-determined development projects by the Zambian government after its 1964 action against the Lenshina sect caused Zambia's Jehovah's Witnesses to look, very successfully, to their own resources for development.

<sup>53</sup> Cheater, 'Anthropologists and policy in Zimbabwe'.

<sup>54</sup> *The Sunday Mail* [Harare], 20 May 1990, 11.

<sup>55</sup> K. Hart, *The Political Economy of West African Agriculture* (Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1982).

development process and how far a ruling class is prepared to inform those for whom it plans. Often, ruling classes seem to consider such information unnecessary. Recently in Zimbabwe there has been a scandal over the government's failure to inform people in the Mudzi district that they are to be removed to accommodate a new, tourist-oriented game park.<sup>56</sup>

So far in Africa the examples of peasant-controlled development are few and far between. The most spectacular example, the indigenous development of Ghana's cocoa production from zero in 1892 to world leader twenty years later, is still struggling to overcome the impact of state control during the Nkrumah era, which itself overtook the ecological disaster of swollen shoot.<sup>57</sup> The state allegation that peasants are incapable of developing themselves without external assistance, direction and control is only in part a legacy of racist attitudes associated with colonial regimes (which attitudes have often been taken over as part of their class paraphernalia by Africa's new rulers). This allegation is more importantly an ideological product of diverging class interests, those of the state colluding with international capital in the interests of the state and against those of its rural population in particular.

Clearly, then, the contemporary African peasantry as a class is exploited, as in the past, by the larger system(s) of which it is part. Peasants as a *klas an sich* are subject to the rule of political overlords who extract from them a substantial portion of their total production through variations on the mechanism of rent. In pre-colonial Africa, according to Coquery-Vidrovitch, rulers used their position as brokers controlling 'foreign' trade to reinforce their extraction of surplus both from their own subjects and from those in neighbouring political domains.<sup>58</sup> In French neo-Marxist views, then, the economic exploitation of peasantries depended on the prior fact of political control of the conditions through which they were linked into larger economic systems. While this characterization was originally applied to the African past, it can with equal facility be applied to the present as well. Through their contemporary control of agricultural marketing, African states realize in foreign currency the value of their peasants' production, especially of cash crops, while returning to the direct producers a variable, but usually small, share of this total. The remainder is used to finance the interests of the state and the bureaucratic class.<sup>59</sup> It is argued, by the politicians concerned, that much of this value is returned to the peasants collectively, in the form of development projects,

<sup>56</sup> *The Herald*, 19 June 1990, 4 (comment).

<sup>57</sup> P. Hill, *Migrant Cocoa Farmers of Southern Ghana* (Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1963).

<sup>58</sup> Coquery-Vidrovitch, 'Recherches sur un mode de production Africain'.

<sup>59</sup> See Hart, *The Political Economy of West African Agriculture*, and Cheater, 'Socialist transformation and rural development'.

rather than individually on the basis of value produced. Occasionally, however, a politician blows the whistle on this myth, as Nyerere did in 1967,<sup>60</sup> and admits that the political threat of urban unrest causes most of this value to be retained in 'central' expenditure. More usually, politicians deplore the manipulation by international capital of the prices that they receive for their peasants' produce and blame lack of development on these falling revenues.

When the money for rural development diminishes, we often find the principle of 'self-reliance' being invoked by the state to justify a *second* extraction of surplus from the peasantry, this time in the form of labour rather than product, in order to 'match' inputs of materials for projects approved by the state. Such extractions of rural labour, at least in Zimbabwe, fall disproportionately on women, increasing their already heavy labour burden. In contrast, self-help projects undertaken by the people without state approval are likely to be destroyed, physically or financially, by state action against them, such as schools that the people decide that they want in a particular locality of which the state planning apparatus disapproves. Recently it has been admitted that one-third of Zimbabwe's secondary schools, all of them in the countryside, are not registered with the Ministry of Education and Culture because they do not meet the minimum standards required of buildings and staff.<sup>61</sup> In some cases, too, they are situated in the 'wrong' place in official calculations.

### THE PROBLEM RESTATED

In those developing countries where agriculture is the mainstay of the economy, farmers are the main producers of value for the state. Although to realize this value some developing states have opted to rely primarily on large-scale, fully capitalized agricultural companies (owned individually, corporately or by the state), most obtain it from a mass of small, marginal producers whom I have here referred to as 'peasants'. In Poulantzas's terms, 'peasant' is a 'class position' in the total social formation, and it really does not matter, therefore, what percentage of producers are individually peasant 'class agents' in a restrictive definitional sense such as the 'substantivists' use.<sup>62</sup> It is the structural position, not the individual exchanges, of 'peasants' which are definitionally critical here.

However, that does not mean that the peasantry is undifferentiated. As Poulantzas indicates, any class in a total system comprises a number of 'class fractions', each with different and often competing interests.<sup>63</sup> If we

<sup>60</sup> J. K. Nyerere, *Nyerere on Socialism* (Dar es Salaam, Oxford University Press, 1969).

<sup>61</sup> *The Herald*, 24 July 1990, 1.

<sup>62</sup> Poulantzas, 'On social classes'.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

are to understand precisely how the peasantry as a class is exploited (for example, by the contemporary state), it is necessary to distinguish between male cash croppers and female food producers, landowners and tenants, those whose labour is regularly appropriated by others and those who control the labour of others, those who own livestock and machinery and those who hire them. Each of these peasant 'fractions' relates differently to others and to the state and is alienated differently. However, as in the case of Zimbabwe, such intra-rural class differentiations may conveniently be concealed under the ideological misconception that the land is held 'communally'.<sup>64</sup>

When considering class conflict between peasantry and state, and its alienating consequences, we should also note that in most developing economies, especially of Africa, most state bureaucrats were born into rural homes and grew up in the countryside. As in Feuerbach's view 'God is alienated man',<sup>65</sup> so the urbanized bureaucrat may be regarded as 'alienated peasant' — with the twist, of course, that it is the state bureaucrat rather than the peasant who constructs this concept. In part, this alienation of the bureaucrat from his origins is a consequence of his educational channel of mobility, but perhaps it stems mainly from his reaction to rural poverty from the perspective (into which he has been educated) of the already developed societies. The poor are an uncomfortable reminder to the bourgeois of a fate escaped; where the bourgeois has personal recollections of that fate, the reminder is doubly uncomfortable. And where the rural poor cannot be trusted to change themselves, perhaps because of some attachment to their 'traditions', *they must be changed* in order that the alienation from their own origins of the upwardly mobile may be overcome.

I would argue that it is this existential perspective on rural poverty, even more than the requirements of class reproduction, which drive state bureaucrats to attempt to control from the centre the process of development on the periphery. The image of the developed peasant which the alienated bureaucrat finds 'good to think' is not, of course, the image of his future that the peasant may hold to be desirable. This ideological refraction of the class polarity between state and peasantry summarizes the problem of rural development which rests on the prior problem of alienation. The circle is closed.

<sup>64</sup> A. P. Cheater, 'The ideology of "communal" land tenure in Zimbabwe: Mythogenesis enacted?', *Africa* (1990), LX, 188–206.

<sup>65</sup> Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx*, 11; see also Callinicos, *Marxism and Philosophy*, 29.