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THE NIGERIAN PEASANTRY: IDENTITY AND CHANGE

(A SKETCH)

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THE PEASANTRY IN NIGERIA: IDENTITY AND CHANGE

Discussion of agriculture and rural development in underdeveloped countries cannot do without clearly categorising the rural population. The study of income profiles, the impact of this or that macroscopic or sectoral operation or the response to this or that development demands categorial clarity.

Unfortunately, in Nigeria, it is usual to speak of 'farmers', ignoring the types of farmers that exist or the differentiations in progress among them. In various discussions since 1960, some intellectuals have doubted the existence of a peasantry in Nigeria. Basing themselves on what they have learnt of European peasants, some roundly declare there are no peasants in this country. Some treat the rural population simply as part of a 'working class' created by exploitative relations between imperialist multinationals and the people of colonial or former colonial countries. Others do speak of peasants, of course, but without a clear idea of what is meant by it. If pressed for a definition, they would say simply 'rural people?

The pervading and extremely wrong idea that all tropical Africa before colonial rule lived in a communal economy with its characteristic communal cum family ownership of land has also helped to befog the issue of whether peasants really exist in Nigeria, and, if so, who they are exactly. The long debate about whether or not there are classes or there is feudalism in Africa does not help matters either.

In this short essay, we wish to dispose of this matter. Of cource, answering the question whether there are peasants in Nigeria or not depends on the definition of a peasant, just as answering the question of whether there are classes or there is feudalism or not depends on the definition of these terms.

Since social scientific knowledge started from Europe, there is always a tendency to apply European criteria in a fixed way. This leads to confusion. Definitions should be modified as we know more about society from various parts of the world. This is the dialectical approach, and it is ultimately the only truly scientific approach.

Dialecticians approach definitions not by merely observing feature differences but also ontologically, that is, by going back to primitives or historical (or formative) beginnings. The dialectical approach trains the attention on processes. To define a phenomenon we go back to the crucial processes of its first emergence as an objective fact. Such an excercise gains immensely in precision.

If we merely look at differences, we may observe some distinctions between the peasant and the worker, the trader, the craftsman, etc. and come to the conclusion that he is different from these by being a small-scale farmer or a rural cultivator. Yet not all farmers, small-scale farmers or rural cultivators are peasants. The capitalist farmer in America or Britain, or the plantation owner in imperial Rome, who cultivated for the market with the aid of slaves was not a peasant. Neither is a capitalist farmer today anywhere.

The first fact about peasants, of course, is that they are rural cultivators of a traditional kind. They raise crops or livestock in the countryside. Yet peasants are not the only traditional rural cultivators. Anthropologists have discovered many cultivating communities that cannot be called peasant communities. The Tiv, Central Ibo (Ibo other than those of Onitsha or Western Ibos) and Ibibio cultivators before colonial rule were not peasants. We thus have to make a distinction between the 'primitive' or 'tribal' cultivator and the peasant cultivator. The word 'primitive' here is used in the scientific sense which means 'embryonic' or'prior to differentiation'. We distinguish between 'tribal' or 'stateless' society which is a society without the state and 'civil' society or 'civilization' which is a society with a state. This calls for a brief comment.

Human society developed from bands or tribes of hunters and gatherers to agricultural tribes. The first agricultural communities, however, were communal in organisation. The means of production belonged to the producers as among the hunters. As among the hunters also, production was for immediate consumption in the household. If a surplus was produced over and above immediate consumption needs, it was exchanged, but the exchange was merely

a way of diversifying household consumption. In short, this is a society where there are no superior or inferior rights to land, the principal means of production, and no differentiation of functions except within the household between man and woman or between older people and younger ones. Each household does the same kind of thing and lives the same life as another. All households are equal in status. The surplus produced by the household, if any, is not alienated from it but is exchanged for its other needs.

We find approximately this kind of society of cultivators before European rule among the Tivs, for instance, or among the Ibibios or the Ibos say of Afikpo Division.

When tribal society develops into class society, however, all that changes. The beginning of class society is made possible by the fact that the surplus produced by the rural cultivator is now alienated from the cultivator's household and used to maintain non-farming groups. Priests, traders and craftsmen become specialised practitioners who no longer farm. A class of specialised warriors and administrators emerges. All these non-farming groups have to be maintained from the agricultural surplus produced by the cultivators.[1]

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1. This process occured in the sort of neolithic society that Lenski calls 'advanced horticultural society'. The regular use of metal and the capacity to conquer and permanently rule 'simple horticultural societies' - those without regular metal technology - made this possible. For a description of how all this occured concretely starting from the example of China, see Lenski, Gerhard, Human Societies, McGraw Hill Book Co., New York and London, 1970, cc. 8. For Africa, the same process is described by Basil Davidson in his Old Africa Rediscovered.

The primitive cultivator becomes an exploited and dominated class whose surplus is alienated from the household. The machinery of domination is the state, a machinery set up by the warriors and administrators to extract the surplus and use it as they desire.[1]

Thus peasants exist only in class society, because the alienation of the surplus of the rural cultivator is the basis of the earliest class societies anywhere in history. The state is the political machinery for converting the rural cultivator into a peasant. Thus we can also say that a peasant exists only in a state, just as the category 'ruling class' exists only in a state.

Consequently, two neighbouring farming communities may use the same farming methods. Yet one may be a peasant society and the other not. As examples we have the Tiv (primitive cultivators) and the Jukun (peasants) up to the nineteenth century. Again whereas the Tiv, central Ibo and Ibibio cultivators before colonial rule were, as already noted, 'tribal cultivators' the Yoruba, Housa and Kanuri cultivators were peasants before colonial rule.

In fact, let us note the following. Because anthropologists were mainly interested in 'tribal' or stateless peoples and came to tropical Africa with the ethnocentric notion that these parts of the world had 'no history'[2], that is, no civil society, they ignored all the evidence of state systems and described all the communities they found in Nigeria with a most unscientific licence as 'tribes'. Contrary to the impression created by this irresponsible scholarship and the use of it by colonial propagandists, it was civil society rather than tribal society that predominated in the area called Nigeria before colonial rule.

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1 Lenski, Gerhard, Ibid.

2 Hegel, despite his encyclopaedic knowledge of Europe, wrote thus of Africa: "Africa proper, as far as history goes back, has remained for all porposes of connection with the rest of the world, shut up... - the land of childhood, which lying beyond the day of self-conscious history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of night". Hegel, Georg W., Philosophy of History, republished in Great Books of the Western World, edited by R.M. Hutchins and M.J. Adler, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., Chicago and London, 1975, p. 196. It was with this foundation, confounded by imperialistic prejudices, that the anthropologists by and large worked from late nineteenth century till after World War II.

In the whole of Housaland, Bornu, Nupe, Jukun, Yorubaland, what is now Bendel State, Onitsha, Calabar and the Niger Delta area, civil society had long been in existence. In some of these areas empires had even risen and fallen very much in the same way as they had done in 'non-tribal' or 'civil' Europe.

One confusion we must get clear of. Some sociologists wanting to evade the fact that civil society is class society, now prefer to dichotomise all societies into so-called 'simple' and so-called 'complex' types. No precise definition has ever been given to 'simple and 'complex' which each one employs in his own way. Nevertheless, two of the attributes of 'simple' societies are said to be that they are small in scale and that they are isolated, local, self-sufficient.

This approach has sometimes been used to face the problem of definition of a peasant community. Such a community is said to be rural and 'small-scale' as distinct from urban or sometimes industrial society which is said to be 'large-scale'. It is said to be agrarian rather than commercial, isolated rather than linked with other communities. On the other hand, it is sometimes alleged that what distinguishes a peasant society from non-peasant agrarian society is the fact that the peasant community (or'society' in the language of this 'simple-complex' school) is linked with other communities in a larger society, whereas non-peasant agrarian societies are not.

In all this we see an example of the use of casual differences as bases for definition which we referred to disapprovingly. What distinguishes a peasant community, however, is not the fact that it is rural, small-scale (whatever that means), or isolated. The point about isolation requires a further look.

Although anthropologists have come across small, isolated tribal communities in regions like the Amazon or in mountain areas, many local communities at the tribal stage are not isolated, but have extensive marital, trade and political relations (say, in the form of war which is a type of relation) with other communities.

Thus Robin Horton obseves:

> A remarkable feature of both Tiv and central Ibo social organisations is that what appears in some contexts to be a series of autonomous political units becomes in other contexts a single larger unit. In turn, this larger unit, though in some contexts it forms part of a series of autonomous units of comparable size, in other contexts combines with them to form a still larger unit. And so on until a level of concerted action involving several thousand people is reached.[1]

The existence or non-existence of links between a cultivating community and a wider society, then, it not what makes it peasant or non-peasant. A peasant community is, indeed, one with links with a wider societal organisation, but the distinction between a peasant and a non-peasant community of cultivators turns on the type of 'external' links rather than on the existence or inexistence of 'external' links as such. We may observe in passing that the existence of organized links with a wider society makes it imprecise to describe peasant society as 'simple' or 'small-scale'.

The links between any local 'primitive' or tribal community and the rest of tribal society are communal or non-heirarchical. These links reinforce the household as the ultimate locus of authority. The links between a local peasant community and the rest of the society in which it exists, however, are stratified or class links and define a territorial rather than a household, band, clan or tribal locus of authority. The former are links based on the equality of status of all families; the latter are links expressing status differentiation or inequality among families. The former are non-exploitative links; the latter are exploitative. The former are links of consultation and consensus in which the concept of power that is, ability and means possessed by a group to coerce or enforce political

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1 Robin Horton, 'Stateless Societies in the History of West Africa' in History of West Africa, Vol. 1, edited by J.F.A. Ajayi, Longman Group, 1971, p. 89.

or economic decisions, are absent. The latter are links of coercion and subordination expressing the power of privileged/ruling households over overs.

We believe Eric R. Wolf is on the decisive track when he writes:

> In primitive society, producers control the means of production, including their own labour, and exchange their own labour and its products for the culturally defined equivalent goods and services of others... In the course of cultural evolution, however, such simple systems have been superceded by others in which control of the means of production, including the disposition of human labour, passes from the hands of the primary producers into the hands of groups that do not carry on the productive process themselves, but assume instead special executive and administrative functions, backed by the use of force... In primitive society, surpluses are exchanged directly among groups or members of the groups; peasants, however, are rural cultivators whose surpluses are transfered to a dominant group of rulers that uses the surpluses both to underwrite its own standard of living and to distribute the remainder to groups in society that do not farm but must be fed for their specific goods and services in turn.[1]

Class society is characterised by the existence of the state which is the coercive instrument of the ruling class over subject classes. As we have seen, we can divide all hitherto existing society into stateless societies and states. The state emerges in history as a machinery for regularly extracting the peasant surpluses and transferring them to other groups in society.

If one desired a short definition of peasants, the following might be given. Peasants are rural producers in class society or in a state whose occupation is cultivating, stock raising or fishing and who in these pursuits make use mainly of the labour of members of their household, excluding slaves, servants and employees.

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1. Eric R. Wolf, Peasants, Prentice Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1966, p. 3.

II

Thus wherever the state had emerged in Nigeria there a peasantry had come into existence, since the state is based on taxes, fines, tributes, confiscations, etc. used to maintain a ruling class. Thus by the nineteenth century, the rural cultivator in the Benin Empire, Yorubaland, Nupe, Housaland, Bornu, Jukun and Igala had passed from the status of a 'tribal' or 'primitive' farmer to that of a peasant. In the coastal trading states such as Opobo and Calabar, the existence of a peasantry would depend on the extent to which the farmers and fishermen of adjoining districts had come under their coercive or commercial sway.

Since in Nigeria the slave trade was a great catalyst in the dissolution of tribal communalism, the emergence of classes and the formation of states, it was also a powerful factor in the transformation of the primitive cultivator into a peasant class in many parts of Nigeria.

The coming of British colonialism completed the process of peasant formation. For British colonialism made the whole of Nigeria part of the British empire, that is, a province of the British imperial state.

Even the Tiv, Ibibio, Ijaw, Idoma, etc. primitive cultivator ceased to be that. His surpluses were extracted and transferred in two ways: first, through unequal trade which transferred his 'cash crop' surpluses to foreign monopolies, and, secondly, through taxation which transferred part of his surpluses to the British colonial government. In the wake of unequal trade and the British colonial government emerged internally new social groups - traders, clerks, and professionals — all feeding on the rural surplus.

In the Tiv, Ibibio, Ijaw, Idoma, etc. countries, therefore, the rural cultivator came under two transfer regimes: an expatriate regime in which his surpluses were alienated to expatriate monopolies and the Nigerian province of the British imperial state, and an indegenous regime in which

his surpluses maintained new non-farming classes in process of formation in Nigerian society.

In areas like Housaland, Bornu, the former Benin empire, etc. where states and empires had flourished before, the new developments were superimposed on the existing regime of alienation. Under the 'indirect rule' system, part of the peasant surpluses went as before to maintain a traditional gentry who were now in collaboration with the British administration, especially in matters of local government. But here, too, on the one hand new social groups outside farming began to emerge and on the other hand expatriate monopolies and the British imperial state established their joint mechanism of exploitation.

Four powerful instruments were used by the British administration to extract peasant surpluses in cash or kind:

(a) monetization of the economy which made exports possible and facilitated all processes of income transfer,

(b) taxation,

(c) encouragement of 'cash crop' agriculture, that is, production for the market as against production for the household's direct consumption,

(d) forced labour which was a form of fine or taxation in labour-time imposed on the local peasantry for the building of roads, etc. especially at the early stage of the colonial administration.

It should be observed that the term 'surplus' includes both goods and labour. Thus any obligation to work outside the cultivator's farm is an appropriation of his surplus labour-time.

III

Peasants have existed in various stratified modes of production or social formations.

A mode of production is defined by the character of the dominant relations of production existing in it. By 'relations of production' is meant the rights which people have vis-a-vis one another in production. More specifically the term refers to the rights of the actual or primary producer in the means of production, in the use of his own labour and in the disposal of the output. The three sets of rights have to be looked at separately and together when we are trying to establish the socio-economic identity of any group.

The existence of the peasantry in many parts of the world is characterised by varying types and degrees of subordination to dominant classes.

In traditional society the conditions of the peasantry depend on the rights of the ruling class of gentry over the land as well as on the right to tax and other political privileges arising from the monopoly of armed force. Rights to land become differentiated as a result of land scarcity, conquest, or migration due to land limitation or to the many wars in which the state engages. Rights to the land may also vary according to whether political control is loose or highly centralised. Thus the Jukun state appears to have been more centralised than the states of the Yoruba country. All these kinds of variation in land rights are to be found among the states of Nigeria prior to the period of colonialism.

With the rise of the state and of priviliged and powerful families, there arises also patronage and clientship. Thus varying degrees of patronage (or clientship) become established between the powerful and the powerless. Inferiority and superiority of families vary from slavery at one end to a free and independent status on the other.

In a society characterised by slavery, such as Benin, Bonny, Calabar, Hausaland or Yorubaland in the nineteenth century, the peasant households existed as households of free men or clients intermediate between the slave-owning chiefs (patriarchs) who formed the ruling oligarchy and the slaves. The peasant households, of course, were differentiated in the degree of freedom, that is, degree of independence of the ruling patriarchy. In class society of any kind, there are various obligations of the inferior to the superior families of which any particular family may be more or less free.

In feudal or semi-feudal society, there were always the obligation of the peasant to pay taxes, to render obligatory deliveries of part of his produce to his superior, to work on the land of his chief (or protector). In feudal Europe, most peasants were also bound to the land: they could not leave the village and live elsewhere without the consent of their superiors. This last appears not to have been the case in those Nigerian agrarian systems - in Nupe, Hausaland, Bornu or Yorubaland - that had elements of organisation and obligation resembling those of European feudalism.[1]

Concerning Africa as a whole, Jack Goody observes: "Though there were no landlords, there were, of course, lords of the land -- the local chiefs of centralised states, who, from the standpoint of food production, were in a sense carried by the rest of the population."[2]

He observes further that in Africa land was not scarce so that exclusive ownership of land by a landlord group with others living as their tenants did not exist. Land was so plentiful in Africa that shifting cultivation prevailed. In such a situation, it was necessary to enslave a man in order to control his labour to any great extent. Slavery, therefore, took the place of serfdom. He argues:

> If you have landlords you can also have tenants and serfs; unfree tenancies mean little unless land is highly valued and your peasantry has nowhere to go. Under conditions of shifting cultivation, it means little. Slavery was important throughout most of Africa: war captives were given household or agricultural

1. Jack Goody, Technology, Tradition and the State in Africa, Oxford University Press, London, 1971, cc. 1 describes some of these features.

2. Ibid., p. 31.

work to perform for their captors or their purchasers. But ties of subordination arose not out of land but as a result of purchase or conquest, thus giving rise to slavery rather than serfdom.[1]

He summarises:

I have been suggesting that while there were local chiefships... supported partly out agriculture, partly from trade, there was nothing equivalent to estates in land of the European kind.[2] Limited estates in land, sufficient to support appointive offices were only rarely built up...[3] and in any case did not give rise to the kind of landlord-tenant (or serf) relationship characteristic of Europe.[4]

Whether or not there was serfdom in Nigeria, however, depends on how serfdom itself is defined. If it is defined with reference to tenancy 'in the European sense' with all its Roman law trappings, then there were perhaps no serfs in tropical Africa outside Ethiopia, an exception Goody makes. If it is defined with reference to the obligation of a peasant to work on the farm of his superior for a number of days or during certain periods, then there was serfdom of a kind in Nupe, Yorubaland, Benin and Hausaland[5] at least, because there was such an obligation in those places.

In his bid to make a case for African specialism, to generalise for all Africa excluding landlordism, tenancy and serfdom from it except in Ethiopia, Goody runs into the metaphisical either-or falacy in a number of ways. According to him it would seem that there must be either slavery or serfdom, excluding the possible coexistence of both, and we must have either European landlordism-cum-tenancy-cum-serfdom or no landlordism, no tenancy of any kind and no serfs of any kind. He leaves many questions unanswered.

He does not tell his readers (1) why landlordism must necessarily be 'of the European kind' to be called landlordism, (2) why serfdom cannot co-exist with slavery, (3) why conquest cannot lead to superior land rights other than 'of the European kind', (4) what was the local consequence of the Benin and Nupe theory that land belonged ultimately to the king, which was in fact the English feudal theory after William the Conqueror.

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1 Ibid.

2 An estate is a permanent benefit given by a king to his vassals in exchange for some obligation on their part to him, usually military service.

3 Goody cites Hausaland as one example.

4 Ibid., p. 33.

5 We are informed that such obligatory service existed in Hausaland right down to the 1950s when they were abolished in consequence of agitation by the NEPU (Northern Elements Progressive Union).

Whilst we do not want to go into detail in this matter, it must be pointed out that Goody deliberately ignores the factual field evidence produced by Nadel, although he is aware of Nadel's work on Nupe, in order to establish his theory of African exceptionalism.

Concerning landlordism and tenancy, Nadel describes landlordism and serfdom in Nupe in detail, using 'landlord', 'tenant' and 'serf' for categories which are appropriately so described if we stick to economic and social essences. There is no suggestion in Nadel that these categories have exactly the same legal implications as in Europe.[1] Darryl Forde also observed landlords and tenants in Yorubaland:

> There are several big landlords round Ibadan, one of the richest men in the area 'owning' some 30 villages of varying sizes. These men generally 'lend' their land in small parcels to a number of tenants who give some form of service in return, presenting landlords with gifts at local festivals, either in kind or money according to their means.[2]

It is obvious that Forde is reporting a situation prior to British rule.

On the Benin Kingdom, Bradbury reports:

> The full-scale onegie is the nominal owner of the land of the chiefdom. In virtue of this he has the kind of political, judicial, economic and spiritual rights over its people as the Oba excercises in the Benin Kingdom... The enigie (plural - E.T.) have well-defined rights over property, persons, and services which, however, vary from chiefdom to chiefdom. Economic rights everywhere include a regular tribute of foodstuffs... The enigie can call on their subjects to provide labour for housebuilding and for farming at the clearing and harvesting seasons.[3]

Ownership does not have to be absolute. The term includes the right or power to alienate or dispose in one form or other or to deny access to or the use of an asset. If a group have enough power to deny thousands of people not only of land but of all property and even the right to their own labour and even their lives, that is, if a group have

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1 See S.F. Nadel, A Black Byzantium, Oxford University Press, London-New York-Toronto, 1942, pp. 195-200.

2 Darryl Forde, The Yoruba-speaking Peoples of South-West Nigeria, International African Institute, London, 1951, p. 14.

3 R.E. Bradbury, The Benin Kingdom, International ~~African~~ Institute, London, 1957, p. 71.

enough power to reduce thousands to slavery, they have enough or more than enough power to turn even more into serfs.

The association of serfdom with land scarcity and slavery with land abundance is not convincing. Even in Europe it is not because land was scarce that feudalism happened. In feudal England with its monorial landlordism, tenancy and serfdom there was plenty of forest land throughout the feudal epoch. In Africa, shifting cultivation denotes abundance of land in general, but it does not mean that land cannot be owned or that one is free to own or use land anywhere. All sorts of restrictions can be imposed on land usage, despite shifting cultivation. Rights of ownership and control over property are connected with power and the means of power rather than with the so-called scarcity of that which is possessed of controlled. The more plentiful capital becomes in the United States and other capitalist countries per capita, the more restricted its ownership.

From evidence all over the world our own conclusion is that slavery and serfdom are not exclusive but in fact imply certain common conditions. Once the general conditions for clientship or seigneuralship have emerged in history slavery and serfdom can coexist for a very long historical period. In fact, just as wage-labour is not a new phenomenon by itself when it becomes associated with capitalism, having existed in isolated cases in earlier social formations, but is only generalised with new associations, so also are landlordism, tenancy or serfdom not new in the feudal order. Landlordism only assumes new forms and tenancy and serfdom become generalised.

There were free men both in Benin and Nupe, equivalent to the free men of mediaval Europe, men who were not slaves to begin with and were peasants, but who also did not owe to local chiefs obligations imposed on others whose conditions approximated to a form of serfdom. For instance, many emancipated slaves did not have the status reserved for originally free men. The writing of 'owning' and 'lend' in inverted commas by Forde

shows his awareness that the conditions described were not exactly the same as in Europe in all legal details. Conquest and permanent subjugation establish superior rights to land and, in many cases, give rise to one form of landlordism or other, which may or may not be associated with serfdom.

As for serfdom in Europe, several economic and social historians regard labour obligation to a local overlord as its most unequivocal mark. Thus according to Clapham, "week-work had been so regular a test of villeinage" (i.e. serfdom - E.T.) that when this labour obligation disappeared, the whole feudal condition came tumbling down with it.[1]

In any case a peasant need not be a serf of any kind. The so-called peasant 'free men' in Europe were not serfs, since they owed no labour obligations to their overlords. Even in Europe also, serfdom itself was of different kinds, depending on the obligations attached to clientship to a superior,[2] and varied in intensity as the enforement of the obligations varied according to the availability of labour.

Serfdom varied not only from place to place within the same country, not only over time in the same country, but also from country to country. In feudal Russia, for instance, unlike feudal Britain, serfs could be brought and sold, could be gained or lost in card games or exchanged for dogs.[3]

All this is to say that there never was and there is not only one kind of peasant: there are many kinds. It is the tendency to identify peasants with serfdom, especially European manorial serfdom, that causes confusion in the minds of some as to the existence of a peasantry in Nigeria. The type and condition of peasants keep changing as society changes.

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1 See J. Clapham, A Concise Economic History of Britain, Cambridge University Press, London, 1966, p. 112.

2 See, for instance, Michael W. Flinn, An Economic and Social History of Britain, Macmillan, London, 1962, pp. 11-13.

3 Cf. J. Williams (ed.): The Soviet Peasantry, Progress Publishers, Moscow. 1975, p. 11.

IV

Modern industrial society is one whose output of goods even in agriculture is not from peasant farms in so far as this society id fully developed. For instance, in Britain there are no peasant farms and no peasants. In recent years peasant farming and therefore the peasants as a class have been disappearing rapidly in countries like France and Japan. In the USSR the peasants are rapidly transforming into rural workers with conditions resembling those of urban workers.

In Asia, Africa, Latin America and Southern Europe today, society is transitional between a traditional, mainly agrarian, order and a modern industrial order. Agriculture in such a transitional society is still based largely on peasant farming. The traditional parasitic classes are weakened in their control over peasant surpluses, but new classes emerge who contest for the peasant surpluses. In the main the peasant surpluses are transfered to the rising bourbeoisie or to the state in the so-called 'mixed economy' of today to be used for a wide variety of purposes, more so than to the landed patriarchal oligarchy.

The situation generates a new kind of differentiation among the peasantry based on contact with the new economy and the transfer of peasant surpluses to new uses. Those peasant households that are relatively free and able to do so may embark on new experiments such as using new farming methods, buying land for farm expansion, planting of 'cash crops', employment of labour, borrowing of money for investment in cash crop production. The situation gives rise to middlemanship and to much money lending or traffic in money. A stratum of peasants emerges engaged in these processes by which the countryside meets the challenges of the new situation.

A peasant family that is not rich enough tends to be conservative. The head of the household cannot afford to risk the precarious existence of his family by experiments in novelty. He, therefore, sticks to traditions. This accounts for the often remarked conservatism of the peasantry -- which

means the vast bulk of peasants. Some families, however, have means beyond the bare needs of survival. Among these the more daring or opportunistic ones embark on the new experiments which they practise not without much hand twisting of the rest of the peasantry.

There thus emerges a distinct stratum of peasants who act as intermediaries between the traditional economy and the modern one, being partly peasant and partly bourgeois. Well known examples are the yeomen of England, the rich peasants of China and the kulaks of Russia, but their kind exist in all less developed countries especially outside the socialist world.

Apart from this entrepreneurial stratum of the peasantry, the rest of the peasants are engaged mainy in subsistence agriculture. As private ownership of land develops, they become differentiated into those with sufficient land to feed their families from year to year (middle peasants) and those that lack enough land for subsistence and have to make ends meet by borrowing land on some conditions or by working part time for rich peasants and capitalists.

As population increases and land becomes scarce, as private ownership and land grabbing by more priviledged persons develop, as farming for the market becomes obligatory owing to monetization, thus intensifying the need for capital, as the inflation which always accompanies capitalist development runs its turtuous course, so do rich and middle peasant strata clearly split out, leaving a mass of poor peasants at the bottom of bourgeoisifying society. It is out of this mass that the proletariat and the lumpenproletariat are drawn.

All these developments are taking place in Nigeria. They are particularly prominent in the cocoa areas of the Western part of the country. Here cocoa export has stimulated private ownership, a cash-crop economy, money lending, middlemanship, rural wage employment, and, along with these, the differentiation of the peasantry into rich, middle and poor peasant

households. Elsewhere in the country, this differentiation is taking place but has not yet gone as far as in the West.

The Nigerian economy has reached a high stage of monetization thanks to the Second World War and the post-war boom. Today petroleum boom is intensifying the monetization process. Not only the traditional export cash crops are produced for the market these days, but also the so-called subsistence crops. Rice, Cassava, yams, and even vegetables are now increasingly grown for the market. This aids along the growing differentiation of the peasantry.

Side by side with the sprawling, if miserable, peasant economy, we have, of course, a few extensive expatriate capitalist plantations, a few indegenous capitalist farms or small plantations especially in the cocoa and rubber producing areas, and a few state farms, now growing in number. The workers on these farms constitute the rural proletariat pure and simple. They would number some thousands as a whole as compared with the vast sea of tens of million of peasants.