

**TRANSFORMATION OF LIBERIAN PEASANTRY UNDER PERIPHERAL CAPITALISM**

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For my wife, Julia

and to the future of our children:

Soria Kondowa II

Soria Keriah

Julian Soriebah

Joseph Soriekema

I declare that no portion of the work referred to in this thesis has been submitted in support of another degree or qualification at this or any other University or other institution of learning.

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ABSTRACT

This is a study of the impact of capitalism on peasant economy and society in Lofa County in Liberia. It is located within the problematic of the agrarian question as discussed in Marxist literature but with a specific reference to peasants in peripheral social formations. While this study draws inspiration from classical debates about rural "differentiation" and the "agrarian question" which culminated at the close of the last century and also recent debates on "the articulation of modes of production" in "developing societies", it departs significantly from these classical as well as recent structuralist Marxist approaches to the impact of capitalism on the peasantry or "pre-capitalist" societies. We suggest a different line of argument whereby the study of the peasantry in the present day developing societies must be located within the context of the development of colonial capitalism in peripheral social formations.

This study begins by tracing structural features of the pre-capitalist Mande social formation of North West Liberia which was dominated by what we have suggested is the chieftain mode of production, emphasising the nature of peasant "natural economy" at the pre-colonial stage. We then discuss the process that led to the transformation of the pre-capitalist economy and society as a consequence of its penetration by colonial capitalism. The discussion on this aspect is located within the context of global imperialist expansion of capitalism emphasising the manner in which colonial or peripheral capitalism has come to establish itself among the Mandes of Lofa County in Northwest Liberia.



The second point examines empirically a large peasant community producing food and non food commodities for national and international markets. The main findings of our study are: Firstly, that the development of capitalism in the agricultural sector in the peripheral social formation is different from that which took place in the metropolitan social formations of Western Europe; and secondly, the development in agriculture is different from that in hunting and fishing. Additionally we examine the conditions under which peasant family farms continue to persist in the face of the "dissolving" impact of capitalism, the phenomenon of "proletarianization" and the process of "repeasantisation" in the agricultural sector with reference to the role of the post-colonial state.

We argue that as the structure of the peasant economy and society today has been completely transformed under the impact of capital, it is inappropriate to regard them as pre-capitalist. On the contrary peasants who are "petty commodity producers" form an integral part of the capitalist mode of production in Liberia, being - as I had observed in an earlier study - subsumed under capital, albeit the subsumption being only formal and not real. Given the low level of capital formation in Liberia, the rural economy is still largely at the level of "formal subsumption" under capital especially in most areas of the rice growing sector, and in the cocoa and coffee small holding sectors.

From our study, we also find that the subsumption of peasant production under capital can proceed without separation of the peasantry from the means of production.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This study is primarily concerned with examining three issues: (i) the impact of capitalism on the rural economy and peasantry in general and specifically of Liberia, and the concomitant transforming result, (ii) the introduction of a new mode of production - colonial or peripheral capitalism - in a social formation that had for many years, operated on the dynamics of the "natural economy", and (iii) what has happened to the peasantry under the increasing domination of the capital mode of production.

#### 1.1 IMPACT OF CAPITALISM ON PEASANT SOCIETIES

What is intended to be dealt with in the following paragraphs is the crucial question of the transformative impact of capitalism on precapitalist rural societies. The debate on the transition to capitalism in various societies has been extensive and raised complex issues. Consequently, the debate has become of significant interest to academics, policy planners, and political actors. Indeed as a problematic in the social sciences it has attracted many academics of various persuasions. It has been further stimulated among Marxists by the publication of Lenin's work: Development of Marxism in Russia and Kautsky's Die Agrarfrage, both published at the end of the 19th century in Russia and Germany, respectively. The translation of Lenin's work into French and later English, makes it available to Western scholars especially those of the Marxist tradition.

Systematic attempts to develop and apply Marx's concept of Mode of Production to analyses of structural change in the Less Developed Societies was the result of the impact of French Structuralist

Marxism in the 1960s. In the light of our present interest, we shall review some of the debates by paying particular attention to some of the more important issues raised especially those pertaining to the analysis of the peasantry of the agrarian sector of the economy. In the course of the reviews, we shall examine theories and concepts, some of which can serve as analytical tools for the concrete study of a peasant economy and society in a particular social formation.

### 1.1.1 Classical Marxist Approaches to the Agrarian Question

The basic issue in this discussion is the Impact of the Development of Capitalism and Rural Society. Our reference, in this exercise, will be the Russian and German debates which started at the close of the 19th century. In Russia the issue was focussed in what was known as "the differentiation debate", while in Germany, Karl Kautsky termed it "the agrarian question" (1). The debate sprang from Marx's own statement regarding the place of the peasantry within the developing Capitalist Mode of Production, his observation of the British and French peasant experiences, made him consider the peasantry as remnants of the feudal era whose ultimate demise, within the increasing domination of capitalist mode of production is already a foregone conclusion. In Marx's own words:

"the peasant who produces with his own means of production will either gradually be transformed into a small capitalist who also exploits the labour of others, or he will suffer the loss of his means of production ... and be transformed into a wage worker. This is the tendency in the form of society in which the capitalist mode of production predominates." (2)

Available literature shows that the main concern of Marx and Engels was with the logic of capital and capitalist development, as a result the peasant question was not extensively discussed in their works. Neither of them provided a satisfactory analysis on the

precapitalist societies except within the context of the development of capitalism, and to a lesser extent, the alignment of the peasantry with the proletariat in the general struggle for socialism. This position invariably brings one to the observation that Marx and Engels were rather conclusive that either the peasantry faced "extinction" in the expanding capitalist relations of production or survival and participation within a socialist transformation (3).

In Russia, Plekhanov, a leading Marxist, not only dismissed the peasantry but considered them as non-problematic. In his words, the peasantry was "non-existent, historically speaking" (4) or "not a class" (5). The theory that the growth of industrial capitalism was the exclusive vehicle in the revolutionary process was rife. The Mensheviks and Plekhanov held this view. For them, a long interval was to ensue between the bourgeois-democratic revolution and the time when Russia would be ready for the socialist revolution. According to them, the peasantry was only a conservative and reactionary force.

A significant departure from the position of Plekhanov and the Mensheviks was contained in a very systematic analysis of the peasantry published in Lenin's work, The Development of Capitalism in Russia. This work, first published in Russia in 1899, was the first major analysis of the development of capitalist relations of production both in agriculture and in industry in that country (6). Lenin used material previously collected by the zemstvo statisticians for his analysis of the peasantry given the increasing rate of capitalist domination in rural Russia. Drawing from the theoretical position of Marx and Engels, he considered peasant production in the same light as feudalism i.e. that the development of agrarian capitalism signalled the end of both practices.

Lenin in his work indicated the eventual disappearance of the peasantry and drew much attention to the process of differentiation which led to the pauperization of the middle peasants and the emergence of two polarized classes: capitalist farmers and rural proletariat. In his own words:

"The old peasantry is not only differentiating it is being completely dissolved, it is ceasing to exist, it is being ousted by absolutely new types of rural inhabitants - types that are the basis of a society in which commodity economy and capitalist production prevails." (7)

In the Russian context therefore, Lenin challenged the Narodnik view which claimed that by the last quarter of the 19th century "toiler farms" (farms cultivated exclusively by the farmer and members of his family) or "people's production" will remain to be so, and not capitalist (8).

Narodniks were quick to recognise inequality in property ownership among the peasantry but they accounted for this in terms of differentiation among the peasant households. According to them, Russian countryside in the second half of the last quarter of the 19th century was characterised by a "semi-natural economy" largely dominated by the peasantry which had the capacity to resist the differentiating and polarising effects of capitalist domination. For them, the future of Russia was seen as one dominated by the peasantry which would represent a class of the majority of the nation. The Narodniks entertained the belief that the commune would form the basis of a future socialist organisation of the Russian economy, the viability of which would rest on the surviving peasant production capable of forestalling the inherent differentiating effect of capitalism which was to accompany the establishment of industrial production on a large scale.

Lenin's work became a major debate with the Narodniks. In it, he established that at the turn of the 19th century capitalism

dominated the urban sector of the Russian economy and society and was becoming a powerful force in the countryside. Lenin again reverted to the zemstvo statistics to prove his point that Russian rural society was indeed differentiated among class lines, in which the emerging capitalist forces undermined their precapitalist counterparts. These new types of rural dwellers were the rich peasants or the "rural bourgeoisie", and the poor peasants or the commodity producers; while the middle peasantry - which was becoming slowly marginalised - would eventually disappear.

This analysis of Lenin is located with Marx's theory on the development of the capitalist mode of production which presupposes accumulation of capital, rationalisation of production, industrialization, and the ultimate disintegration, and finally the disappearance of small scale enterprises vis-a-vis the larger ones. This path has been established in industry and a departure from it in the development of agriculture could not have been foreseen. What was to follow therefore, was an increasing division of labour within the society and peasant agriculture will inevitably surrender to large scale capitalist agriculture.

The peasantry was central to Lenin's analysis of the development of capitalism in agriculture because such transition transforms the peasantry into rural wage workers which could align with the urban proletariat to spark and pursue the bourgeois-democratic revolution against the feudal lords to erase all remaining aspects of feudalism in Russia. It was Lenin's optimism that the growth of capitalism would hurry the path into the socialist revolution. Lenin did not pay significant attention to the important question of the impact of capitalism on the peasant in this process because of his belief that the peasant farm would ultimately disappear.

Lenin identified two rather different lines of capitalist development in agriculture. The first which he called the Prussian or reformist path, he suggested, would give rise to "landlord capitalism". The second, which he termed the American or revolutionary path, would give rise to what he called "peasant capitalism" (9). In the former path, the landed economy is transformed into capitalist "Junker" economy where large holdings of the landlords would certainly continue to dominate the national economy. In the latter path, revolutionary struggle would break up the monopolies over landholdings and replace such monopolies with the development of small peasant farms. Lenin considered the latter path as progressive because it has a built-in mechanism for a rapid process of capitalist differentiation. This would usher the possible alliance between the rural and urban proletariat unified into a revolutionary force committed to the overthrow of the bourgeoisie class and establish a socialist state under the dictatorship of the proletariat.

This view was later vigorously challenged by the Production and Organisation school of Russian rural statisticians who had originally developed the view of the *Norodniki*. Alexander Chayanov, one of its main protagonists, argued that the Russian countryside was dominated by undifferentiated peasants up to and during the first quarter of the 20th century. In that situation he suggested that about 90% or more of the farms were not utilising hired labour (10). Chayanov had one explanation for the economic inequality that existed between and among families in rural Russia, especially in terms of differences in size of land area cropped. He conceived this in terms of differences in terms of family size where, obviously, the larger the size of the family the larger would be its cultivated area simply because of the labour power available

and used. The reverse was true for smaller families. Because as he thought, the degree of inequality between family farms was not considerable, he concluded that it is appropriate to regard the Russian peasantry as a homogenous and non-differentiated entity capable of resisting the polarising effects of capitalism. Chayanov attached a lot of importance to the demographic factors in successfully executing the necessary change. This view was significantly different from the Classical Marxist position on class differentiation and is therefore a new dimension to the debate.

Teodor Shanin has, in the recent past, given considerable time to this problematic of peasant differentiation in general and in Russia in particular. He suggests that there is a phenomenon of rural socio-economic differentiation and inequality in Russia in terms of household mobility over a certain period of time (11). Typical among the several variants of peasant household mobility is the cyclical and multi-directional mobility which have a levelling rather than a polarising effect. With the use of material gathered from the Russian dynamic studies of the zemstva before the revolution and the Central Statistical Board after the revolution, Shanin argues that capitalist development in agriculture is countered by processes beginning from within peasant society itself geared towards the preservation of the peasant family utilizing only the household labour.

Explaining the pattern of peasant household mobility, Shanin rejects the previous approaches like the Production and Organisation schools and Chayanov's biological determinism and the economic determinism theory held by many Marxists. He provides instead an approach which is a multivariant analysis which suggests that observed effects are the result of several causes. According to him, there are four different patterns of peasant mobility which can



be generally applicable: i) centripetal mobility, ii) centrifugal mobility, iii) cyclical mobility, and iv) multidirectional mobility (12). Except for centrifugal mobility, all have the effect of levelling rather than differentiating the peasantry within a certain period of time. For these reasons, Shanin concludes that because peasants have not favourably responded to the polarisation theory as was unforeseen by most Marxists, there is an absence of the "class consciousness" to which it was expected to give rise. Therefore the peasantry occupied a much more secure place in agrarian societies than had previously been envisaged.

Karl Kautsky's work provides the earliest extension of Marx's work to the analysis of agrarian societies in Germany. His work, Die Agrarfrage or "The Agrarian Question", which was first published in Germany in 1899 and translated into French in 1900, has stood the test as a classic in Marxism. It was also the first major contribution to the subject of the impact of capitalism on agriculture (13). Kautsky's work was specifically prepared for developing a Social Democratic or Marxist analysis of the penetration of capitalism in agriculture. He vigorously disagreed with those, like Sombart, who had suggested that Marxist analysis on the development of capitalism could not be applied to agriculture. Sombart's view that the peasant family farm was not destroyed but indeed survived in the face of capitalist domination was shared by the Russian Populist (14). Sombart however, did not elaborate on the reasons why the small peasant farms survived.

Kautsky for his part, suggested that Marx's work on the logic of capitalistic mode of production was of course applicable to agriculture. He observed however, that the rate at which capitalist expansion took place in agriculture was slower than in industry, and that the form it takes in the former is different from the latter.

He refused to reduce the Marxist theory of capitalist production to the simple formula of the "disappearance of the smallholding before the big" as if this formula was the only route to understanding the modern economy (15). He concluded that there was a basic difference between industry and agriculture which provides for the process of concentration to operate differently in both cases. He argued that in agriculture, land unlike capital, which was the principal means of production, can not be reproduced. Therefore, in order to constitute a large holding, the dispossession of the small peasants must be a pre-condition.

Marx had been more insistent than Kautsky that economies of scale in capitalist production favoured large agricultural holdings. Kautsky however, asserted that "a smallholding cultivated on an intensive basis can constitute a larger enterprise than a bigger farm that is exploited extensively" (16). Faced with the empirical reality of the survival (and indeed persistence) of the peasantry as a class in capitalist society - a phenomenon which was to later confront Lenin and many later researchers - he tried to provide an explanation. He explained the phenomenon of peasant survival in terms of the peasant's ability to provide the industrial capitalist with a cheap source of raw materials and articles of immediate consumption. He argued however, that in playing this role the peasants were worsening the conditions of their own socio-economic well-being.

His belief that the transformation of the peasantry could be delayed was perhaps his greatest strength. The reasons he gave for his belief were, in our view, his most important contribution to the debate because in them he raised important questions in Marx's original analysis of the role that capital played in agriculture.

He, therefore, suggested that the Marxist's method of studying the agrarian question should be as follows:

"... we should not confine ourselves to the question of the future of small scale farming; on the contrary, we should look for all the changes which agriculture experiences under the domination of capitalist production. We should ask: is capital and in what way is capital taking hold of agriculture, revolutionising it, smashing the old forms of production and of poverty and establishing the new forms which must succeed. Only when this question has been answered, can we decide whether Marx's theory is applicable to agriculture or not." (17)

Given the kinds of questions which interest us in this current work, Kautsky's own work points to an important direction for our research. It forms a preliminary basis for generalisation on the relationship between agriculture and industry which makes it necessary to study the subject further within a concrete historical and empirical reality.

Researchers of a later period examining the transformation process in Europe and some Less Developed Countries of the so-called Third World have expressed doubts concerning the likelihood that capitalist production relations would characterise agriculture as they do in industry (18). In the Liberian case we find that small peasant production, instead of, and far from disappearing, continues to be socially self perpetuating. These doubts give rise to the question of the peculiar characteristics of agriculture itself as seen by Kautsky. The core of the problem is the non-disappearance of the family farm enterprises. It is our view that research on the problematic of agrarian transition in particular and the agrarian question in general should focus on the varied conditions in which the peasant family farm survives within the dominant capitalist mode of production.

### 1.1.2 Dualist-Modernisation Theories: Neo-Marxist Challenge

For the specificity of our problem, we will also consider the intellectual tradition of the sociology of development or what has been appropriately referred to as the dualist and modernisation theories. These were specifically developed to be applied to the situation in the less developed societies such as the one which is the focus of this thesis.

A few years after the Second World War signalled the successful development of full-fledged capitalism in some countries while some others which had not caught onto this spirit remained behind and "backward". This gave rise to an increasing interest, in academic circles in the whole question of "development of underdevelopment" in the countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America. One major similar characteristic which was seen to transcend all the societies of these regions was the existence, side by side, of the so-called "modern" (rather capitalist) ventures employing wage labour and "traditional" (or pre-capitalist) production, including peasant production. The academic debates that have resulted seek to understand the question of the inter-relationship between these two spheres of production in dynamic processes of economic and social development.

Two significant attempts to find a solution to this problem have been located in what are today known as the dualist and modernisation theories. The dualist theory was introduced into sociology and economics by J.S. Furnivall and J.H. Boeke who reached their conclusion from observing the colonial society of Indonesia (19). Furnivall used the term "dual" or "plural" society to refer to the co-existence of two or more different social systems within the same political boundary consequent upon the imposition of

the colonial economic system upon a pre-capitalist society. Later, sociologists applied Furnivall's concept of plural society to their study of ethnic and racial pluralism in colonial and post colonial societies. Boeke's contribution was later developed by economists, especially W.A. Lewis, who incorporated the concept into an economic theory of development to be applied to the Less Developed Countries or the so-called Third World (20).

The concept of dualism implies that no connection exists between the "modern" or progressive section and the "traditional" or closed sector. The latter is described as characterised by stagnation and inferiority in terms of capital accumulation, gross income, production, consumption and economic growth. The main characteristics of the two sectors are opposed. One of the sectors, which is usually imported from abroad, is not able to oust or assimilate the other social system(s) which has grown from the local environment existing in what has been termed as "enclave economies" (21). Boeke argues that the Western economic theory is inapplicable to the dualistic economies and suggests that there should be three economic theories instead of one; the economic theory of pre-capitalist society, the economic theory of a developed capitalistic or socialistic society which is also "the general economic theory", and finally the economic theory of the dualistic economies (22). Boeke is pessimistic about the possibility of attaining overall economic development in the dualistic societies.

Protagonists of the modernisation theory in anthropology and sociology do not radically differ from the dualists in their basic tenets. The works of T. Parsons, B.F. Hoselitz, D. Lerner, and M. Nash are cases in point (23). For them Less Developed Countries are composed of two sectors: one is "traditional" implying it is

underdeveloped, backward, homogeneous, conservative and static. The other is "modern" suggesting that it has traits of progressiveness, heterogeneity, dynamism and liberalism. For the former to be developed it has to be fully integrated with the latter by breaking down the isolation and destroying the subsistence economy of the peasantry thus incorporating it with the national and international market economy. The modernisation theorists were more optimistic than Boeke had been in recognising the potentiality of developing the Less Developed societies along the line of modern western societies.

The dualism or dichotomic model of the modernisation theory draws inspiration from the 19th century sociologists who were preoccupied with the division of society into two polar types like Durkheim's *mechanic/organic*, Tönnies's *Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft*, Maine's *brotherhood/economic competition*, de Cousseau's *familistic/individualistic*, and others, and its later development by Talcott Parsons in the form of dichotomous "pattern-variables" where one set of ideal or polar type of characteristics is opposed to another ideal or polar type (24). A similar line of argument is contained in the work of Roselitz who, drawing inspiration from Parsons' theory of action, constructed two ideal-types of society, the one combining universalism, functional specificity, achievement-orientation, and collectivity-orientation which represents the modern type of pattern variable and the other combining particularism, diffuseness, ascription and self-orientation which represents the traditional type of pattern variable (25).

The above school of thought, which has been classified by B. Turner as the "internalist theorists" (or more appropriately, the functionalist-equilibrium theorists) explains the main problem of

backward societies in terms of characteristics internal to the societies (26). They specify cultural and psychological traits like values, attitudes, or motives, as factors that inhibit the development of these societies. In order to develop such societies, they argued, Weberian ingredients of growth like this worldly-asceticism, rationality, rule of law, bureaucracy, and democracy, have to be injected into the social structure. Likewise through the integration of the traditional sector with the modern sector, and in particular the diffusion of knowledge, skills, organisation, values, technology and capital from the modern sector (or the developed western societies) to the traditional sector (or the less developed societies) the dualistic character will be dissolved and the traditional and underdeveloped societies will achieve growth and development similar to that of the modern and developed western societies.

What seems to be the main objection to the internalist theorist type of analysis, as put forward by the Neo-Marxist school of thought, is that modernisation theory, sociology of development, and development economics of the Neo-Classical school do not take into account historical roots of the phenomena of underdevelopment, the relationship of subordination/domination between the third world countries and the advanced capitalist countries, and their effects on political and institutional structures of the former societies which are crucial for an analysis and understanding of development in the underdeveloped countries. Theories of the "development of underdevelopment" or "dependency" emphasise strongly the nature of relationships between the advanced countries and the underdeveloped countries taking into consideration the political and especially economic relationships of domination and subordination.

The dualist model, postulating traditional and modern types of societies and transition from one type to the other, represents a neo-evolutionary and teleological conception of the development of society. Its basic assumption, which is an oversimplified one, is that the original state of all societies is similar and change and development is towards a singular direction which is given. Backward economies and societies will develop into advanced capitalist economies and societies when all the 'ingredients' of the latter have been successfully injected into the former.

The internalist theorists have been challenged by a variant of the Neo-Marxists who propose an alternative view that backwardness or underdevelopment must be conceived and studied in the context of variables external to the societies concerned. In their view, the primary dilemma of backward societies is their dependency on the global structure of capitalist relations; their exploitation by colonialism and the state structures which are embedded within these societies in post-colonial time; their inability to negotiate favourable terms of trade; or their subservience to the interests of multi-national corporations. Such are the views put forward by the underdevelopment theorists, the dependency theorists, the unequal exchange theorists, and the world system theorists.

As some of the theories referred to above have no direct relevance to this work, it will not be necessary to discuss them in this context. In fact the works of the major proponents of these theories have been adequately surveyed elsewhere (27). However, for the purpose of this thesis, we will briefly consider the critique of the dualist theory by A.G. Frank, and in turn, E. Laclau's critique of A.G. Frank, as both views are directly relevant to the issues with which we are concerned in this work.



One of the foremost critics of the dualist theory is A.G. Frank who, in the second half of the 1960's, launched a vigorous attack on the notion of dualism. He formulated an alternative explanation of the phenomenon of backwardness or what he termed as underdevelopment (28). Based upon historical reality and empirical evidence of Latin American societies with which he is most familiar, he forcefully put forward an argument that the notion of dualism is empirically unfounded and false as a representation of historical reality (29). Citing Latin America as a representative example of Third World societies, he suggests that capitalism as a market relation has integrated the agricultural or peasant sector into the national and indeed the world economy since the former was colonised around the 16th century. Capitalism, he argued, penetrated even the remotest parts of the globe, dissolved pre-capitalist economic and social structures and created hierarchical structures of "centre-periphery" (or metropolitan-satellite) relationships that could be perceived as such at successive levels within a global capitalism.

Frank's criticism of the dualist theory is well taken. Rightly, he argued that commercialisation and commoditisation have penetrated the rural peasant sector of the Third World countries. But his conception of capitalism departs somewhat significantly from the definition proposed by Marx in Capital. Frank conceptualises capitalism in terms of relation of exchange and a market economy in the manner of Adam Smith and Max Weber, whereas Marx's conception of capitalism turns on the conception of relations of production.

Even Frank's conception of the "development of underdevelopment" appears to be alien to Marxism though not necessarily wrong. What is often advocated in the orthodox Marxist theory is that capitalism is "homificient", that is, it has the same

effect everywhere. For example, Lenin's model of capitalist development clearly states that where capitalist mode of production takes root its tendency is to develop and become dominant destroying all the elements of the previous (pre-capitalist) mode(s) of production. In an earlier work we had equated these dynamics to Shanin's classical metaphor in which he has referred to capitalism as, "like ... the finger of Midas which turns everything it touches into gold, so also capitalism turns everything into capitalism ..." (30). Capitalism generates capital accumulation and hence development and this is the logic of the capitalist mode of production. Its deficiency lies not in its inability to generate capital accumulation and capitalist development but in the character of that development and contradictions that underly it. Such an optimistic vision of the dynamics of capitalist development is to be found, for example, in Marx's comments on the impact of British colonialism in India (31).

In the colonies too, the rising forces of capitalism generate forces that are antagonistic to both imperialism and pre-capitalist structures (e.g. feudalism). Colonies are not developed by metropolitan capital but the colonial capital does bring about structural changes that open the way for indigenous capitalist development and growth of "national bourgeoisie". The colonial societies must therefore go through a national bourgeois democratic revolution before these societies can be fully capitalist (after which they would progress towards a socialist revolution). Until the national democratic revolution against imperialism and feudalism is carried out, these societies are not fully capitalistic.

Frank's contrary argument is that colonial societies became fully capitalist when they were incorporated (in 16th century)

within the global market. He would, thus, deny the Lenin model. Secondly, although these countries have long been assimilated into global capitalism, that has not brought capitalist development to them as that seen in the centre, rather it has brought underdevelopment. Development of capitalism, therefore, has a different effect on the centre and the periphery. Frank explained underdevelopment by the mechanism of exploitation of the developed countries of the Third World, countries which are linked through the metropolis-satellite relationship. It is a relationship of domination and subordination. In the national economy, the capital city or urban centres are the metropolis while the countryside is the satellite; the expropriation of surplus of the latter by the former caused the underdevelopment of the latter.

What is important in Frank's theory of underdevelopment is that capitalism or capitalist mode of production does not have the same effect and logic in the metropolitan countries and the satellite countries. This provides a new ground for the study of the present underdeveloped countries to prove or disprove Frank's assertion. The significant question that must be addressed in this context is why and how is the capitalist mode of production in underdeveloped countries different from that of the developed capitalist countries. This seems to us to be problematic.

The Latin American dependency theorists (T. Dos Santos, C. Furtado) and the world-system theorist (I. Wallerstein) put forward almost a similar line of argument to that advocated by Frank. Wallerstein's division of the world system into the core-states, semi-peripheral states, and peripheral-states suggest that the only viable unit of analysis is the world as a system. To him, countries of the world are arranged in a hierarchical order

such that superior countries or 'strong states' exploit inferior countries or 'weak states' within an unequal internal division of labour (32).

Both Frank's underdevelopment theory and Wallerstein's world-system theory suffer a similar shortcoming attributed to the modernisation and sociology of development theories; that they regard nation-states and societies as homogeneous and not internally differentiated. This obscures the reality of the internal structure of each society and fails to identify its matrix of social relations of production. These approaches do not, therefore, provide a conceptual framework for studying structural change and patterns of class transformation, class alignments and class struggle, or process of change and transformation as an unfolding of the internal dynamics of the underlying structures of societies. These theories also have an economistic bias and discount the differences of the "super-structural" elements, political, ideological, and socio-cultural, between societies.

Wallerstein's "modern world system" approach rules out the possibility of conducting substantive social research of the micro-sociological or anthropological type focusing on internal structures of societies. It is basically on this point that we disagree with Wallerstein. We believe that a detailed substantive study of sectors of peripheral societies, analysing structures and processes within them, keeping in mind their linkage with the national economy and the world capitalist system should generate fruitful insights which can form a strong basis of comparison and generalisation. Also it is noticeable that Wallerstein's analysis avoids the central problematic of transition from pre-capitalist mode of production to capitalism in the Third World countries; in as

much as they are wholly subsumed under a global conception of capitalism, the problem of transition to capitalism does not arise.

### 1.1.3 Contemporary Marxist Approaches to the Agrarian Question

Contemporary Marxists have approached the problem of the impact of capital on peasant production from an altogether new angle. Recent works by French structuralist Marxists and others provide some new insights and theoretical foundations pertaining to the problems of underdevelopment of the Third World and the agrarian question in these countries (33). Their works are directly related to the theory of mode of production which is originally formulated by Marx and used by Lenin for application to the case study of capitalist development in Russia.

In the light of Lenin's analysis they might have expected small peasant production in colonial societies to disappear with the impact of colonial capitalism. Instead they find that peasant production, far from being dissolved as a consequence of the development of colonial capitalist enterprises, is instead integrated with it in a subordinate relationship. Such subordination is essentially by way of the peasant societies becoming sources of cheap labour power for employment in colonial enterprises and also producers of commodities for the colonial market and, in turn, a market for colonial production. They implicitly reject the Leninist (and Marxist) idea that the development of capitalist mode of production is necessarily in contradiction with pre-capitalist modes and therefore, with its own progress necessarily dissolves the latter. Instead they argue that in the colonial situation the development of capitalism both conserves as well as dissolves the pre-capitalist mode and the capitalist mode subordinates the pre-capitalist mode to subserve

its own purposes. The pre-capitalist modes, it is argued, are articulated in a subordinate position, with the capitalist mode.

We, however, take a somewhat different view of this. We feel that it would be erroneous to regard the rural or peasant sector of the Less Developed societies as pre-capitalist since the material reproduction of the natural economy and, therefore, the pre-capitalist conditions of reproduction has been destroyed. The peasant sector in most Less Developed countries today is not any more pre-capitalist as it has been structurally transformed by capitalism. To be sure, peasants who are now "petty commodity producers" are subsumed under capital albeit the subsumption is only formal and not real, the concepts which we shall clarify elsewhere below.

Laclau who provided a cogent criticism of Frank's conception of capitalism has, following French structuralist Marxism pioneered by Althusser and Balibar, revived Marx's original conception of capitalism as a mode of production. In his interpretation, mode of production is an abstract and a structural concept defined as a complex unity of the forces of production and relations of production where the latter is the determinant. It constitutes, as Laclau puts it,

"a logically and mutually coordinated articulation of i) a determinate type of means of production, ii) a determinate form of appropriation of the economic surplus, iii) a determinate degree of development of the division of labour, and iv) a determinate level of development of productive forces." (34)

The concept of mode of production provides an alternative tool for a more promising approach than those we have examined in sub-section 1.1.2 above for the study of the internal structure of concrete Third World social formation; the concept of

social formation being defined as a complex structure of social relations which consists of a unity of economic, ideological, and political structural levels whereby the role of the economy is determinant (35). Our usage of the concept approximates the concept of society used in academic sociology. To be sure, social formation is a descriptive term which,

"... denotes an actual and specific societal entity, with all its particularities, products of past developments and structuration and restructuration, results of accident and design and all historical legacies of the past and potentialities of the future" (36).

Put simply, a social formation is a given entity, and for our present purpose a unit of analysis, usually with a geographical boundary such as a state, a nation, or an empire, which has all its peculiarities of historical development of its economic structure, and political-legal, ideological or cultural superstructures. Within a social formation there usually exists at least one, or several modes of production but one is dominant over the other(s). The structure of a mode of production, however, may stretch out beyond the 'boundary' of a social formation such as the case of colonial capitalist mode of production or peripheral capitalism.

Among the French structuralist Marxists (and British, American, Asian, and African Marxists who have followed them), the concept of mode of production has been developed and utilised for application to the study of pre-capitalist social formations of the Less Developed societies. Some of the major contributions of this genre have come from social anthropologists (Meillassoux, Godelier, Terray, Ray, etc.). In social anthropology, this is an important development and a significant departure from the 'American' cultural anthropology and the 'British' structural-functionalist tradition. At the same time, unlike the more recently favoured alternative of

market or transactional models, the approach that we refer to here is a holistic one. It provides appropriate and useful analytical tools for the study of pre-capitalist societies undergoing change as a consequence of the impact of capitalism, bearing in mind that the theories and concepts thus referred to are only to serve as points of departure for our research and for generating specific and searching questions and not ready-made answers. The concept of mode of production is an appropriate analytical tool for our present study provided that the concept is developed and applied in a creative manner. Also any study of a concrete social formation must take into account the historical specificity of each social formation and the unique super-structural features of the social formation so that we must guard against both a narrow structuralist (and static) use of that concept and an economistic conception of structure and process in society.

This brings us to the centre of the debate, that is on transition to capitalism and the agrarian question in peripheral social formation locating it within the Marxian concept of mode of production (37). This debate is different in form and content from the already familiar debate on "transition from feudalism to capitalism" between M. Hobb, P. Sweezy, and others (38). It centres on the difference and peculiar ways by which the transition process has taken place and continues to take place in the peripheral social formations.

Some of the familiar questions posed on the process of transition are: "has the transition to capitalism already been completed or is it still at the transitional phase?", or "is it a case where dissolution of pre-capitalist structures is only partial so that essentially they are 'conserved' thus blocking the way to a



full transition?". The often convenient, but quite a misleading way of answering these questions is by defining capitalism (i.e. capitalist mode of production) in terms of a single structural feature such as the predominance of wage labour, or the generality of commodity production, or the extensive process of accumulation of capital, and others. For example, Laclau and Brenner seem to emphasize the single feature wage labour, as the defining characteristic of capitalism (39). We believe that to reduce to one denominator as a defining characteristic of capitalism or capitalist mode of production is unsatisfactory and especially taking wage labour as the defining characteristic. This is because the latter has existed in social formations long before capitalist mode of production predominated such as in feudal Europe or even in ancient Rome. More importantly, one of the defining structural features of capitalist mode of production is that of free labour rather than wage labour as such. In the words of Karl Marx:

"Free labourers in the double sense that neither they themselves form part and parcel of the means of production, as in the case of slaves, bondsmen, & C., nor do the means of production belong to them, as in the case of peasant-proprietors; they are therefore, free from, unencumbered by, any means of production of their own." (40)

We believe that an appropriate way of conceptualising capitalism as a mode of production is to define it as a complex unity of five structural conditions as suggested by Hamza Alavi as his conception is in line with Marx's original notion of capitalist mode of production. The five structural conditions are:

- 1) Free labour in Marx's famous double sense which are free of feudal obligation and the separation of the producer from the means of production;
- ii) Economic coercion of the dispossessed producer;

- iii) Separation of economic (class) power from political (state) power and this is simultaneously followed by the creation of bourgeois state appropriate to the economic infrastructure;
- iv) The development of commodity production where labour power, too, becomes a commodity;
- v) Extended reproduction of capital which gives rise to the organic composition of capital (41).

These structural conditions of capitalist mode of production is an abstraction and a structural concept which has been produced in its pure form. In the transitional stage where more than one mode is present in a social formation, we expect to find only some and not all the five structural features mentioned above. In this situation, both pre-capitalist and capitalist structural conditions exist in a complex relation within a concrete social formation.

We now arrive at a crucial issue on the relationship of two or more modes of production and their implications for the dynamic of development. Some, especially the French structuralist Marxists, who observe and recognise the presence and predominance of non-capitalist relations of production (or labour process), especially peasant production, designate such production as semi-feudal or pre-capitalist. Furthermore, they recognise, too, that far from dissolving such production rapidly, capitalist development subordinates such production and benefits from it. Hence a notion is put forward of the relationship of "conservation-dissolution" between capitalist and pre-capitalist modes; or "blocked-transition" due to some countervailing forces (42). Some others would consider the coexistence of complex structures as articulation of modes of production.

Different writers use the term articulation differently. For some, like Meillassoux and Bettelheim, it means a symbiotic co-existence of modes of production, thus the notion of 'conservation-dissolution'. Ray's usage of the concept, however, comes closer to Lenin's thesis of the process of the development of the capitalist mode of production (43). In a social formation where the pre-capitalist mode of production is articulated with the capitalist mode of production, the latter becomes increasingly dominant with the former descending. Ray divides the process of articulation into three stages; the first stage represents the initial link of the pre-capitalist mode with the capitalist mode in the sphere of exchange where interaction with the latter reinforces the pre-capitalist mode. Second is the stage where capitalism has taken root subordinating the pre-capitalist mode of production but still making use of it. And the final stage is the total disappearance of the pre-capitalist mode, even in agriculture. This third stage is not yet reached in most Third World social formations.

The above notion of stages of articulation, especially the second and the third stage, somewhat approximates Marx's conception of subsumption of labour by capital. In Volume I Capital, Marx suggests that the subsumption of labour under capital takes place in two different stages namely formal subsumption and real subsumption (44). The first stage is a situation whereby individual or household producers are incorporated in the circuit of capital and subjected to the latter's domination. In this first stage, capital takes processes of production as it finds them, as developed in the pre-capitalist economy; it transforms the social relations of production. Capital, however, has not yet directly organised

production and socialisation of production, too, has not yet taken place.

The second stage, real subsumption, is a situation whereby capital has directly organised production and production is socialised involving large numbers of workers in complex relations of cooperation. With the rise in the organic composition of capital, the labour process is transformed by the employment of capital intensive techniques of production. The social relations of production, as we already noted above, have already been transformed at the earlier stage of formal subsumption of production under capital. This stage is characterised by an advanced form of division of labour in the process of production. In our view, this pair of concepts can be fruitfully developed and utilised in our attempt at grappling with the problem of capitalist domination in agriculture and rural society in general.

#### **1.1.4 Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production**

The historical materialism of Marx is concerned with the driving forces of human evolution or change in social formations. The historical process of change is a specific one, that of qualitative or structural change which results in the dissolution and the replacement of the 'old' or previous mode of production by the 'new' or ascending mode of production. This entails a constitution of a new type of social formation corresponding to the emerging mode of production. The domination of each mode of production in a social formation represents an epoch in history. The political economy of Marx is, therefore, premised on the division of the history of human society into several epochs, each is defined by the dominant mode of production. A change from one qualitative stage to another qualitative stage follows a change in

the dominant mode of production. Capitalism is, for example, one of the several modes of production which has its origin, its development, and its final dissolution.

While Marx mentioned several types of pre-capitalist modes of production like primitive, slave, Asiatic, and feudal, Marx did not provide a rigorous theory of them. His reference to the pre-capitalist modes of production was scattered in his works like the Formen (Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations), The German Ideology, Preface to The Critique of Political Economy, The Grundrisse, and in several of his correspondences with Engels.

Having outlined the structural conditions of the capitalist mode of production above, our interest now is to delineate the structural characteristics of feudal and Asiatic modes of production as they are indirectly relevant to our present discourse. This exercise would, later in the study, guide us in defining the dominant pre-capitalist mode of production in a social formation which will be the subject of our study.

Too often the concept of feudalism or feudal mode of production is defined by emphasising one or two structural conditions only. This is well exemplified in the now famous polemic on Maurice Dobb's work Studies in the Development of Capitalism initiated by Paul Sweezy sometimes in the 1950's. Dobb, for example, defined feudalism as an economic system based on serfdom (as against capitalism which is based on wage labour). Sweezy, on the other hand, defined it as a mode of production in which all production was for direct consumption rather than for exchange. We feel that emphasising only one structural condition as the defining characteristic of a mode of production is unsatisfactory and could be misleading. For example, serfdom has existed in ancient Rome

well before feudalism actually originated in Europe while the case of Polish feudalism studied by Witold Kula seems to show that relations of exchange and long distance trade existed during the feudal epoch which also implies a significant amount of surplus entered the market (45). These examples demonstrate the inadequacy of emphasising one structural condition only as the definition of feudalism or other modes of production.

A more satisfactory approach is by defining the feudal mode of production as constituting several structural characteristics taken together as a complex unity as in the conception of capitalist mode of production already discussed above. Alavi has consistently used this approach and defined the feudal mode of production as constituting the following five structural conditions:

- i) Unfree labour rendered not necessarily in the form of labour services but taking a variety of possible forms;
- ii) A fusion of economic and political power at the point of production and a localised structure of power;
- iii) Extra-economic coercion in the extraction of the surplus from the direct producers;
- iv) Self-sufficient ('subsistence') economy of the village (or the manor), commodity production being secondary for the direct producer; subject to the condition that he produces also surplus that is appropriated by the exploiting class of which a significant proportion may enter into circulation as commodities;
- v) Simple Reproduction where the surplus is largely consumed by the exploiting class which acquires it, instead of being accumulated, so that the economy and society merely reproduce themselves on the existing level of productive resources and technology (emphasis original) (46).

The feudal mode of production had been the dominant mode of production in most European social formations and a few Asian (India, Japan, and China) and East African social formations at particular periods in history. But in most social formations of the rest of Asia, the Middle East, and Latin American social formations, the model of the Asiatic mode of production rather than the feudal mode of production is in our view more applicable. As for Africa we would argue that although there may have existed some semblances of this mode in some social formations, it has not been conclusively proved that it was the dominant mode before the penetration of "colonial" or peripheral capitalism. In fact there is a general agreement that it did not exist in the Guinea and Malagueta coasts. We will deal with this exhaustively in our next chapter. It is however, necessary for now to clearly distinguish between these two modes, Asiatic and feudal, to avoid unnecessary error in conceptualising the pre-capitalist mode of production in some so-called Third World countries.

Marx himself did not provide a rigorous conception of Asiatic mode of production. His cursory analysis of the latter, and in particular the distinction he made between (European) feudalism and the Asiatic mode of production (especially India) is unsatisfactory due to the inadequate information, especially on the Asian countries, available at his disposal. We therefore base our conception of the Asiatic mode of production on some works by other writers who have attempted to provide a more satisfactory conceptualisation of the Asiatic mode of production (47). We designate Asiatic mode of production in terms of the following four structural conditions:

- i) Class Structure: There is a clear division between the state class or "higher community" which constitutes the non-producing class and the community of producers of the peasantry. The state claims ownership of the land. However, land is neither a private property nor a commodity which can be exchanged in the market. For Marx, the hallmark which sets it off immediately from feudalism is the absence of a private property in land. At the local level, it is the community that controls the distribution and utilisation of land to members of the community. Peasants have direct access to the land subject to the payment of tribute or dues demanded by the state. In other words, the peasants do not lose eminent domain as in the feudal mode of production.
- ii) Relations of Exploitation: The state through its functionaries, who are "administrators", claims tribute in the form of customary dues and land rent or tax. This "right" is customary and is often based on the ideology of the ruling class who claims the right on the surplus produced by the subject class. The producing class is also obliged to pay tribute in kind such as free services usually for public works. The exploitation of the peasants is normally collective. This means that class exploitation takes place without the development of private ownership of land like that of feudal and capitalist modes of production. Even if exploitation is done privately and a direct one, this is done in the name of the exploiter's function in the "higher community". There is a fusion between tax and rent as both are one and the same thing. In some instances where the social formation is located along trading routes, surplus



appropriation is an indirect one, that is through toll tax and on profits from trade.

- iii) Productive forces: The development of productive forces is rudimentary but relatively more developed than the primitive-communal mode of production. It allows for the regular production of surplus either for the consumption of the state class or, in some cases, for exchange locally or engagement in long distance trade. The existence of regular surplus indicates the dynamic of its productive forces rather than stagnation as claimed by some writers like Wittfogel and even Marx. In some cases where the authority is strong dominating a large number of producing class, the state undertakes massive public works for agriculture, defence, worship, or just for prestige. This is made possible by the enslavement of some of the peasantry. The economy, which is still natural, is based on agriculture and handicraft production mainly for the direct consumption of the producer. Production is for simple reproduction of the community rather than for extended reproduction of capital.

- iv) Political-ideological Superstructure: The state power is centralised with "government" functionaries to carry out state duties such as to collect taxes, tribute, and perform ritual function. The ideology of the ruling class is based on fiction or myth on the origin of the "king" or the "higher community" to legitimize its right of control and domination of the subject class. In some cases, the higher community functions as an aristocratic system of government where the ruler belongs to a specific lineage whose office is hereditary. His political power is buttressed by economic, religious, and ritual power.

What seem to be contradictions in the Asiatic mode of production is the development of private property; the struggle between lords and the central power to disengage themselves from the latter and to establish themselves as independent feudal lords through the use of extra-economic coercion by checking the geographical mobility of the peasantry who are now bonded to individual "feudal" lords. Its contradiction and class struggle often gives rise to the feudal mode of production where the central power is relatively weakened and the link between the local lords and the "sovereign" is only formal.

There is a general agreement among most scholars that the Asiatic mode of production is the first class divided mode of production after the primitive-communal mode. The weakening and disintegration of the Asiatic mode of production is its tendency to develop into a feudal mode of production and this is often the consequence of the development of private property, unless the social formation in question is being "injected" from outside in which case the colonial mode of production or peripheral capitalism will take root and ultimately become the dominant mode of production in the social formation.

Maurice Godelier has cogently argued that the Asiatic mode of production represents a greater possible progress of the productive forces than that which is accomplished on the basis of the previous communal forms of production (emphasis original) (48). It is within this epoch that Man begins to dominate nature, "... invents new forms of agriculture, architecture, mathematics, writings, trade, currency, law, new religion, etc." (49).

### 1.1.5 The Concept of Peripheral Capitalism

Finally we shall consider the concept of peripheral capitalism as against metropolitan or central capitalism which is also directly relevant to our present study by referring, in particular, to the works of Samir Amin and Hamza Alavi insofar as their works are relevant to our discourse. Samir Amin's assertion of the necessity of analysing the process of development (and accumulation) as a single process on world scale where the world is divided into "central" and "peripheral" social formations is reminiscent of A.G. Frank's and I. Wallerstein's notion of metropolis-satellite and core-periphery states, respectively. The world is so divided due to the process of uneven (for some, "unequal") development of capitalist mode of production (50).

But more importantly, Amin differentiates between the process of accumulation in the centre and the periphery. Accumulation and capitalist development in the centre is an integrated one; the agricultural sector develops simultaneously with the industrial sector and both complement each other. Capitalism in the centre is "autocentric", governed by its own dynamic. On the contrary, accumulation and capitalist development in the periphery is a dependent one; an "extraverted" capitalist development constrained by its dependence on central capitalism. Capitalism in the periphery is, therefore, different from capitalism in the centre. The former's development is characterised by "disarticulation" between sectors since capitalism in the periphery serves the development of capitalism in the centre; and capitalism in the periphery produces mainly raw materials and some consumer goods but not producer goods. In other words, there is no complementary relationship between Department I and Department II in the

production process as capitalist development in the central social formations.

In addition to the above is another phenomenon which Amin has termed as uneven development which takes place in the peripheral social formations. Uneven development within a social formation means that one sector experienced development well ahead of another sector; the former is highly capitalistic often served by foreign capital while the latter is still stranded at the "traditional" or pre-capitalist stage where full-fledged capitalist development has not taken place yet. The conclusion that Amin arrives at is almost similar to that of Frank's; the development of the central social formations led to the underdevelopment of the peripheral social formations.

Hamza Alavi shares only some of the arguments put forward by Amin. He, and some others like Cardoso and Benaji, advocate the concept of a colonial mode of production to explain a particular type of capitalism although each of them uses the concept quite differently (51). In colonial societies, argues Alavi, colonial capitalism dominated and ultimately succeeded the previous pre-capitalist modes of production and the consequent transformation and development was the result of the "dialectical opposition" of colonial capital with pre-capitalist modes of production; the former is ascending and the latter disintegrating. Colonial capitalism was injected from outside and this differs from capitalist development in the central social formation where capitalist mode of production evolves from within.

Alavi then distinguishes two other structural conditions of colonial mode of production which makes it different from metropolitan capitalist mode of production namely, 1) Generalised

commodity production which has a form that is specific to colonial structure and, ii) Extended reproduction of capital which also has a form that is specific to the colonial structure (51). Alavi's conception of colonial mode of production was criticised by Foster-Carter and Brewer on the ground that, firstly it does not at all specify the nature of class relations within the colonial mode of production and how it differs from the capitalist mode of production, and secondly that an addition of another mode of production is unnecessary as colonial mode is still a "type" of capitalist mode of production (53). Additionally, we feel that it may give rise to a problem of determining the transitional stage between colonial and capitalist mode of production. Can it be demonstrated that the relationships between the two modes is contradictory?

In his latest work, Alavi has revised slightly and elaborated his earlier formulation by abandoning the label of "colonial" mode of production following others who have already done so. He replaced this with the label of peripheral capitalism and provides a rigorous conception of the structural conditions of it (54). The five structural conditions of peripheral capitalism are in fact similar to those of his colonial mode of production.

As a concluding remark to our brief survey of the debate on the impact of capitalism on pre-capitalist or peasant societies, we would like to point out one major shortcoming of most of the above approaches. It is that most of them are narrowly economic and seem to neglect the important role of the state and other super-structural elements like socio-cultural, religious, legal, or ideological. An exception to this, however, is Alavi who explicitly abandons an economic conception in his definition of mode of

production for he specifies superstructural conditions as essential structural components for defining modes of production. Like Alavi, we believe that the superstructures, and in particular the state, often play an important role in determining the nature and direction of transformation in many of the peripheral social formations. We suggest that any concrete study located within the problematic of transition and the agrarian question must take into account the impinging influences of the superstructures. After all, our concern is not with the economic infrastructure alone because it is both the latter and the superstructure which make up a society or "social formation".

## 1.2 Research Problem

This is a study of transformation of peasant societies located within the sociological problematic of the agrarian question. We seek to examine in detail historically and empirically the manner by which the peasantry has been transformed as a result of the extension and domination of capitalist mode of production in a specific social formation.

This study takes the view that there is a difference in the manner by which the peasant problem in the less developed societies is solved as compared with that in the now advanced countries of western Europe. This difference can be shown by engaging in a detailed study of the process in a peripheral social formation for the purpose of comparing with the historical experience of the advanced capitalist countries. This type of study can be meaningful only if we take into consideration the totality of the social formation in question including both the economic infrastructure and all the superstructural elements and in particular the role of the

state. We believe that the latter has some bearings in determining the nature and direction of transition of the agrarian sector in the present third world social formations.

Related to the above is our second view that there are differences in the nature and the degree of transformation even between sectors of the rural economy in a specific social formation. This is attributed to the uneven nature of capitalist penetration between sectors and/or the difference in the speed of capitalist development between different types of the rural economy. In our own case, we shall demonstrate the differences of the impact of capitalism on agriculture where the logic of capitalist development in the latter is similar to that in industry. Both the above views imply a rejection of the notion of a universal and unidirectional form of rural development or the process of transition to capitalism in a predetermined manner as often claimed by the modernisation and development theorists, and even some Marxist theorists.

This study draws inspiration from the works of V.I. Lenin and K. Kautsky on the theses of peasant differentiation and the agrarian question, respectively. However, we hope to go beyond their works and provide fresh evidence for a better understanding of the peasantry under the domination of a specific variant of capitalism, i.e. peripheral capitalism. Unlike the theses advanced by Lenin and Kautsky where the peasantry as a class would be dissolved and disappear under the impact of capitalism after going through the process of differentiation and polarisation of classes, our argument is that this may not be so in the peripheral social formations where the peasantry is transformed by, and under the domination of, peripheral capitalism. Peasants in the less developed countries are

transformed and subsumed by capital without themselves being dissolved, albeit their process of production now forms as an integral part of the capitalist economic system.

Additionally, we shall examine the manner by which, under certain conditions, peasant family farm and socio-economic well-being are stabilised if not improved; and secondly the manner in which the process of "repeasantisation" takes place even under the transformative impact of capitalist mode of production. These have to be seen in the light of the active intervention of the post-colonial state in trying to promote "modernisation" and development in the situation of economically deteriorating peasant community. These, to a certain extent, provide some countervailing forces that will act as a brake on, or at least slow down, the polarising effects of capitalist domination of the peasantry which have been formally subsumed under peripheral capitalism.

### 1.3 On Methodology

Past studies of the peasantry available to us in English in monographic form have been the monopoly of social anthropologists and rural sociologists. Drawing from the traditions of American cultural studies or British school of structural-functionalist anthropology, most of these studies are synchronic in nature utilising the anthropological fieldwork method of participant-observation and the sociological method of statistical survey. The researcher records in great detail the observable behaviour of the peasants, the social structure and organisation as they find it at a particular point in history, as if the peasant community is a static entity. Even if the dynamic nature of the latter is acknowledged, most studies do not generally trace changes in the structure of the



peasant society which have taken place over a long period of time. This is mainly due to the constraints of the underlying theories of society and the inadequacy of the methodology used rather than that of the science of anthropology or sociology as such.

Historians too, and especially economic historians, have shown a keen interest in the peasantry, or what they would normally term the agrarian economy and society. But most of their studies, except for a few, do not go beyond recording in great detail the nature of the economy and society within a short span of time, a particular period in history. These studies too, do not provide a satisfactory analysis of structural change and transformation especially between epochs in history which often take place over a long period of time. As with conventional anthropology, the inadequacy of these studies is due to the perspectives and methodology of historical research and analysis which have been utilised rather than the inadequacy of historiography as such. A combination of anthropological or sociological study with history enables us to develop a more useful and adequate methodology for a study of change, especially structural change, of a particular economy and society. This is the method of historical sociology or historical social science.

This is by no means to claim a new discovery in methodology. Far from it, this method of sociological analysis which is basically the method of historical materialism has been proposed by Marx since the middle of the last century. Although Marx himself spent less time in the study of structural change in particular societies the basis of his work, Capital, is premised on historical materialism and is essentially concerned with the problematic of change. The notion of a division of the development of human society into

several epochs in history such as the ancient, feudal, Asiatic, bourgeois societies, the study of the logic of the capitalist mode of production, and the struggle of opposing classes in each epoch, are examples of his materialist method. Our study thus draws inspiration from the Marxist method of political economy or historical materialism.

#### 1.4 Unit of Study

This study will be divided into two parts. The first part is historical and is drawn from secondary published materials. It will seek to outline the salient characteristics of peasant economy and society in both the pre-transformation and during the transformation phases.

The study begins by tracing the origins of Liberia as a state, a social formation which is the unit of this study. The nature of peasant economy, class structure, and the corresponding superstructure of the social formation will be described in detail to highlight the place of the peasant during the pre-colonial period. We argue that the structure of pre-capitalist mode of production approximates the model of the domestic mode of production. As it will be seen in the next chapter, this is a significant departure from the views of earlier workers who have variously designated all pre-colonial West African "societies" as either tributary, or Asiatic, or slave.

We will then examine the era of the colonialism which represents another period in the historical development of this social formation. We shall describe how "colonial" or peripheral capitalism was introduced through the process of primitive accumulation, and the direct consequences of this exercise.

Significant attention will be paid to the role of the colonial state in introducing political, legal, and ideological conditions, appropriate for the existence and furtherance of the new economic order of the period. It can be rightly stated that the peasant subsistence sector was "articulated" with peripheral capitalist mode of production during this period. It later generated the transformation of the peasantry and led to the gradual destruction of the pre-capitalist natural economy.

Part Two of our study attempts to describe and analyse the nature of peasant society in the present (post-colonial) period. Empirical materials for such an analysis are drawn from our own research conducted in the same social formation. We carefully chose a section of the Mande area in which there are different economic specialisations or different organisations of production for such a study. In this subset we decided that the village level approach is the best for our purpose, because it is our belief that if some coherent generalisations are to be made on peasant transformation and transition to capitalism in a particular nation-state, then it is of necessity to examine in some detail the changes that are taking place at the village level. If carefully chosen the types of peasant commodity production on this level can be more or less representative of the nation-state.

To embark on a study of the evolution of the whole of Liberia is not the objective of this thesis. Although Liberia is a relatively small country, it is big enough to make such generalisations as could easily obscure the reality. Of course the transformation process has neither been uniform in the various regions of the country nor has its pace been the same. Even the regions may be quite different from one another in their basic

economic structures. We have, therefore, selected for our study a cross-section of Mande peasants in Lofa County, one of the six counties in which they form the majority of the population.

We have made this choice for the following reasons. Firstly, this author is from this group and except for relatively brief periods, has spent the better half of his life among these peoples. It is to them we owe our traditional education and we understand their ways of life better than any other group in the Liberian nation-state.

Secondly, and more importantly, the political and social structure of the Mandes in pre-colonial times bears the characteristics of the larger Grain Coast 18th century society from which Liberia later came into being. This, in our view, presents a continuity in terms of the basic structures of the two social formations which existed in different historical periods within the same historical epoch.

Thirdly, although the Mandes have a relatively small representation on the sea coast, they were politically well organised. They had recognised leaders, laws, and a system of enforcing their laws, buttressed in their ascribed status orientation. This ensured both political stability and survival. When the colonists first arrived on the Grain Coast in the early 18th century, their first contact with the indigenous people was with this group. Consequently the Mandes became the first casualty in expatriate colonialism and its so-called modernising influences. It follows that they were among the first people to experience the earliest impact of Western colonial expansion which set into motion the process of transformation of their economy and society and that of the rest of the peasant society that became known as Liberia.

The commodities produced in this region which we have selected is representative of the present types of peasant economic specialisation and are the major products produced by the peasant communities of Liberian society. This further justifies our selection of this region for our empirical observation. The communities observed are accessible by road and the furthest from a major commercial centre is about forty miles away, while the nearest is about seven miles. It must also be noted that all of them have reached what I prefer to refer to as the advanced phase of peasant economic specialisation in the production of both food and non food commodities. The social structure in these communities is dictated by their proximity to the urban end of the folk-urban continuum. Communities situated outside such studies from commercial centres are obviously different in their degree of transformation vis-a-vis those we have studied.

### **1.5 Peasantry as a Class**

Different writers have stressed different aspects of the peasantry in trying to provide a "definition" of the latter. One of the earliest observations made on the peasantry in anthropological writings was by Kroeber who was referring to a historically specific case of western European peasantry. Kroeber introduced the notion of "part-societies with part cultures" and emphasised the rural character of the peasantry in relation to market towns; structurally, as part of the larger stratificatory system whereby the peasantry is dominated by a powerful group the traditional characteristic of a local community with a specific social and cultural life; and its attachment to the soil (55). He contrasted the peasantry with the tribal community where the former is

characterised by, "... lack of the isolation, political autonomy, and self-sufficiency" (56).

Within the American tradition of cultural anthropology, it has been Robert Redfield who spent a great deal of his academic career in the study of "peasant" village communities. Based upon some case studies conducted amongst rural village communities in Mexico, Redfield formulated a typology of folk-urban continuum contrasting the "folk society" located at the extreme rural end with the "urban society" located at the extreme urban end of the continuum (57). The typology is in line with the notion of traditional-modern dichotomy of the modernisation theory.

During his early studies Redfield did not have a definitive conception of "peasant" as we understand today. His main interest was to study village communities which were situated between the isolated "tribal" community and the "modern" community. In his more mature work, the tendency was to define the peasantry in the social and cultural aspects whereby the peasantry is, "a way of living" or a specific culture contrasting the non-peasant Great Tradition with that of the peasant Little Tradition (58). His statement that the peasantry is, "a kind of arrangement of humanity with some similarities all over the world" is path-breaking which others were to follow. He also mentioned the social relationships between the peasants and the elites.

Redfield's conception of the peasantry, by implication, seems to suggest the homogeneity of the latter. Diversity in cultural terms is explained in terms of different location in the line of the folk-urban continuum. This is rather unsatisfactory as most peasant communities are heterogeneous not only in socio-cultural terms but also in the political, economic, and structural aspects. Also there

are important differences between peasants in different regions within a single nation-state not to mention differences across national boundaries.

Redfield's notion of the "folk culture" was later developed by George Foster who shared the view of Redfield and emphasised the particular characteristic of peasant culture in terms of attitudes, values, and specific psychological traits (59). Their works on the peasant world view has some influences on policy makers who are responsible for drawing policy programmes to develop the "backward" peasant communities.

Within the British tradition of social anthropology, it was Raymond Firth who emerged as one of the founders of the sub-discipline of economic anthropology. In an earlier work we had noted, for example, the parallel between the Liberian Mande land unit and that of Firth's Maori land unit. In another of his works, Firth researched in the economic aspect of Malay fishermen in Malaysia whom he rightly referred to as peasants (60). While Mandes in Upper Lofa are forest people and cannot be drawn into fishing as an occupational specificity, there is among them the parallel occupation of hunting that associates us with the Firth definition and analysis of peasant societies. It is our view that the hunters of Upper Lofa play the same economic role and work within the same social relations as the Malay fishermen. This study goes beyond the village community study of Redfieldian variety utilising the formalistic approach of positive economics. Firth provided an analytical definition of the peasantry as an economic category. But unlike some other writers before and after him, he regarded fishermen and rural craftsmen as peasants because, "they too share the same kind of simple economic organisation with those who work on

the land" (61). As he rightly argued, "... they are of the same social class as the agriculturalists, and often members of the same families. As occupational groups they may even be separable only in theory, since many a peasant farmer is also a fisherman or craftsman by turns, as his seasonal cycle or his cash needs influence him" (emphasis added) (62). He defined peasants as "small scale producers using simple (non-industrial) technology and equipment. Their economy is subsistence, relying for consumption mainly on what they themselves produced" (emphasis added) (63).

Another anthropologist who has provided an important contribution to the conception of the peasantry is Eric Wolf. Based on research work carried out in Puerto Rico under the supervision of Julian Steward, he developed a different line of research looking at the history of development of the local community in relation to the larger economic and political matrix after realising that the narrow focus on village community is inadequate if not misleading. He was able to draw some differences among the peasants located in different regions and these differences, according to him, were attributed to the differential regional impact of the historical process of colonialism and the expansion of capitalism. This is a marked departure from the Redfieldian tradition of cultural studies. His emphasis is on the heterogeneity of the peasantry which came much closer to reality than the hypothetical or ideal-type construct of Redfield's folk-urban typology.

In his general characterisation of the peasantry, Wolf paid particular attention to the aspect of generating surplus by the peasants. He classified it into three types of surplus namely "communal fund", "replacement fund", and "surplus that is transferred to the dominant group who claimed rights to expropriate



surplus from the peasantry" (64). The last suggests the underdog position of the latter in relation to the former manifesting a kind of asymmetrical power relationship which is essentially a class relationship in the Marxian sense. In addition to this, he also followed his predecessors Redfield, Foster, and Steward in contrasting peasants with the tribal and urban population and emphasising the subsistence nature of peasant production.

A more serious attempt to formulate the conception of the peasantry as a specific "social entity" has been made by Teodor Shanin around early 1970's. Based upon comparative study of the peasantry all over the world, he conceptualised the peasantry as constituting four essential and interlinked facets:

- i) The family farm as the basic unit of multi-dimensional social organisation;
- ii) Land husbandry (and in particular animal rearing) as a means of livelihood directly providing some part of the consumption needs;
- iii) A Specific traditional culture related to the way of life of small communities;
- iv) The underdog position of the peasantry - its domination by outsiders (emphasis added) (65).

This formulation by Shanin appears to be a synthesis of ideas of early writers some of which we have mentioned above. The notion of family farm is suggested in the work of Chayanov in his work The Theory of Peasant Economy (66). Land husbandry as a means of livelihood is the notion accepted by most anthropologists and rural sociologists except a few like Firth who widened the concept to include fishermen and rural craftsmen in his definition of the peasantry. The notion of specific traditional culture has been

particularly emphasised by Redfield, Foster, Steward, and Wolf; and finally the notion of the underdog position of the peasantry is also stressed by Wolf.

Shanin's formulation of the four interlinked facets covers almost all the important dimensions of the peasants' life - economic, political, familial, and socio-cultural. However, his notion of family farm without mentioning the level of technology generates some problems of distinguishing between peasant family farm and the "capitalist farmer" whose economic activity is highly capital intensive but utilising only family labour such as the many western European farmers today who do not employ wage labour. Fortunately, in response to this type of criticism Shanin has specified the lower level of technology utilised in the peasant-type family farm as compared with that utilised in the capitalist-type family farm (67). His emphasis on animal rearing seems to be less applicable to some Asian and African or Latin American peasantries whose livelihood is based on the binary economic activities of agriculture and fishery or hunting. No doubt he did mention some seven analytically marginal groups which he considered as lacking at least one of the four major conditions of the peasantry outlined above. But even within this group, fishermen and hunters are excluded as a qualified member of the peasantry.

This study, which lies within the domain of political economy, is concerned with the historical aspect of a specific peasantry and its relationship with the power domain, the process of colonialism and capitalist development within a specific social formation. It takes the view that the peasantry is a class which existed during the pre-colonial and colonial epochs and continues to persist for survival in the post-colonial period. Our notion of class is a

broad and general one attributing to the dichotomic conception expressing power relationship, the dominated peasantry as opposed to the dominant and powerful ruling class; and the economic function of the peasantry as producers as opposed to the non-producing class who rely on the surplus produced by the peasantry for their consumption needs.

In one of Marx's earliest writings on the peasantry, he expressed the following with respect to the peasantry as a class:

"They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented. Their representative must at the same time appear as their master, as an authority over them, as an unlimited governmental power that protects them against the other classes and sends them rain and sunshine from above". (68)

Sharing the view expressed by Marx, we consider peasants as a class-in-itself whose consciousness is generally low. But within a historically specific political situation, this "low consciousness" is transformed into a "high consciousness" becoming what Marx termed as a class-for-itself (69). Only in the latter situation that peasants as a class are able to express overtly the conflictual relationships with the dominating class or authority and usually the state.

Another important facet of the peasantry is its heterogeneity, an aspect which has been ignored by some writers who define the peasantry as a social entity, a socio-economic category, or even as a class. Our view is that peasants have always been and will continue to be, in the foreseeable future, a heterogeneous group not only in socio-cultural terms but also in economic and class terms.

The notion of peasant heterogeneity, or more appropriately differentiation, is central to the problematic of transition to capitalism in the agrarian sector of the economy of peripheral social formations. Different writers emphasise different criteria

for measuring differentiation. The Russian Populist and most economists generally use simple economic differentiation like income, animals owned, and particularly the size of land owned or cultivated to measure differentiation. This is quite different from the materialist conception of class where it is constituted in terms of relation of production. It is in the latter sense that the concept of class is used as a means of indicating qualitative or structural differentiation while other socio-economic indicators like net conventional income and size of farm owned or operated will be placed against this qualitative indicator.

The generally accepted way of distinguishing classes in peasant society is to classify them in terms of the trichotomic scheme of rich peasant, middle peasant, and poor peasant. This is generally used, as Alavi has rightly pointed out, not in terms of relative differences of wealth or property but should be understood in terms of relations of production (70). It distinguishes between those who live off the labour of others (landlords, capitalist farmers) and those whose labour is being exploited (sharecroppers, farm labourers) on the one hand and those who neither exploit the labour of others nor their labour being exploited by others (independent smallholders). Perhaps, as Alavi argued, these structural descriptive terms like capitalist farmers, (landlords), independent smallholders, sharecroppers, and farm labourers would help us in avoiding unnecessary confusion instead of the terms rich, middle, and poor which are, to certain people, erroneously understood in the literal meaning of the terms or at best as simple economic differentiation (71). As we shall later see there is no landlord class in the discussion of the Mande peasantry. The elders as a class (who many contributors to African peasantry have referred to

as exploiting the labour of others) are not necessarily the richer class as the landlord class case may be in other parts of Africa, some parts of Asia and Latin America.

At the transitional stage between pre-capitalist mode and fully fledged capitalist mode of production in the agricultural sector, the peasantry is generally differentiated along class lines into landlords, rich peasants, middle peasants, poor peasants, landless peasants, and including two emerging classes of capitalist farmers and farm workers or rural proletariat making a total of seven different classes in the rural economy (72). This classification is based on the principal relation of production from which a person draws his livelihood (73). This is a formal classification or sub-division in accordance with the class structure of the peasant society which can be arranged into a hierarchy of order or stratificatory system.

## FOOTNOTES

## Chapter 1

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22. J.H. Boeke, Ibid., p.5.
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50. S. Amin, Unequal Development, op. cit., and Imperialism and Unequal Development, op. cit.

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69. S. Ossowsky, Class Structure in the Social Consciousness (London: 1979), especially Chapter 5; T. Dos Santos, "The Concept of Social Classes", Science and Society, XXXIV, 2 (Summer 1970), pp.166-193.
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71. We noted that the category "landlord" is missing from Alavi's outline of the structural descriptive terms on p.294, Ibid..
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CHAPTER II"PRE-COLONIAL" LIBERIATHE SEARCH FOR A MODE OF PRODUCTION

This chapter will seek to outline the nature of the "pre-colonial" class structure and social relations, customary land dealings, peasant economy and society, and "traditional" differentiation within the peasant society, before the "colonial" transformation in Liberia - the Grain Coast section of what is historically known as The Guinea Coast of Africa. In short, it will seek to show the make up of the social structure in the "pre-colonial" time.

In order to do so near successfully, one has to discern the prevalent, if not the dominant, mode of production of the area at the time. A lot of literature has been turned out for this purpose but a conclusion has yet to be reached as evidenced by literature turned out as recently as 1985. To this on going debate I will add my views.

Of course "pre-colonial" communities in this part of the West African Coast did not fit neatly into the "classical" Marxist evolutionary trajectory - slavery, feudalism, and capitalism - derived from the Western European historical experience. Suret-Canales for example, has suggested that the "Asiatic Mode of Production" dominated pre-colonial black Africa. Besides the conceptual problems one may run into by fitting unconditionally what is Asiatic to what is black African, one gets the erroneous implication that social structures in the social formations of pre-colonial black Africa were uniform. Certainly this was not so and has been pointed out in a number of works. In rejecting the view of applying the "Asiatic Mode" to Africa, Wickins argues that one might be easily misled to think so because some of the

characteristics of that mode of production do indeed fit the African situation. Marx, he said, "was in fact thinking rather of the so-called 'hydraulic' societies of the near East and Asia, of which Egypt was an obvious example, where the state enforced corvees for the construction and maintenance of public works" (1). Coquery-Vidrovitch especially criticised Suret-Canale. In her words:

"And just because Marx and Engels sketched a possible fourth mode, the 'Asiatic mode of production' must we therefore apply it textually to the newly discovered world of Africa, when the concept was based on the historical experience of the Middle East and Southeast Asia? Suret-Canale (1964) attempted to do just this." (2)

Some authors have concluded that the situation as existed in parts of pre-colonial West Africa was decidedly feudal (3). Goody has done an excellent review of the earlier related literature and has concluded:

"... I discussed the application of the term 'feudal' to precolonial African states from the formal point of view and have concluded that there appears little to be gained by thinking of African societies in terms of the concept of 'feudalism'." (4)

In his contribution to the "feudal" debate in Africa, Wickins argues that a dominant feature of European feudalism, which was the granting of land in return for services, was present in certain empires and kingdoms of Africa. He points out:

"There remain, however, essential differences between the African political system and European feudalism. In Europe, in legal theory all land belonged to the crown, which made grants to its vassals and these in turn made available land to the actual cultivators, either directly or through a chain of vassalage. In Africa, though a claim to the ownership of all land on the part of the King was common, access to land usually remained a right inherent in the membership of the community. It was exceptional to find in Africa a clear division between a land owning class and a dependent peasant class ... the applicability of the term feudalism to Africa depends much upon the definition given it. The more imprecise it is, the wider its application. The penalty for vagueness is loss of analytical value." (5)

What obtained in "pre-colonial" Liberia and to some extent even in "post-colonial" Liberia is essentially what is described in some parts of the Wickins quote. There is no written record or oral tradition (known to this writer) to indicate that any part of the Liberian peasant community has been dependent on any one person or group of persons (land owning class) or to a vassalage. For "pre-colonial" Liberia I categorically negate the existence of feudalism or a feudal mode of production.

Slavery - domestic or pawn - has been conceptualized to explain the social structure of West African pre-colonial social formulations by quite a few authors. Although these authors all subscribe to the fact that there was slavery of sorts in one or the other part of West Africa, their conclusions as to the role and utility of these slaves in the respective West African economies, renders the conceptualization of a slave mode of production in this region rather inconclusive (6). Rodney, for example goes to great lengths citing evidence from as early as 1788 to as late as 1959 to affirm domestic slavery on the West African Coast. He however, draws the rather interesting conclusion that from his "'chronological assessment', it was the Atlantic slave trade which spawned a variety of forms of slavery, serfdom, and subjection in this particular area". Rodney draws from Fage who suggests:

"... nevertheless, the existence of domestic slavery has an important bearing on the development of the slave trade in West Africa ... The presence of a slave class among the coastal peoples meant that there was already a class of human beings who could be sold to Europeans if there was an incentive to do so." (7)

Kilkeny categorically asserts that "we can in fact discern a slave based mode of production within an African social formation" (8). She shares the same views on the concept with

Hindess and Hirst who have concluded that this mode exists where "slave labor forms the basis of production", and cites Padgug that when slaves produce an important proportion of the society's economic production then the slave mode of production is said to exist (9). Kilkenny further reiterates that, "The mode of production comes into existence with the domination of the production process by slave labour and with the effective possession of slave labour by a separate class of slave owners" (10). In my view this assertion raises two important questions: did slave labour in fact dominate the production process on the Grain Coast? If yes, is it correct for one to refer to those slave owners as being in a "separate class"? Of course the need to indicate the characteristics of such a slave owning class therefore becomes necessary.

Samir Amin has suggested what he has dubbed the "Tributary mode of production" as underpinning the state formation of the pre-colonial period of Africa. This usual generalization about Africa, as if it is a small homogeneous society, always invariably blurs the picture. No less guilty of this practice is Simonse who believes:

"States with a tributary mode of production once stretched over the whole of Africa, from the Islamic kingdoms of the Sahel to the Bantu kingdoms of South Africa." (11)

The evidence provided for this claim is not at all convincing. Here again, it comes to focus that some theoreticians are bent on fitting and explaining every social structure into their perceived theories in spite of the fact that they possess an inadequate and/or factual social construct of their intended social formations. The double standards set by the so called "tributary mode of production" and the Asiatic model are aptly put by Steinhart who suggests that they

are in fact one mode of production but "described illusively by Marx (1967: I, 357-358, III, 790-792; Avineri, 1969: 88-95)\* as the Asiatic mode of production, the system is one in which surplus is appropriated by means of a "tax/rent couple" or tribute. To avoid the unfortunate overtones of geographical specificity, I prefer to use the phrase 'tributary mode of production'" (12). It is clear from this quote that either - even to his proteges - the so called "tributary mode of production" and the "Asiatic mode of production" are one and the same, or that there is a lack of clarity or a misunderstanding, in the conceptualization, or both.

Indeed understanding the mode of production of a people or a region is central to understanding the history and social structure of such people or society. The West African situation contextually continues to be a problematic in this light. Considering the references to domestic slavery in the region from which it is suggested that there was a slave mode of production, it becomes necessary to turn briefly to the historical materialist approach, as this approach in my view, lends a great deal of clarity to the confusion of the subject. If we were to accept that slave labour forms the basis of production in a slave mode of production, then the differences between "slavery" and "domestic slavery" on the one hand, and the roles assigned to each group in the production process, on the other, seems to me, to be the beginning point. Rodney has described domestic slaves as

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\* The references to the works of Marx and Avineri are those of Steinhart.



"members of their masters' households. They could not be sold, except for serious offences; they had their own plots of land; and/or rights to a proportion of the fruits of their labour; they could marry; their children had rights of inheritance; and if born of one free parent; often acquired a new status. Such individuals could rise to great trust including that of chief." (13)

This view is shared by many, for example, Bisbergen and Geschiere who have indicated that domestic slaves could even marry women from the royal household, "so that their offspring could swell the ranks of the royal village without residential claims being made upon them from their paternal side" (14). If, as Kilkenny cites Marx, the slave works under alien conditions of production" that is, "possesses neither the means of production nor his/her labour power", then it becomes extremely difficult to assert that there was a slave mode of production on this part of the West African Coast. Slaves, as you can see, could not fit neatly into those conditions described above. Domestic slaves were rather radically different in their relations of production from the chattel slaves from whom the conceptualization of slavery was advanced. There is a lot of evidence to prove this, for example, Wickins in making this point cites Clapperton who had observed domestic slaves in West Africa:

"The domestic slaves are generally well treated. The males who have arrived at the age of eighteen or nineteen are given a wife, and sent to live at their villages and farms in the country, where they build a hut and until the harvest are fed by their owners. When the time for cultivating the ground and sowing the seeds comes on, the owner points out what he requires and what is to be sown on it. The slave is then allowed to enclose a part for himself and family. The hours of labour, for his master, are from daylight to mid-day; the remainder of the day is employed on his own, or in any other way he may think proper. At the time of harvest, when they cut and tie up the grain, each slave gets a bundle of the different sorts of grain about a bushel of our measure, for himself. The grain on his own ground is entirely left for his own use and he may dispose of it as he thinks proper." (15)

For the Liberian specificity within the West African matrix there is no doubt that pawning and domestic slavery existed here. Anderson reports of seeing domestic and agricultural slaves in the interior of the country (16). Holsoe notes the possibility of recruiting slave labour by those in the northern and western parts of the country who practiced "extensive horticulture" onwards of 1600, but he goes on to state that there is little evidence to support the existence of slaves in the area in "the pre-European contact period". He concludes that "however, it is a tenable one" (17).

While there is abundant evidence to ascertain that there was "slavery" of sorts on the West African coast, it is equally abundantly clear from this evidence that chattel slavery was not one of those sorts. The conclusion that runs through, as you have seen, is that a society based largely on subsistence agriculture in which "surplus" was not appropriated solely for the upkeep of political leaders but also for elders who had, in their youth, also provided for the elders and leaders of their day; and where this society has not been a "hydraulic" one or one in which corvée labour has not been extracted for grandiose public works, etc., cannot be understood within the Asiatic mode of production. Similarly, as can be seen, a society in which slave participation in the production process for the maintenance of the "elite" or "ruling class" was on a scale as has been described earlier, would not be justifiably categorized under the slave mode of production. It is precisely at this juncture that one turns to the French Marxist anthropologists who have been investigating what they have variously called the "domestic mode of production" or "the lineage mode of production", in order to find out what they make of the structure of the

pre-colonial society in this part of Africa. Here again one has to be careful what to accept since these scholars certainly look for guidance from the works of Marx who did not provide such guidance for the analysis of these societies.

Meillassoux's major contribution to this debate comes from his work among the Guro of Ivory Coast. This work is significant to us for two reasons: (1) Ivory Coast is on the immediate east of Liberia and formal politico-geographical boundaries between France (the former colonial master) and Liberia (which lost a large territory in that area), were not settled until the early 20th century. This means that Meillassoux's findings bear some relevance to "pre-colonial" Liberian societies because of their proximity to Ivory Coast. (2) There is no ethnographic (or otherwise anthropological) work on Liberia (which this writer is aware of) including those by Holase, d'Azevedo, Hlophe, Schwab, Carter, etc. that has particularly studied the subject under discussion. In this light Meillassoux's work on the Guro may be analytically quite useful as a comparative guide for our own analysis of "pre-colonial" Liberia.

Meillassoux's model basically deals with the subsistence economy based on the exploitation of the land in a society in which there is no scarcity of this very important factor of production. The tools used are crude and some of them can be individually owned. He sees control over the human labour of the producers and their reproduction (both physical and biological - the latter which he ties to kinship) by the elders - as manifested through the system of descent and marriage alliances, as central to the survival of the entire economic system. He thus conceptualizes this as the "domestic mode of production" (18). Coquery-Vidrovitch has made an "attempt to define an 'African mode of production'" which falls

under the rubric of "lineage mode of production" which for her is a "system" which, in her words:

"... could be said to define an economy in which all the members, united by blood, language, and customs, participated in orderly production and distributed goods within the family or among families by means of reciprocity and redistribution (not including remunerated work) and in which economic institutions could not be differentiated from political and economic institutions." (19)

Although the stresses of Coquery-Vidrovitch and Meillassoux appear to be different, they do agree on the cardinal point of the enormous authority of the elders over the young men in one or the other way and especially the control of the former over the institution of marriage. Other participants to this debate notably P.-P. Rey\* and E. Terray\* have in principle accepted the general description of the lineage mode of production while their quarrels seem to be with the *modus operandi* of the "system".

In the "pre-colonial" Liberian specificity, the lineage mode of production seems to me to be the best rubric under which the social structure can be adequately described. This position is of course opposed to the view that all of the pre-colonial social formations in black Africa had invariably practised the much heralded "tributary mode of production" as seen elsewhere. The "pre-colonial" Liberian situation was never a social formation in which tribute paying and/or vassalage was institutionalised to reflect its conceptualization as one dominated by a tributary mode of production.

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\* The works of these authors are lengthily discussed by Reini Reatgever in "Analytical tools, intellectual weapons: The discussion among French Marxist Anthropologists about identification of modes of production in Africa" in W. Van Hiesbergen, Van and P. Gaschiere, *op. cit.* (1985).

## 2.1 The Origins of a State

The present Liberian state occupies what was the Grain Coast so named because of the abundance of malsaguetra pepper, known in Europe at the time as "grains of paradise". The land area is 38,000 square miles with a population of 1.5 million.\* The Cavalla River forms its eastern boundary with Ivory Coast while the Mano River separates it from Sierra Leone on the West. The Nimba range of mountains lies between the country and Guinea on the North and the Atlantic Ocean borders it on the South.

The wealth in natural resources of this part of the West African littoral is evidenced by the very early contacts made by Europeans in search of merchandise which culminated into naming certain parts of the coast according to their commercial importance - Gold Coast, Ivory Coast, etc. The inception of these contacts remains dubious as the sources hardly collaborate. Johnston cites several sources to show that between "1364 -1365 two Dieppoiss ships reached the Grain Coast now Liberia", and that Pedro da Cintra reached these shores in 1461. The Portuguese as a matter of fact had named several physical features on the Liberian coast and remained active there until they actually monopolized trade in the

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\* The population of Liberia was for a long time estimated at 2 million until 1962 when the first ever population and housing census was conducted and found to be 1,016 million. In 1974 a second census put the number at 1,503 million. The result of the next census conducted some five years later was never published because it was rejected by the National Legislature on the grounds that it did not show an anticipated significant increase over the previous result. In 1984 another population census was conducted and the result of that has not been published to the time of this writing. Like the population all texts dealing with topography of the country had put the land area at 43,000 square miles until the last decade when a proper measurement of the country's land acreage was undertaken by a joint Government of Liberia team and a German cartographic unit, put the land area at 38,000 square miles.

area. They (the Portuguese) in turn reported of the vast natural resources found on this coast as Johnston notes that the River Costas (which the Portuguese had named), appears to have been the most frequented trading station as well as the headquarters of the pepper trade. Dapper (1868) a Dutch explorer whose work Johnston refers to had actually stopped twice on the Grain Coast for wood and fresh water and had seen grains, camwood, ivory, gold, fowl, sheep, goats and even oxen in large supplies. He had described the country as "rich and plentiful" and properly placed for commerce. Samuel Bacon, a Swiss, had made a "somewhat lengthy stay in Liberian waters" in the early 1600s and bought rice and pepper on two separate occasions. The reports of these early Europeans brought back many others with various interests. The British, Germans, and Danes were primarily interested in establishing commercial interests while the French, the Swedes, and the Dutch were interested in both commerce and colonization (20). Karna holds that the Carthaginians led by Hanno were the earliest Europeans to have visited Liberia, arriving in 502 B.C. in search of commerce (21). Guannu gives the Normans the lead, actually building trading posts on the Coast as Bassa and Sinoe (22).

As early as the 16th century the Portuguese had made mention of kings, chiefs, and headmen in the Grain Coast. This contradicts the notion of stateless societies associated with this part of the world. Vasina et al. have stated:

"A State system may be defined as a political structure in which there is differentiated status between ruler and ruled. It is founded not only on relations of kinship but also on a territorial basis. The most important index is the presence of political offices i.e. of persons invested with roles which include secular authority over others in given territorial aggregations for which there are effective sanctions for disobedience. Such political offices must furthermore be coordinated hierarchically." (23)

Indeed there is more evidence of European traders and for explorers negotiating with chiefs than exists of the absence of a political hierarchy. Rodney affirms that political states existed with public and private laws in practice, and a clear class differentiation based on the distinction between those who had power and authority within the state and those who did not. This notion of class, according to Crummey and Stewart, is certainly not synonymous with inequality because many forms of social inequality in Africa are based on sex, age, kinship, or status rather than take the character of class. It was within this milieu that the European traders first negotiated for trade in raw materials and then later the trans-Atlantic slave trade (24).

The peopling of Liberia is outside the task of this thesis. However, Hulsius, writing in 1606, has claimed that the interior of the Grain Coast was a province of the Melli (Mali) Kingdom. Dapper, writing eighty years later, named some tribes he came into contact with on the Grain Coast who still exist there today. Suffice it to say that by the time of European contact with the Grain Coast political and social organization existed in such a way that there was no mistaking the locus of power and authority. Because of the ethnic and lineage arrangements which formed the basic political, social and economic structures on the Grain Coast, it can be said that many states existed in what is Liberia today (25). Chevalier des Marchais is said to have landed at Cape Mesurado in 1794 and observed that the extent of the King's dominion was not well known but that if the number of his troops was anything to judge by, then it was believed to be considerable. So were the famous Kings, Sao Bosoe, and Gatumba.

The economy in this historical period was largely subsistence based and dominated by land with the people producing almost all their needs and wants. The textile industry was perhaps the oldest industry among these peoples and the products thereof even formed part of the articles of trade with Europeans as far back as the 14th century. Johnston had noted that the natives of Cape Mount had not only impressed the Europeans with the excellence of the cotton fabrics but had actually sent some cotton goods to Portugal (26). In fact Brown claims that for six thousand years cotton fabric has been in use by the indigenous Liberians especially in the Northwest. Containers for eating and drinking were produced from wood, clay and gourds. Leather was used in small quantities, and iron, though not in abundant supply, was used to furnish the needs of hunters, warriors, and householders (27). Consequently trade among the peoples was limited to barter, inter tribal or inter chiefdom trade was encouraged as some tribes were more noted for producing certain commodities than others: just as much as professional differentiation was also another reason for such trade.

## 2.2 Pre-Colonial Class Structure

There existed in pre-colonial Liberia three main language groups: the Mande, the Kwa, and the Mel in order of numerical dominance (28). To discuss the largest group would be a fair representation of the Liberian society. Among the Mande existed an aristocracy and a peasantry. Of course a mode of class analysis implies a dichotomic scheme of a non producing and politically dominating class vis-a-vis a producing and politically subdued class manifest of a division in economic function and political structure. Both of these classes were heterogeneous.





In most Mande communities the constitution was monarchical and the kingly office was hereditary from father to son, but despots were not condoned. Of course there was a proliferation of kings in the area because of the variety of ethnic groups inhabited there, however, the suggestion by Johnston that there did not exist a supreme ruler for any of most of the ethnic groups has not been corroborated (29). The powerful Sao Boso of the Kondo confederacy which comprised Mandingo and Kpelle ethnic groups is a case in point. In fact Walker and Guanna recount how the Dey and Mamba kings Peter and Yoda concluded agreements with foreigners on behalf of their peoples (30). Our research proves that leadership among the Mandes had sub-divisions throughout the extent of the territories to make for easier governing and to ensure the security of the peoples and territories. There was no use of titles to distinguish the ruling class from either the other aristocrats or the commoners. The throne, as a rule, was ascended by the eldest son of the King and if that son was a minor, the boy's oldest "small father" (paternal uncle) became regent.

State offices existed among the Mandes. There was the "speaker" in many of the Mande ethnic groups who could speak for the king if the former, for one reason or the other, was physically absent or otherwise incapacitated. There was also the powerful council of Elders and an Adviser to the King who was invariably a Medicine Man, a Priest, and a Sorcerer all in one. In times of war a Commander in Chief was usually appointed from the council. There

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\* Among the Mandes largely, the father's brothers are "small fathers" and the mother's sisters are "small mothers". The father's sisters are "small mothers" and the mother's brothers are uncles. The father's sisters are equally mothers. The term cousin does not exist.

were badges of office like swords, spears and bows and arrows. These offices were not hereditary and no one could pass his membership thereof to his child. The Adviser to the King was an exception in this regard as the Medicine Men generally had been trained in their craft by their forebears and were to, as it were, keep it in the family. Of course the extent of a territory determined the number of offices and sub chiefs in his political configuration. In Lynch, Blyden visiting Boporu country, the seat of the Kondo Confederacy, in 1871, noted that the capital had a population of over 2,000 inhabitants while he approximated the population of the country to about 30,000 persons. He wrote of the King:

"The territories over which he rules extend from Boporu as a centre, South East a day's walk to the St. Paul (River); North a journey of 8 days; West to the little Cape Mount River; South to Gadeh." (31)

Mande Kings were not absolute monarchs although they wielded enormous judicial and executive powers. In fact they displayed the mixed character of acting absolutely on some occasions and with the counsel of their subordinate chiefs on others.\*

Loyalty among Mande Kings constituted more of a dynasty. Where the reigning monarch did not beget a son as heir to the throne then the lineage provided an appropriate heir according to tradition. The legitimacy of the monarch was tightly woven in tradition and custom as the kings were supposed to be the guardians of the tribe bound in an ineluctable cohesion between the ancestors and members of the tribe. Obedience to the monarch was seen as obedience to the ancestors and therefore necessary for the survival of the tribe.

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\* See B.J.K. Anderson, A Journey to Musardu, (Frank Cass, London: 1971), in which he describes the authority of the King of Boporu on an earlier visit he had paid there before Blyden.

Though a king could be young in years he was always referred to as "Grand-father" by young and old alike, thus symbolizing him as the representative of the ancestors. These manifestations legitimized him and even when a monarch's human failings led him to wickedness the loyalty of his subjects was unquestionable and such wickedness was invariably halted or minimized through the counsel of the usually powerful council of elders with whom he shared the onus of leadership. Besides these age old customs and traditions this writer is not aware of (nor did he unearth) any historical concepts to bind the ruler and the ruled. Stories and myths of why people should be loyal to the monarch, of course, abound in some other parts of West Africa. The Golden Stool of the Ashantes is a case in point. Wa however, did not find such stories or myths among the Mandes.

Before long distance trade was introduced there existed, as it were, only the elders - among whose members were also the leaders of the powerful Poro Society - who could be referred to as a non royal aristocracy (32). The elders were categorized into leaders of households on the one hand, and those men who had made a significant contribution to the advancement of the community in defence, diplomacy, medicine, etc., and who were now retired because of old age. To this group was added - with the introduction of long distance trade - the middle men who were the comparatively wealthy class. Their roles of course were different. The council of elders served as the consultative group to the ruler with whose consent every major administrative decision was taken and they also provided the counsel of their years when serious disputes arose either between individuals or whole villages. The long distance traders

provided for the community those extra commodities which were not produced by the community but which gave the people some comfort, or satisfaction, or both. More importantly the traders paid taxes to the king for providing the security for the traders and their dependence on his protection and influence. This was one of the many sources from which the royalty and elders were reproduced. Besides, tradition provided that the King's household be adequately (sometimes lavishly) provided for to supplement what the household itself could produce for its own reproduction.

The subject class usually consisted of the peasantry, the slaves and the pawns. In addition to these, free peasants from other communities would travel to a new community and voluntarily place themselves under the protection of some elder. The category of slaves embraced war captives and criminals - like rapists and murderers - banished from their homes and made gifts to far away ally kings. Pawns were those persons given to serve others as a guarantee that a certain obligation would be met; or given away to render services to another person for a specific period of time as, (a) to fulfil a bet of obligation, or (b) as reciprocity for some economic or social obligation which one did not have the means to reciprocate in kind. If the pawn was a collateral and the arrangement was defaulted, he was given the opportunity to purchase his freedom or remain a pawn. This was a rare case because those pawned were usually important members of a household like son, daughter, nephew, niece. Slaves and those pawned lived in houses built for them and were encouraged to marry both within their own kind and from among the free persons in the community and so "villages grew up adjacently, as a rule, to the house and compound of their owner". Consequently a whole village might constitute a

household composed of over thirty houses, sometimes with a population of well over a hundred persons. The pawns and the slaves worked for the benefit of the household, and the head, in turn, properly fed them, took care of their needs and tried to solve their individual problems as they arose. They were considered, in fact, as part of the master's household. Given what obtained above it is clear that the terms slavery and slave do not denote the harsh and dehumanising condition with which they are conventionally associated. It was a relationship of duties and obligation. In many parts of Mande "country" it became an artificial kinship permitting the addition of new members to one's group or village.

The question of accumulation of wealth by these subjects - in the traditional meaning of the term - did not arise in the subsistence economy. Slaves and pawns were members of their masters' households for whom they worked, but they could have access to their own plots of land especially if they decided to marry and make homes in their new found residences. The free peasant who had come as a stranger and placed himself under the protection of some elder belonged to that elder's household but had a free access to land. The original peasants who were heads of households had free access to land. There were no taxes on the produce of any of the categories. Custom dictated however, that the peasant-stranger made occasional gifts to his stranger-father and to respond favourably when he was occasionally requested to put his labour at the disposal of the latter.

Corvée, in the strict sense of labour exacted in lieu of taxes, was not practiced as it would be technically absurd to find an alternative for a concept which did not exist. Taxation was not introduced at the time, nor was corvée. In the absence of either,

there were in built societal mechanisms which fulfilled their roles. As has been mentioned earlier, it was as incumbent on the subjects to provide for the welfare of the monarch as it was for the various communities to provide for the lesser chiefs and the elders. The chiefs, because of their role and the elders because they had in their youth provided for their elders - for them it was like their insurances had matured. Every section of clan of the kingdom provided their quota to a makeshift labour force which was put together to work the king's farm from start to finish. Of course the work was done in stages to leave adequate time for the participants to tend to their own farms. Alternatively the work could be divided among clans who took turns to perform their tasks. So was it also done if the chief wanted to build a new compound or a major road had to be built or cleaned. Otherwise the road had to be built by members of those villages whom it was immediately meant to serve. In the performance of these tasks, the Speaker, the lesser chief and their immediate deputies, the Medicine Men and the elders were exempted. Unexcused absences were liable to reasonable fines to be paid in kind. The King or chief usually had hunters in his household who provided him with meat although in cattle areas the King could easily own half or more of all cattle in the land besides raising sheep, goats, and fowl. In spite of that other hunters in the territory as well as artisans and other craftsmen made voluntary periodic gifts to the King. Besides being a response to custom, the practise assured the leader of one's unflagging loyalty. The lesser Kings/chiefs made magnanimous gestures of goodwill to the leader, such gestures did not always go unnoticed by the King or his headwife. This customary arrangement has been referred to by some writers as exploitation of the dominated class by the dominant

class. Such a conclusion raises more questions than it provides answers for the understanding of these kinds of societies.

Excesses against the subject class among Mande rulers was uncommon. Slaves largely fulfilled the role of domestic servants. The women did cooking, washing, drawing and carrying water, collecting firewood, weaving, and harvesting. The men did the ploughing, clearing, and cultivating new farms, going on errands and accompanying the master on trips when the need arose. The pawned, as has been stated, was not a slave and could have a specific period of stay at the masters' household after which he could work to free himself from the situation, if the one who pawned him did not meet his obligation. However, the pawned fulfilled all the functions of the slave. Together they could be drafted into the army if and when war broke out. Rodney cites several other sources to show that some Kings had slave towns but the victims were largely agricultural labourers, personal attendants, and wives or concubines. The ordinary peasantry however constituted the majority of the populations of most Mande kingdoms or chieftains. In this kind of society the dominant mode of production was what I would designate the "Chieftain mode of production" which approximates the domestic mode of production. The basic tenets of this mode are as follows:

- a) The chief nominally owned all lands for and on behalf of the community - ownership implies that he was sole custodian - and no one cultivated any parcel of it without his expressed permission.
- b) The chief was sole custodian of all other public property.
- c) The relations of production were so customarily arranged that ensuring the reproduction of the entire community was paramount and not just the reproduction of the individuals and families who were directly engaged in production. For this reason those who

were able to use their labour power directly in the production process, produced enough to keep the entire community going. This has been mistaken by many scholars as appropriation of surplus by those who did not participate directly in the production process like the elders. The failure by many scholars to recognize that surplus accumulation by producers other than for the public good was never an issue further proves their lack of understanding of the system. The chief and elders were provided for as custom prescribed but they in turn performed functions in more ways than one for the reproduction, cohesion and functioning of the whole community i.e. for the young men who produced for the livelihood of the entire community. That this could be mistaken for exploitation rather than the dynamics of the system is to explain the structure from external influences and experiences.

- d) All socio-economic decisions radiated from the chief in his capacity as regent for the ancestors and who carried the onus of guardian of all the customs and traditions by which the entire tribe was bound and to which absolute loyalty was given.
- e) The size of the unit of production was determined by technical consideration, while the unit of consumption ranged in its various aspects from a group of households to the whole of the local community. Therefore the two types of units did not necessarily correspond.

### **2.3 Chieftain Mode and Other Modes: Tributary and Domestic**

We are aware of the danger of suggesting a new mode of production which will automatically appear as a proliferation of modes especially where some people may see the differences as



theoretically minor. Our view is that there is a tendency to mislead and in order to minimise that tendency warrants an examination of what we suggest as the chieftain mode in these communities vis-a-vis the earlier suggested modes - Tributary and Domestic. We hope two things will result: 1) To simply state the relations of production as they actually existed (in many cases still exist today) among the pre-colonial-pre-capitalist Mande of Liberia,\* as opposed to what is thought to have existed. 2) Minimise the danger of presenting social formations in Africa as a homogeneous entity thereby blurring the picture of vast differences.

The major characteristic of the tributary mode of production is that a dominant class of non producers (rulers) in this economic arrangement, appropriate the surplus value created by the direct producers as tribute paid to the state as "owner" of the means of production, in this case land and cattle. This condition is likened to the Asiatic mode of production (33). This tribute could be in either labour or kind. It is essential to remember that the producing class from which tribute was exacted was excluded from the means of production although they lived in the village and lineage communities. It is equally important to note that in this model the direct producers are "held in a relationship of political and legal subordination" to the non producing, non labouring ruling class (34).

In those parts of pre-colonial or pre-capitalist Africa where the tributary mode is said to have existed, there is said to be

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\* The Mande of Liberia are part of the Mande linguistic group of West Africa inhabiting parts of all the countries from Mali to Côte d'Ivoire. In some of these countries they form a significant majority of the population. Although there may be slight differences between and among them, the cardinal rules of their economic arrangement remain the same.

evidence of dominant and subordinate lineages and the social relations of production provide for the dominant lineages to expand their means of production from tributes exacted from the subordinate lineages. Examples of such societies have been cited in some Southern Saharan societies where "warrior" lineages exacted protection money from their subordinates in the form of agricultural produce and livestock. Other dominant lineages like the "maraboutic" were supported by tithes gathered in similar fashion (35). Such surplus accumulation made possible the occupational specialisation of dominant lineages. There were also tributary relations between the locus of power and its local peripheries. The lineage ideology therefore is an important part of this mode as their relations of production do tend in fact to overlap.

As has been seen in what we have suggested to call the Chieftain mode the social relations of production were organised quite differently from the above. In the Mande area where we studied, the emphasis was always placed on the survival of the total community. There is no evidence of tribute payment even to the chief and the elders who were placed (as they still are today) in very high places of respect. There were no dominant and subordinate lineages which made tribute exaction in the former mode possible. Except for slaves there were no other groups of people ostensibly held in political and legal subordination. Even the much heralded view that women had no rights was not always true. In Mande communities women had the right to divorce their husbands and in such cases brideprice was returned. It is significant however, that the right was enshrined in customary law.

It is also crucial to note that there was never a dominant group of non-producers who were totally reproduced by surplus appropriated from direct producers in the chieftain mode. Seniority was always (as it is today) reserved for the old, not necessarily a class of political rulers. Even the elders contributed to the overall production process by directly participating in it (as far as age allowed). No one was ever excluded from the means of production for whatever reason which is a cardinal difference between these social relations of production and those that existed in the tributary mode in which the producing class which paid the tribute was excluded from the means of production. With all of these differences obviously the organisation of the social relations of production in pre-capitalist Mande communities could not have been the tributary mode of production.

The Domestic mode of production for its part shows four main characteristics: 1) The community's ability and capacity to meet short term and long term basic food needs for its members. 2) Land is used as an instrument of labour. 3) The major source of energy is human strength. 4) Use of individual means of agricultural production. In this mode surplus is derived from two main sources: 1) from the production of direct dependents and 2) from extended families and temporary units of production (35). Like the dynamics of the tributary mode, the elders' rights to appropriate surplus (both in kind and in labour) are followed by rules of kinship because of the control they have over access to the resources of the ancestors' territory. This is so because the elders are the representatives of the ancestors. Of course there are similarities between this mode and the chieftain mode but these similarities are more in form than in substance.

Among the Mandes in the chieftain mode, certain categories of kin are governed by expectations of duties performed and privileges to be enjoyed. This will be discussed in Chapter 5. It is however, very important to note that the elders (as a class) do not have an automatic right to the surplus produced by the young either in labour or in kind. In these communities the welfare of the total community supersedes the economic and social welfare of any individual or group of individuals. The chief and the elders (but more so the chief) form the ineluctable cohesion between the population and the ancestors. They have always enjoyed the respect of the entire community and continue to do so still.

#### 2.4 Access to Land

The term "tenure" - denoting private ownership through title - as it relates to land especially in the Western experience, has been deliberately avoided as a sub-topic for discussion because of its ambiguity if used in the Mande context (37). As in many African societies of the pre-colonial era one may rightly assert that in a Mande setting the community reserved to itself what could be the right of eminent domain while every adult member of that community had "usufructuary"\* rights to the land as a means of sustaining

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\* See the following articles in the Journal of International African Institute which deal with land use systems in parts of Africa which corroborate that of the Mandes:  
 Vol. XVIII (1948), "Modern Developments of Land Tenure: An Aspect of Cultural Change", L.P. Mair  
 Vol. XIX (1949), "Ibo Land Tenure", G.I. Jones  
 Vol. XX (1950), "Land Tenure Among the Nwa of Cameroons", F.M. Kaberry  
 Vol. XLI (1971), "Patterns of Land Holding and Land Distribution in the Ife Division of West Nigeria", I.H. Vanden Drissen.  
 See also: J.K. Nyerere, Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism (Oxford University Press, Dar Es Salaam: 1968).  
 A.L. Mabogunje, "The Land and People of West Africa", in J.F.A. Ajayi and M. Crowder, History of West Africa (Longman Group Limited, London: 1971).

life.<sup>a</sup> This right of access to land was derived from the individual's status either as a member of the kinship group or the subject of some political authority, and it was acquired by the clearing of any bush or forest for cultivation which another person had not already so designated through a sign of intention that was commonly acknowledged. One was not under a legal obligation to pay tribute to the ruler but in-built customary dynamics had made provision for his primary reproduction and that of the elders.

There did not exist what could be called proprietary rights over land in Mande custom as land was too important a commodity to allow for individual ownership over it. Land was the very essence of Mande life and therefore dominated the economic system of these people. Consequently its ownership was vested in the community as an overseer for the entire clan or tribe, having been acquired by conquest, by occupation, or by ancestral right. The term "land" as used in this context refers to the physical terrain, the productive powers of the soil, the village, farm land and forests. It approximates that of the Maori for whom it constituted home, dwelling and source of raw materials (38). It was in this tribal land unit that arrangements were made for individual and family "ownership" - meaning "usufructory" rights but never in the sense of claiming title to, or disposing of it as one wished as was the case after settler colonization was established. Since there were no proprietary rights over land, disputes for same, were never between

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<sup>a</sup> We must qualify the use of the term "usufruct" in the present context. The term "usufruct" by definition denotes the "legal right to use and enjoy something belonging to another". In this context it is misleading, as the land, far from "belonging to another", belonged to the community of which the user was a member. In this sense the user was part of the ownership team. This writer is therefore using this misleading term because he is unaware of an existing English term to accurately conceptualise the system.

individuals but between communities or villages and occasionally between tribes. It was this communal use in any ample measure of this functional trinity of land: village, farm, forest; that stimulated the expression of the Mande people in the collectivism of the tribe - chief economy and justified their continuous struggle for survival. This structure remained basically the same for a long time of the colonial period and the economic structure based on subsistence production was not altered until monetisation was introduced. Before then barter satisfied the means of exchange and one can still find this in many remote parts of Liberia today, just as much as one can still find communal labour mustered for community development purposes, which must not be misunderstood for corvée.

There is yet no evidence that any Mande ruler had claimed eminent domain over land. What in fact obtained was that the King/chief, because he symbolised the authority of the ancestors, was guardian of the resources and unity of the tribe. Consequently he - along with the elders - as chief administrator of all affairs of the tribe, administered all land. Only the tribe, and not the chief, had inalienable rights to the land just as it was the tribe, and not any individual, that was the unit. There is of course evidence of rulers in some parts of Africa claiming eminent domain. Maquet and Naigisiki have revealed that in ancient Rwanda, the Mwami claimed true ownership of lands and custom reserved it in his power to enforce such rights against any subject. However, it is noted that he seldom exercised this right. This may be explained from the fact that the Mwami, as absolute ruler, personified the sovereignty of the state and therefore reserved unto himself the right of public ownership (39). Max Gluckman studied the Lozi (Barotsa) people and

observed this ultimate ownership of land by ruler with a difference. In his words:

"Ultimately the Loxi consider that all land, and its products belong to the nation through the King ... The King is thus the 'owner' of Loxiland and its cattle and wild products, in the sense that he ultimately claims rights over all land ... He is obliged to give every subject land to live on and land to cultivate, and he must allow every subject to fish in public waters, hunt game and birds ... The King must protect against trespassers or anyone attempting to prevent them from exercising their rights ... Should he desire the land, either for his own use or to give to another, he must ask for it: 'the King is a beggar'." (40)

For most parts of black Africa then, the right to land was inherent in the fact that one's right to life had to be complemented with the right to sustain it. This could not be the case if one's right to use the land, which was the source of primary reproduction, had to be inhibited otherwise. For the Mande people in particular, Brown had this to say:

"... the natural products of the soil are the property of the person who holds the land ... if fruit trees stand on the land, the produce belongs to the planter of the trees. In theory their occupier has only usufruct of the soil as long as it pleases the village or tribe, whose voice is the chief. In reality, this occupation developed into a type of ownership which permitted a member of the family to inherit the farm. In the absence of tribal opposition, the head of the family may transfer this plot to the third person providing that person be a member of the tribe". (41)

Land, it must be known, was never scarce in Mande "country". A household head therefore selected a spot where he wanted to farm and would then request the chief for permission to farm that area. Permission, invariably granted, the farmer would then clear a very small area of that land in a conspicuous place to warn everyone else that he had earmarked the area for his farm that year. So did every head of household. Of course people farmed in different places every year to allow the previous land to lie fallow awaiting the

ripening of late grown vegetables or other tuberous foodstuffs. Once every foodstuff was collected and stored away, the land reverted to the community and could be farmed by another household once it was ready for use again. The earlier peasant also qualified for the use of the same spot on a first come first served basis with other contenders. The "occupation" Brown referred to in the last quote was largely in the case of land given to a peasant on which to grow fruit trees. Such land could be used for that purpose by that peasant and/or his heirs for as long as the community did not have any other use for it. When the need for it arose, the user would be given another plot of land for other fruit trees.

Indeed the social arrangement proximates Amin's tributary mode of production but lacks its most basic characteristics, tribute and force. The structural characteristics lack what obtains in Marx's Asiatic mode of production or Wolf's prebendal domain (42). In this kind of tribe-chief economy what actually exists is the Chieftain mode of production. It must be pointed out however, that among the tribes which make up the Mande group in what is known as Liberia today, there might have existed slightly different manifestations of the cardinal rules which tradition and custom had provided for the preservation of peace, harmony, and concord of the people but more importantly for the maximization of their welfare and survival as a people. Notwithstanding, the fact that the rules still hold today in many areas of Mande "country" removed from the local centres of European civilisation - inspite of the formation of nation-states - indicates that if differences existed, they could well have been in the application of the rule, rather than in the rule itself.



## 2.5 Liberian Peasant Economy and Society

Any description of peasant economy and social structure in "pre-colonial" time must be generalised ignoring local differences in detail. Such description can then be better treated as a model that reality is to approximate rather than fit exactly into the model. This is a generally accepted practice in both Anthropology and Sociology and has been our guiding principle in this thesis, given the relatively large number of indigenous tribes that occupied the Liberian terrain before "colonial" times.

The Mandes are a forest people - except for a small section, the Vais, who live on the littoral (43). Their preference for the forest region is dictated by the fact that rice is their staple diet - rice does not thrive in the sandy soil of the coastline. They were also hunters. No particular mode of transportation was prominent among them. There is evidence that some Kings/chiefs occasionally used horses but the greater majority of the people walked from place to place inspite of the distance that was to be covered. Villagers along a river bank used dug-out canoes and/or rafts. Those who lived on the sea coast built canoes merely for the purpose of transport as very few Vais ever became fishermen, but contact with the interior - where they made their rice farms was maintained through this means. Where the rulers did not have horses, hammocks were used to transport the King/chief when it became necessary to travel from one place to another especially if he was an old man. Most of the comparatively young chiefs walked ahead of a large retinue of elders, entertainers, wives, and praise singers. Such journeys lasted unusually long even if they were relatively short distances.

The Mandes lived in permanent villages from where they went far and near to pursue their needs and fulfil their many obligations and roles. They were not a constantly mobile or fluid people precisely because of their attachment to the land. For them the tribal land unit incorporated village, farms, and forest. Although they practised slash and burn (shifting) cultivation, the town or the village always remained. It was not uncommon then (indeed as it is now), for a family (household) making a farm too far away from the town or village to build a hut on that farm where some members of that household lived from time to time while maintaining their home in the town or village. It will be ridiculous to suggest that all African tribes were always on the move because of inter or intra tribal wars; because it would be noted that the level of uncertainties were no greater then than they are now. Besides, in the psychology of Manda thinking, the spirits of the ancestors were always considered to be hovering around the village/town and only in extreme cases could their graves be abandoned. And so as nearby bushes lay fallow, it was common for some members of a village to move to a "new" town usually bearing the same name as the old one, thus holding their roots to the town or village.

The sizes of Mande villages/towns differed from four to about one hundred households. As can be seen the writer chooses to use the term households in preference over families because, once more, the latter term does not accurately describe what obtains in the former. For the purpose of clarification it is necessary to use one tribe - the Mande - from the Mande cluster in order to illustrate how the people were governed. The largest political subdivision of the Mandes was (and still is) the Chiefdom ruled by a Paramount Chief, immediately assisted by the Council of Elders and the

Chiefdom Speaker. The Speaker acted for the Chief in case the latter was incapacitated in one way or the other. They both had to be descendants of the founders of the territory. Each chiefdom was divided into sections and each section was ruled by a Section Chief, assisted by a Section Speaker and a Council of Elders. The Section Chiefs were directly accountable to the paramount chief. There were several towns in each section and each town had its own chief, speaker, and council of elders. These were also directly responsible to the section chiefs in whose section their towns were situated. At the lowest level were Village Headmen with their Elders, also responsible to the town chiefs. So one can suggest that there was a linear hierarchy of responsibility in the Mende political setting but as can be seen there was no absolutism. The chiefs in this arrangement had executive powers but judicial power was never exercised without the input of the councils of elders.

The town in which the paramount chief resided also had a town chief and speaker. They in consultation with the council, managed the day to day affairs of the capital, and brought to the Paramount Chief only those matters that were worthy of his executive attention. Those who ruled in the towns and villages of the territory were firstly those who had either played significant roles in the founding of those towns or their descendants. In some cases, they were those with the largest number of kinsmen, which was a yardstick for measuring influence. Although they could or not be related to the tribal chief, they served as his direct representatives - he being the overall custodian of the tribe and the chief representative of the ancestors. These village headmen and town chiefs could or not, be relatively wealthy, but wealth was not a powerful consideration for their choice. There was not, as we

found out, a fixed set of characteristics for their choice like a son succeeding a father, personal abilities, or political patronage. Although a prospective headman could possess all of these, his relationship to the founding fathers of the town or village was always what weighed heaviest in his favour.

The Mande peasant economy can be appropriately described as a natural economy (44) in which production is for personal needs characterised by a close connection between industry and agriculture or an economy in which "the production of use values is dominant" (45). Peasants relied for their subsistence and simple reproduction on several agricultural and non-agricultural products like rice, cassava, yams, eddoes, fish, wild and cultivated fruits as well as domesticated and wild animals. To a lesser degree they produced commodities for exchange. It has been noted elsewhere that some communities participated more on certain kinds of production than others simply for the availability of skill and ecological reasons. The need to exchange their surplus for other necessary products which others produced motivated the whole idea of exchange.

The major crop grown was the staple - rice. Grown upland (not irrigated therefore grown at the beginning of the rainy season) was the type most commonly practised. Swamp rice farming was also practised but was done on a relatively small scale and was uncommon because of the low availability of swamps. Where available, it was farmed usually in a swamp as the name suggests, or on a low lying flat land close to streams or rivers which provided water for the plants through irrigation. Some aspects of the cultivation process like preparing the field, slashing, planting and harvesting were done by extra-family labour based on the traditional labour exchange arrangement. The normal time span for a swamp rice farm from slashing to harvesting is between seven and nine months.

The second type of rice cultivation practised is the upland or slash and burn method, common in all of West Africa, and could be found also in parts of Latin America and parts of South East Asia. The laborious process entailed many steps and the would-be cultivated areas were often larger than swamp farms. Extra-family labour was always required and obtained through a social arrangement based on the understanding of reciprocity. In spite of the tedious labour that was characteristic of upland rice cultivation, it was always preferred because the peasants could grow on the same land (alongside the rice) a variety of other crops and vegetables like cassava, yams, eddoes, pumpkins, potatoes, peppers, tomatoes, beni-seed, etc. Because the harvest time for these crops is shorter than the rice, it means that the same land provided the peasants with an almost complete supply of food for their subsistence. This is unlike the swamp farming in which other crops are not usually grown alongside the rice. Upland rice cultivation has been practised among these peoples for hundreds of years.

Both of these types of rice cultivations (upland and swamp) do suggest that sheer necessity for the survival of peasant families grouped in fairly large units (villages) and formation of extra-familial and extra-village economic ties which were so necessary for their survival and biological reproduction. As a matter of course households depended on one another in their economic activities. This dependence cannot be overestimated, as it was not only displayed in farming operations but in practically all aspects of the community's life from seeking a wife, to building a house and to funerals. In these communities the old saying that "no man is an island" could not be more true.

For most Mandes meat was the major source of protein - to be eaten with rice - obtained largely from wild animals hunted from the forests and nearby bushes. Hunting wild animals was done in three ways: individual professional hunters using spears, and bows and arrows; individual trappers who were not professionals, using all kinds of traps and techniques; and bands of men who followed a professional hunter after he suspected animals to be either grazing in, or inhabiting a particular area. This last category used nets and sticks. Peasants also domesticated animals like cows, goats and sheep. Poultry was so abundant in some parts of Mande country that the Portuguese called the area "Gallinas" (fowl) territory. These however were not used for daily consumption as they were kept for specific occasions such as the arrival of a respectable stranger or for feasts of one kind or another. Fish was also eaten by these people to augment their meat supply. For those who lived away from the coast fish was obtained from swamps, ponds, rivers, streams, and lakes. For those who lived on the sea coast the obvious fishing ground was the Ocean. Fish was caught by one or a combination of more than one of several methods: using nets and baskets, drying up a pond, and using spears. Vis-a-vis the populations of the Mande peoples there was no scarcity of the sources of meat and fish.

Household labour was normally used for most economic activities. When an activity needed more manpower than that available to the family the entire village or a section of a town was appealed to under a system in which reciprocity in a similar future situation was clearly understood. Hired labour was virtually unknown. As can be seen throughout this section of this work, the welfare of the community superseded individual interests whenever communal tasks were to be performed. One's labour was always placed

at the disposal of the community for such tasks. This importance of community over the individual concretized the individual's inability to separate his welfare from that of the community. Tasks which needed such communal activity included, but were not limited to, the construction of a "palaver" hut - a multi-purpose building where the chief and elders frequently met to discuss matters of common interest. The young men used the same structure for recreational purposes and it was a communal dining hall - road construction or maintenance, harvesting a crop, etc. Pitt-Rivers had observed that although there was an absence of inducement and coercion in "primitive" societies, yet work was done (46). It must be understood however, that such community requests took careful cognizance of times of important communal and individual occasions which could not be interfered with except in a case of extreme urgency which threatened the very existence of an entire community.

A peasant community can only reproduce itself over time by the production of a surplus over immediate consumption. Karl Marx refers to this phenomenon as simple reproduction. Peasants in the Maude country were - under normal climatic conditions - always able to produce more than their subsistence needs. The surpluses were destined for a number of uses - seeds for the following year's planting, saving for hard times, feeding for the boys and girls who attended the Poro and Sanda schools at the end of the harvest season, other ceremonial festivities, and gifts (especially to the

chief and elders).<sup>\*</sup> Mande peasant society (especially in the hinterland) was self sufficient throughout the pre-colonial period. Village communities produced all their required consumption needs. Of course there was a rudimentary division of labour resulting in a diversification of local produce. Apart from rice production and those activities which are connected with simple reproduction, there were individuals who specialised in making various kinds of handicrafts - baskets and nets for fishing, traps and catching wild animals, weaving mats and cloths; workers in wood produced furniture and other utensils (bowls, spoons, etc.); potters produced bowls, pots etc.; the blacksmith, perhaps the most important artisan of the community, produced simple hoes, knives, and cutlasses. It was common for villagers to barter for their needs with neighbours and/or kinsmen in the next village or town.

The industry of these people was not limited to blacksmithery, pottery, and woodwork. The textile industry is probably the oldest among the Mandes. Of this industry Johnston noted:

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\* This writer rejects any reference to these gifts as tributes as is the custom of some academics. It must be remembered that even in this latter quarter of the 20th century there are still some ceremonial rulers in the so called advanced societies whose entire livelihoods and every whim and those of their kin are paid for by appropriating "surplus" from the public coffers. In most instances one cannot even refer to these outlays of funds as surplus because more often than not such appropriation is made even before adequate simple reproduction needs of the producers are considered and often to their detriment. Although they cannot be seen to be doing any production, the producers are forced to provide lavishly for them, yet especially Western Academics or Western oriented academics refuse to call this action tribute paying and/or exploitation generally. However, in the case of Africa the same action has been dubbed as tribute paying. It becomes only less confusing if the same concept can be used to describe the same characteristic wherever they exist in spite of the geographical location and the cultural milieu in which they are found.



"... there were no cotton goods, no calicoes in the holds of the vessels such as there would be nowadays ... it was the natives of the Gambia and other rivers of Northern Guinea, and of Cape Mount in Liberia, that impressed the Europeans with the excellence of their cotton fabrics and actually sent cotton goods to Portugal." (47)

Especially for Liberia Brown made the point very particularly when he noted that among the people of Northwestern Liberia i.e. the Mandes, "cotton fabric has been used in the indigenous life for six thousand years." Originally cotton grew wild but was later domesticated. The women picked, dried, fluffed and spun the cotton into thread and the men wove it into cloth from which clothes and costumes for both men and women were made. Side by side with this was the dyeing industry which is claimed to be nearly as old as the latter.

Peasants on the sea coast had a different experience because of their long standing contact with foreign merchants - be they slavers or of other commodities. History has it that from about 1462 Europeans of many nationalities had frequented this coast in their search primarily for gold and for anything that would interest them. Among the Vais and Gallinas - two sub-groups of the Mandes - these Europeans obtained ivory, camwood, and civet cat for civet perfume. In return the Europeans probably brought to these peoples linen and woollen cloths which were unsuitable for the tropical climate. Other items were mirrors, beads, daggers, swords, basins, iron bars, bracelets of brass and lead, gunpowder, axe heads, red caps, hammers, brandy and cheese. Perhaps next to cloths the most important trade goods were coral ornaments and glass beads. By the 17th century ivory was in decline as Braun (a Dutch merchant) had in 1611 carried a thousand pounds of gold (in weight). As ivory went in decline the merchants sought rice and pepper in return for iron

bars and beads. It was at this time that the Europeans introduced silk and velvet to the Vais and Gallinas. To this date velvet symbolises the owner - among these peoples - as a person of substance.

Chevalier des Marchais - a French explorer and merchant - who was able to cultivate warm personal relations with King Peter of Mesurado at the time, was actually offered a small island by the King. The Frenchman therefore proposed the building of a trading company in the territory which could have led to French colonization. This proposition did not find favour with the French authority. Part of Marchais' report on which he based his proposition is worthy of note here for later analysis. He is said to have reported that clay for bricks and stone proper for ashlar work were in abundance in the region. Building timbers grow on the spot. Beef, mutton, and hogs, cost little. Antelopes and deer graze quietly beside tame cattle and that the rivers and sea afforded plenty of fish. He recommended that the articles of trade could be brandy, gunpowder, trade guns, swords, knives, striped linen, Indian cottons, glassware of all sorts, beads, kauri shells, brass goods, pewter plates and pots, gunflints, iron bars, and coral. Marchais' dream did not materialize. A trading post was not approved by the French (48).

To suggest that because of this contact with the coastal Mandes there were developed pre-colonial indigenous trading communities in the area before the advent of the colonists would not be true. Organized trading communities like trading posts did not exist. Exchange of goods through barter did take place between the European merchants and the people on this side of the coast but not at designated posts. The merchants stopped at any town or village and

exchange took place. It would be safe to note that as a result of the fairly constant contact with foreign traders foreign goods were introduced into the region and local materials produced by local inhabitants were collected. What is however, very important is that the articles given to the Africans in exchange for their products did not affect their lives or lifestyles qualitatively. These articles were neither necessities nor advanced their production skills. Marchais for example had implied that this was a self sufficient entity producing or endowed with the ability to produce all their needs. Brass rods, kauri shells, and beads could not have affected their lives as much as say the plough could have done. The bottom line of this argument is the exploitation of these coastal people by the Europeans which stretched into the hinterland and which continues today was started at this point in history. One must understand that the articles of exchange produced by the Africans was done by peasants and slaves but on a relatively small scale for two reasons: firstly the constancy of the visits of these European merchants was not assured, and secondly, the primitive nature of the African technology was a hindrance to large scale production. Indeed their main economic activity was the production of food crops and other necessary products for their consumption.

The above evidence shows that the peasant economy in pre-colonial times fits into what has been termed "natural economy" in which the main purpose of production was for simple reproduction of the community. The proceeds of whatever surplus that was exchanged did not constitute the means of simple reproduction in the community. As can be seen therefore, generally their survival and reproduction was totally dependent on the goods produced by themselves inspite of the trade links with the foreign merchants.

provided by the sea, which links did not matter for their existence. It has been proved that until the second quarter of this century many peasants in this region had lived quite independent of their link and contact with the outside world.

## 2.6 Traditional Differentiation

In traditional Mande society there was a marked class and social differentiation between the ruling class and the subject class in terms of power relationships on the one hand, and production and appropriation of goods and services on the other. Much of this differentiation has been noted earlier. Our interest in the following analysis therefore, is to discuss differentiation within the subject class itself and in particular among the peasantry. It can be argued that there was a class and status differentiation between the free peasantry on the one hand and the slaves (ordinary and pawn) on the other. The free peasants were a subject class who provided labour and material support for the welfare of the ruling class, based on custom. They were not subject to tribute. Loyalty to the tribe was never demanded in Mande custom, it was given as a norm. Being loyal to the tribe meant loyalty to the ruling class especially the chief who was the embodiment of the ancestors and therefore the tribe. Loyalty was not given in return for protection. They were protected by the tribe from both internal and external calamities. In economic function the subject class tilled the soil and kept most of the products for their own consumption. Only a relatively small portion of their proceeds were surrendered for the upkeep of the ruling class.

The pawned (those given away as collateral in loans) surrendered large portions of their products to their master's households of which they were members. A relatively small balance was kept to dispose of as one saw fit. It can be seen that in this case there was a direct form of surplus appropriation from the producers by their masters who more or less constituted the non-producing class. This surrendering of surplus remained obligatory until the debt for which they were pawned was liquidated in full. The distinction between the free peasants and the pawned in their relations of production distinguished the sub-classes.

Ordinary slaves were also cultivators of land and in practice both land and means of production belonged to the master.\* This was quite unlike the earlier two sub-classes discussed above. They could be given away as gifts to other people or resold but not beyond the first generation.\*\* Ordinary slaves surrendered all they produced from the farms to their masters. In return they obtained all their means of subsistence from their master's household. Unlike the earlier two sub-classes, they had no free access to land even though land was in ample supply. The only land they had access to was that allocated to their masters. This is a significant difference between the ordinary slaves and the pawned and peasantry.

There was no structural differentiation within the peasantry where social relations of production were concerned because ownership of land from which such differentiation could have been derived was absent. There was no land "owning" peasant and no "non

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\* This does not mean that the master owned the land, it only means that the land had been allocated to him for his use during that planting season and would revert to the community thereafter.

\*\* A slave's child born during slavery was not considered a slave and so could not be sold into slavery.

land-owning" peasant. In principle and in practice everybody had equal access to land especially agricultural land. The peasantry was therefore homogeneous in class terms, although the peasants were not equal in simple economic terms of differences in relative wealth or standard of living. Large families logically produced more than small families but the difference could also be noted in their consumption rate. The workforce in a large family meant that the family fulfilled a more complex economic function than a small family of three or four. For example, while a man and his three wives and four of his seven sons in a fairly large family worked in the rice farm, the other three sons could go deer hunting, two of his four daughters could go fishing in the nearby stream, while one of the other two would be preparing the family meal and the last one could be nursing the baby. Such a differentiation and its consequences provided a surer means of economic enhancement over a family with say a total of four persons whose diversification and ultimate production in the economic process was limited.

Access to land differed only between early and late comers to a particular village or town. The founders of a new settlement would understandably have access to a nearby (but not necessarily better) agricultural land. This could not lead to a marked differentiation in the quantity of the products between the early and late comers. A levelling would however, ultimately emerge when the nearby bushes would have been all farmed and everybody had to go far away from the town or village to choose suitable areas for farming. There was, as a matter of course, a significant differentiation between the headman or village chief and the rest of the villagers. Custom provided that all the other able-bodied peasants of the village provided free services for him during the farming season. This was

scheduled in such a way that it did not hinder work on individual farms. If he was a chief, he was invariably kin to the tribal chief on whose behalf such services were to be rendered to the village chief. If he was a village headman, he could have been chosen by the tribal chief for such physical powers as might have been displayed in war or some other displayed skill like leadership ability. In this case such services were rendered him as a political functionary of the chief. Consequently village chiefs/headmen were wealthier (if their products could have been given market value) than the ordinary villagers because they were able to produce more surplus through the extra family labour provided by other villagers.

Status differentiation was also significant in the peasant community. Class differentiation was unimportant. Status differentiation could be seen in terms of political and ritual functions and in terms of age, marital status, membership of either the poro (secret society exclusively for men) or the sande (its counterpart for females), and sex. A village community was usually led by an "elderly" man who was the leader of the whole community. He was held in high respect by his fellow villagers either because of his link with the tribal aristocracy, or because of his political office and his elderly personality, or both. His status was therefore higher than any other villager. Immediately below him in status were members of the council of elders. Following these were the village doctor (incorrectly but variously referred to in some literature as "witch" doctor, "fetish" priest, medicine man, etc.), and zosa (leaders of the poro and sande secret societies). These categories of people were higher in status than the rest of the population because of their specialization skills and knowledge

often sought by the rest of the people in times of need. The female ross for example were the midwives of the peasant community and were even consulted on prenatal and postnatal complications, or just to advise a pregnant woman. In fact in many Mande communities the village doctor was a member of the chief's council of elders.

There was status differentiation also in age, marital status, membership of the secret societies, and sex. Age was a great dividing line and elder people were therefore higher in status than anybody else in the community besides the chief. It must be footnoted that where the chief happened to be comparatively younger, he set the example of showing tremendous deference to the elders because of their knowledge and experience which came with age - or so it was presumed. Equally importantly, it was considered that in their youth, they had played their part to ensure the survival and perpetuity of their community. Next in status were the married men and women, then came the single men and women, and finally children. It is important to note that because wives were considered as properties of their husbands, status differentiation in sex was present and very important. There was even division of labour along sexual lines and the notion of superior-inferior - as in Europe in the not too distant past - was clearly present.

The father was always regarded as head of the household and this accorded him with a higher status because of the varied responsibilities associated with his role. If the father (husband and head of household) died, the wife or wives and their children looked up to the family of the deceased for protection and sustenance until it was decided whether she could marry a brother of the deceased or be given the "freedom" to marry someone else outside of the family of the late husband. The widow/s is/are always



advised to marry within the family if any children resulted from the marriage as the welfare of the children - which was considered paramount - was thought to be more secure among the immediate kinsmen than outside of their circle. Decisions on important matters that concerned a whole family were taken by the father in consultation with his wife. This is contrary to popular understanding of the role of the African wife, in the decision making process. Our findings show that heads of households always consulted their wives on all important matters affecting the welfare of the household. This consultation was however, done in private and the husband made the decisions in public. Where a man had more than one wife, he always asked the head wife (who would always act for him and make decisions for the smooth operation of the household whenever he was absent for protracted periods). Children were always excluded from the decision making process.

As has been shown, it is safe to suggest that in pre-colonial Mande peasant society, status and not class formed the important basis for differentiation. This phenomenon indeed still persists today. On the other hand class differentiation has now become important and taken on a different form which will be examined later.

### Conclusion

It is clear from the description and historical analysis presented that the dominant mode of production that existed in pre-capitalist Liberia was what we suggest calling the Chieftain Mode of Production. Others have preferred to call it invariably the Domestic, or Communal, or Lineage Mode. The suggestion of an Asiatic mode of production on this part of the Grain coast is hereby

rejected because of its inadequacy to characteristically fit what obtained in this social formation. The society under discussion lacked either variants - direct exploitation and indirect exploitation through taxation on the one hand, and profit from trade on the other - which consist of the Asiatic mode of production. The protagonists of the exploitation theory have woefully failed to relate its historical explanation to what obtains in this context. Indeed there were relatively strong states capable of exercising control over the subject class, embark on simple public works projects like road and bridge construction, and moderate defence walls against external enemies. But to suggest that these manifest similarities were conclusive to dub such a society as practising the Asiatic mode of production is as unacceptable as asserting that it practised the Tributary Mode of Production. As for the latter, it is crucially important to note that the relationship between a chief and his subjects was such that both parties constituted the whole i.e. the tribe. The Chief got his mandate more or less (but more so) through ancestry which marked him quite apart say from a European King who claimed divine right and less so ancestry. To suggest that contribution to a chief's sustenance is tribute payment is to show a lack of understanding of the modus operandi of the system and complicating a rather simple and straight forward social organization.

Since the chapter also deals with the general structural characteristics of the peasant economy and society in the "pre-colonial" era, we shall summarize these characteristics in a sort of model which will serve as a base for the historical and empirical study of peasant transformation in "colonial" and "post colonial" times. This model is a generalisation, abstracted from

the specific historical conditions of the Liberian peasants in the "pre-colonial" period.

i. The peasant household is the basic unit of production and consumption. Kinship forms the basis of the social relations of production. The basic economic activities are usually undertaken by members of the household however, the use of extra-family labour through the traditional institution of labour exchange or reciprocity is a common practice. This arrangement accounts for the surplus production above the subsistence needs of the household.

ii. The village community consists of members who are largely related through kinship or affinal ties. Normally a village is a self sufficient or rather self dependent community. Here the market and its role are both minimal and insignificant. Most socio-economic activities are based on interpersonal and the general inter-dependence of the villagers which sometimes require group cooperation.

iii Structurally and culturally the members of a village community are homogenous. They have an access to land which is usually overseen by the village chief/headman who invariably is the representative of the Tribal chief who in turn, is the chief custodian of all the Tribe's lands. Economic differentiation is a quantitative rather than a qualitative one, but there is a degree of differentiation in social status defined by role. Animism forms the basis of the cultural tradition as well as a guide to one's customary practice. The Foro and Sanda - traditional schools for boys and girls respectively transformed into male and female secret societies - define the social behaviour and one's position in relation to others not only in the village but in the tribe at large.

iv The pattern of marriage is simple and takes two trends: intra-village; and intra-tribe are, on the one hand, the most regular pattern. On the other hand, a Paramount of Town or Village chief of one tribe, who is in a military pact of mutual defence or a non-aggression treaty with a chief of a nearby tribe, may consolidate their alliance by giving one of his daughters in marriage to a son of his ally. Or simply as a matter of goodwill. Otherwise extra-tribal marriages are few and far between. It is to be noted however, that kinship and marriage ties extend beyond village boundaries and provide some linkage among different villages.

v The basic economic activity is agriculture combined with secondary activities like fishing, animal husbandry, hunting, crafts, etc. Specialization in a single economic activity is generally unknown hence there is no clear separation between agriculture and industry. The technology used in the performance of economic activities for their subsistence and reproduction is simple. Consequently the forces of production are at a relatively low level of development.

vi With regard to inter-class relationship, if such societies should be looked at in class terms, it can be said that the peasantry as a class is more or less subjected to the power domain of the ruling "class". The relationship between the two "classes" however, cannot be said to be antagonistic and opposed and it is very seldom that the peasantry as "a-class-in-itself" is transformed into "political actors" or "a-class-for-itself". It is safe to suggest that pre-capitalist Mande peasant society was characterized

by "low classness". Whatever was the case, avoidance was often preferred to defiance or direct confrontation with the chief and elders who could be looked at as the "ruling class".

vii Movement from one locality to another was not particularly common in Mende peasant community unless as a response to natural catastrophes like flood or drought.

By the early 19th century capital investment by Americans began on the Grain Coast for the exploitation of economic resources through the repatriation of the freed slaves from the United States of America to found what became the Liberian State. This action and all it entailed brought about a new kind of contradiction between the foreign interests and the indigenous ruling "class". This was manifested through a series of struggles between the foreigners - seen as agents of extra-territorial power - and their supporters on the one hand and the indigenous rulers on the other. With the subjugation of the indigenes through the use of force and their subsequent appeasement through treaties of peace and friendship, the way was paved for the establishment of a "colonial" state, responsible for providing appropriate conditions for the development of colonial capitalism. How this was infused into the matrix of the social formation and the consequences of the same on the peasantry will be discussed in the following chapter.

## FOOTNOTES

Chapter II

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4. J. Goody, Technology, Tradition, and the State in Africa (London: 1971), p.21.
5. P.L. Wickins, op. cit., p.234.
6. The following have made significant contributions to the development of this concept: A.G. Hopkins, An Economic History of West Africa (London: 1980) (see Chapter 2); W. Rodney, A History of the Upper Guinea Coast 1845-1900 (London: 1970); J.F.A. Ajayi and M. Croder, History of West Africa (New York: 1976), Vol.I; N. Asikwe, Liberia in World Politics (Connecticut: 1934); R.W. Kilkenny, "The Slave Mode of Production in Pre-colonial Dahomey"; M. Mason, "Production, Penetration, and Political Formation: The Ouida State 1857-1901"; R. Roberts, "Fishing for the State: The Political Economy of the Middle Niger Valley" in Crummay and Stewart, Modes of Production in Africa: The Pre-colonial Era (London: 1981).
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8. R. Kilkenny, op. cit., p.28.
9. B. Hindess and P. Hirst, Precapitalist Mode of Production (London: 1975), p.126.
10. R. Kilkenny, op. cit., p.160.
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16. B.J.K. Anderson, Journeys to Masarda (London: 1971).
17. S. Holsoe, "Economic Activities in the Liberia Area: The Pre-European Period to 1900" in Dorjahn and Isaac, Essays on the Economic Anthropology of Liberia and Sierra Leone (Philadelphia: 1979), p.69.
18. G. Meillassoux, Anthropologie économique des Guoro de Côte d'Ivoire (Paris: 1964); G. Meillassoux, Maidens, Meat and Money: Capitalism and the Domestic Community (London: 1981).
19. C. Coquery-Vidrovitch, in Gutkind and Wallerstein, op. cit., p.109.
20. Sir Harry Johnston, Liberia, Vol.I (London: 1906), pp.30-72.
21. A. Karnga, A History of Liberia (Liverpool: 1926), p.5.
22. J. Guanuu, Liberian History Before 1857 (Monrovia: 1980), p.10.
23. Jan Vassina, R. Mauny and L. Thomas, The Historian in Tropical Africa (London: 1964), p.87, quoted in W. Rodney, op. cit.
24. Crummay and Stewart, op. cit., p.24.
25. Lucy Mair (1977) has argued that such political communities have their own territories whether or not they are organised in the form of states as indeed they had their governments and laws.
26. H. Johnston, op. cit., Chapter 1, Vol.1.
27. G. Brown, Economic History of Liberia (Washington: 1941), Chapter 2.
28. Greenberg (1966:8) has referred to them as the Mande, West Atlantic and Kwa and as sub-families of the Niger-Congo family of languages. The Mande speakers share a common origin and include the Lorma, Kpella, Gbandi, Vai, Mende, Mandingo, Mano and Gio ethnic groups. Together they account for over half of the population of Liberia which has a total of sixteen ethnic groups.
29. H. Johnston, op. cit., pp.1073-1074.
30. See T.J.B. Walker, History of Liberia (Boston: 1926), pp.54-55, and also J. Guanuu, op. cit., p.26.
31. H. Lynch (Ed.), Black Spokesman: Selected Published Writings of E.W. Blyden (London: 1971), p.71.

32. The poro is an exclusive male secret society widespread among the Mandes except for the Mandingoes. It has been discussed in several works on the Mandes or sections of this group. I have discussed the functions of this secret society at length in my unpublished Master's thesis. For other works dealing with the subject, see for example: W. Rodney, op. cit., Chapter 1; K.L. Little, The Mende of Sierra Leone (London: 1951); G.W. Brown, Economic History of Liberia, Washington: 1941).
33. E. Steinhart, op. cit., pp.115-116.
34. B. Hindess and P. Hirst, op. cit., pp.175-220.
35. Stewart, op. cit., pp.80-110.
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38. R. Firth, Primitive Economies of the New Zealand Maori (London: 1929), p.360.
39. Maquet and Nagiziki, "Land Tenure: Rights in Ancient Ruanda", in Z. and J. Koczaki, An Economic History of Tropical Africa Vol.I: The Pre-colonial Period (London: 1977), p.71.
40. Max Gluckman, "Land Tenure: Group and Independent Rights", in Z. and J. Koczaki, op. cit., pp.55-57.
41. G. Brown, op. cit., p.72.
42. See Eric Wolf, Peasants (New Jersey: 1966), pp.50-51.
43. History has it that even the Vais were once forest dwellers but they travelled to the sea coast in search of salt water i.e. the sea. In the process they waged war on the Golas - another Mande tribe - who they pushed back from the sea coast. Today both peoples live side by side but the Vais retained the sea coast.
44. See R. Luxemburg's concept of "natural economy", quoted by B. Brady, "The Destruction of the Natural Economy", Economy and Society, 5, 2 (1975), p.127.
45. See H. Bernstein, "African Peasantries - a Theoretical Framework", in Journal of Peasant Studies, 6, 4 (1979), p.423.
46. Pitt-Rivers, Clash of Cultures (London: 1927), p.210.
47. H. Johnston, op. cit., Vol.I, p.72.
48. H. Johnston, op. cit., Vol.I, pp.73-103.



For two hundred and twenty-eight years has the colored man toiled over the soil of America, under a burning sun and a driver's lash - plowing, planting, reaping, that white men might roll in ease, their hands unhardened by labor, and their brows unmoistened by the water of genial toil; and now that the moral sense of mankind is beginning to revolt at this system of fond treachery and cruel wrong, and is demanding its overthrow, the mean and cowardly oppressor is mediating plans to expel the colored man entirely from the country. Shame upon the guilty wretches that dare propose, and all that countenance such a proposition. We live here - have lived here - have a right to live here, and mean to live here.

- Frederick Douglass  
The North Star - Jan. 26, 1947

CHAPTER IIICOLONIAL TRANSFORMATION AND THE PEASANTRYIntroduction

The last chapter described the structure of some of the social formations in pre-colonial Liberian society. Presently we intend to recount the events that led to the establishment of Liberia as a de facto colony of the United States (1). Rather than examine the demographic, political and economic changes that obtained in the region which could have given rise to a foreign intervention into the affairs of this region, it is in this case necessary to provide a description of the social, political, and demographic changes that were taking place in the United States that sowed the seed of colonization and of course the economic expectations that were to be obtained from such intervention and the imposition of a colonial administration in 1822. Because colonial rule brought its own effects to bear on the politics, economy, demography, and social relations among the people of the region, it becomes necessary therefore to discuss changes in these respects up to the middle of this century when Liberia became firmly established as a peripheral capitalist economy.

The rationale for such a background exercise is to show how these relatively stable peasant communities were melted with the shock of dislocation and eventually integrated into the colonial economy and politics. Consequently the peasants had to rise to these changes which transformed them over time into what they are today. The introduction of a peripheral capitalist mode of production is seen in the "enclave economies" of first plantation,

and later mining. This function produced, as will be seen later, what is considered the most significant contribution to the transformation of the peasantry through the articulation of the latter with the former.

The present situation of the transformed Liberian peasantry discussed in this section of this study should be considered basically as a result of the long association and a long historical experience beginning with the settler impact on the indigenous people since 1822. Obviously our paramount interest is in the present reality in which the Liberian peasantry finds itself and within which it operates. We hold however, that for a clear understanding of this exercise, it is extremely necessary to firstly revert to the historical milieu which gave rise to these circumstances and secondly (and against that background) locate it within the larger political, economic, and social matrix of which the peasantry is a part.

To do so effectively it seems necessary to explore the structural conditions of peripheral capitalism by distinguishing it from central capitalism even though both are generated from the general capitalist mode of production. Because we have identified the structural conditions of both central and peripheral capitalism and summarized them elsewhere in this work, an attempt will be made to elaborate only two of these conditions here: i) generalized commodity production and ii) extended reproduction of capital. These two are specifically important to the workings of the peripheral capitalist mode of production.

As a matter of course it must be stressed that in colonial societies the introduction of generalized commodity production took a 'disarticulated form' and is radically different from what

obtained in metropolitan capitalist development in which generalized commodity production was "integrated into both industry and agriculture" (2). The circuit of commodity production in a peripheral social formation cannot be internally completed except through its links with the metropolitan economy whereas in the case of metropolitan capitalism the circuit is internally completed (3). Consequently generalized commodity production in colonised societies in its structural context is not limited to a single social formation because of its link to the metropolis. Geertz provides a useful example of this situation in his comparative study of the economic development of Java and Japan, in which he concludes that a "disarticulated" form of development exists in the former while an integrated process of development occurs in the latter, especially between industry and agriculture (4). What can be seen to result from these two shades of development experiences is the success story of Japan's economic development endeavours as opposed to the failure of the development process of "agricultural involution" as obtains in Java.

The next structural condition is "the extended reproduction of capital" in peripheral societies, where the surplus value generated in them is generated by "metropolitan" or central capitalism (5). This of course provides for the development of the productive forces in central and not peripheral social formations. As a result of this process capitalist development in peripheral social formations assumes a different imperative and therefore contributes to the factors which explain the lack of momentum in the process of transition to capitalism in the peripheral social formations. These structural conditions do provide a strong leverage in the argument for the specificity of capitalist development in peripheral social formation against what takes place in central social formation.

### 3.1 Colonization Considered: Idea and Reality

Even before America's war of independence a number of influential Americans had started considering solutions to what they considered a major political and social problem in the American polity - the proper place of blacks in the American "civilisation". The search for a solution to this "problem" was complicated by the fact that the people in question were either slaves still in bondage, freed slaves or descendants of either group. The American war of independence brought many blacks to the ranks of the American armed forces and with demobilisation at the end of that war the future of these blacks brought this matter into a sharp focus. Could the black population be assured of the individual's right to liberty and human dignity and the right to fully participate in the democratic process that was being tailored around them? In short, were they citizens of the United States of America in fact and in deed? As this discussion took place between and among slave holders, politicians, clergymen, businessmen, and ordinary Americans, the issue was turned into that of discovering a country to which free blacks could be removed, rather than how best these people could be rehabilitated and afforded the opportunities for total integration into American society in the light of their experiences in the dehumanizing condition of slavery. Slave holders and plantation owners could condescend to discuss the problem only as far as they saw the presence of freed slaves in their communities posing pressure on the remaining slaves to seek their freedom, in one way or another. The (white American) individual's right to own and defend property they argued, was enshrined in the very essence of America and therefore the institution of slavery itself - with slaves as property - was not up for discussion.

White American middle class bigots viewed the black situation from two angles. Firstly, that once slaves became freed, politicians should do all in their power to rid America of the freed blacks as, according to them, the presence of these people was not conducive to the public good. Secondly, and more importantly, it was realised by Americans with colonial ambitions that these people could serve their purposes and fit into their projects and become a source of wealth if they were deported to their "natural" environment where they could serve their colonial enterprises. American liberal opinion galvanized into the great American dream of liberty, rights and dignity, cowed before the contradiction of freedom for some and enslavement or deportation for others. Philanthropists and clergymen had their own biases. Those who introduced the moral fibre into the discussion were enthused by the "famous" 1772 decision of Lord Chief Justice Mansfield of the English Supreme Court, when he ruled that any slave who set foot on English soil would no longer be a slave. Slaves who fled to England as a result of that ruling were expatriated to Sierra Leone as an asylum for them. The relative success of the Sierra Leonean experiment was always referred to those Americans who preferred emancipation with expatriation for the slaves and even the free blacks of America. Their position was that as in the case of Sierra Leone, another settlement peopled by the same kind of people (i.e. freed slaves) would be equally successful.

These moralists - armed with the Wilberforce ruling - took refuge under the Blackstone treatise to question the legality of the institution of slavery itself just as Blackstone had refuted the accepted origins of the right to own slaves as reasoned. He had argued:

- " i. That the law of 'nature or nations' endows one with the right to kill an enemy in the absolute necessity of defending oneself from the actual danger of one losing one's own life at the hands of that enemy. Capturing and enslaving the enemy who might have posed a threat, real or potential, to one's life - which has been a matter of historical acceptance - negates the inference of real danger to, and the absolute necessity of defending one's own life. This act abuses natural justice and renders the action indefensible.
- ii. As for the purchase of slaves, Blackstone observed that it was incomprehensible for anyone to claim ownership rights over another under the guise of the simple notion of purchase. He submitted that sale implies an exchange of equivalence of human life and liberty, the question of the same cannot arise. Consequently such exchange was, by reason, illogical.
- iii. For those who held or tended to hold the offspring of slaves into slavery, the jurist argued that the nullity of the first two accounts stated above essentially provides that if natural law and reason cannot hold a parent as a slave, it would be conclusively remiss for same to reduce an offspring into the same condition." (6)

This moral stand, whether well intentioned or with ulterior motives, was advanced and supported by philanthropists and clergymen, who found slavery theologically unacceptable. It would be erroneous however, to assume that the seed of colonization which germinated into the Republic of Liberia would have matured without the support of powerful politicians and people of influence in the American establishment.

The history of America's African Colonization Movement gives a place of prominence to some christian ministers under the inspiration of the Rev. Samuel Hopkins, who had brewed the idea of sending freed blacks back to Africa - but as originally thought, not for permanent settlement. A young physician called Thornton, of Virginia, is credited for being the first person "who conceived, and

attempted to carry into effect, a plan for a colony of free coloured people on the western coast of Africa" (7). Hopkins' plan was to recruit and train as teachers and preachers those black people who possessed the requisite inclination to return to Africa, "to christianize, evangelize, and civilize" the "savage natives" of that continent. The question that immediately comes to mind is what generated such a sudden change of mind when the Rev. Hopkins himself was a one time slave owner and dealer? It is our view that after Hopkins had suffered a change in fortune which cost him his slaves, he suddenly realised that the social evils in white American society were all perpetrated by the black portion of the Americann population, and therefore it was essential to stop Africans from encouraging the slave trade. He figured that this would be made possible if Africans were to be introduced into the high moral principles of christianity. Hence his plan was started by a campaign to christianize those blacks on the American front who had not till then accepted christianity. Hopkins' idea however, became a definite plan for colonization after discussions with his clergymen friends especially Rev. Styles, who later became President of Yale. Funds were raised and the trail blazers were sent to Princeton in 1776 but the outbreak of the American revolutionary war brought what became known as "Hopkinsianism" to a sudden halt and his colonial ambition was never resuscitated (8).

Hopkins however, can only be seen as one of the protagonists of a new and growing band of the "Great Awakening" clerics for whom evangelism - at the financial cost of the Faithful - was the surest way of spreading the faith. Their basic doctrine was that of "disinterested benevolence" which would hasten God's kingdom on earth in which "clergymen would command places of power". Several



societies were established in an attempt "to touch every class or group that did not fit into the ideal" christian society the organizers envisaged. The idea, it would seem, was firstly to incorporate the large number of freed slaves into the corpus of the christian church, imbue them with christian principles and morals so that such teaching would become an ameliorating factor on their rather understandable hostile attitudes to the wider American society which continued to expect docility from them. This training in pacifism it appears, was meant to subdue those free blacks who refused expatriation, into accepting their "inferiority" rather than raise questions or to indulge in violence. Of course it will be absurd to suggest that everyone who identified with the benevolent organizations or even the colonization movement did so for the same reasons. It is safe however, to suggest that as the motives were different, so were the reasons and expectations.

Meanwhile the number of freed blacks steadily increased, to arouse the attention of Rev. Robert Finley of New Jersey - an associate of Hopkins - who observed that because they were illiterate and with no knowledge of the Bible they were to fall into pauperism, vice, and infidelity. This view reinforces our earlier stated suspicion that this programme of evangelisation supported by the clerics was cunningly meant to dissuade the black community from mustering all available resources and forces at their command and using the same against the forces of oppression and from assisting in their own way to seek the liberty of those members of their community who were still languishing in the despicable dungeons of slavery. In his words, "their number increases greatly and their wretchedness too" (9). It is reported that in his county alone there were - in 1816 when the colonization society was formed - 1500

free blacks indicating a rising trend, because whereas there were less than sixty thousand free blacks in all of the United States in 1790, the number, by 1820 - two years before the first colonists set out for Liberia - was a quarter million. Finley "lamented" because the distribution of tracts and bibles to free blacks who were living in abject poverty and squalor did not, as Hopkins had hoped, improve their social condition let alone bring them to equality with their white compatriots. This must be seen in the light of the experience that far from a concern for the deprivation in which the black community lived, Finley's lament was that their presence in the United States would give rise to chaos and uncertainty among the population in general and in the slave communities in particular. Hence, he saw their physical removal from the United States as the only solution to the problem of the free blacks. He sought support for the establishment of a benevolent society for the colonization of free blacks in Africa. Attempts to dissuade him from embarking on his colonization mission met with the resolute answer, "I know this scheme is from God" (19). Finley reportedly drew a lot of encouragement from the 1787 success story of British "philanthropists" who had repatriated freed slave to Freetown on the West African coast which subsequently became the Crown Colony of Sierra Leone. Finley's obsession with colonization and his frequent reference to the profitable commercial link between Sierra Leone and Britain can only be adequately explained within the profit motive which lay at the back of his mind. His anxiety grew even wilder when it was reported that a relatively wealthy black man (Paul Cuffee) had, in 1815, led a group of some forty freed slaves - from his own funds - to Sierra Leone. Finley then enlisted the moral and material support of the most influential clergymen in New England

for the establishment of an African Educational Society for the sole purpose of training black teachers and preachers to lead the proposed African colony. With this support he moved to Washington to sell his ideas to the politicians. It is useful to note that even in the spirit of his christian benevolence Finley continuously stressed that the colony "if wisely formed" would "more than compensate for every expense" through trade and commerce (11). This reference exonerates our conviction about his real, but hidden, motive.

While the christian ministers were seeking their own solution to the "black problem" the presence of so many black freed slaves in the slave states of the south of the United States seemed to have posed a threat to the continuous survival of the institution of slavery itself. Slave masters saw the free slaves as an incentive to the slaves to run away, revolt or simply become recalcitrant and thereby destroy the slave economy in which the south was deeply rooted. It was even suggested that all the crimes of the cities and the many known social upheavals that deprivation engenders, could, at that time, be traced to the free slaves. The solution for these now became the province of the politicians.

Thomas Jefferson, who in 1776 had written the much quoted clause "... all men are created equal ..." now saw things differently in 1781. Shick reveals that Jefferson's championship of the emancipation and his subsequent remarks about the freed slave and especially about equality between the races could only qualify him as racist. For Jefferson had observed that blacks were "inferior to the whites in the endowments of both mind and body" (12). Writing extensively on the subject he observed:

"Among the Romans emancipation required one effort. The slave, when made free, might mix with, without mixing the blood of his master. But with us a second step is necessary, unknown to history. When freed, he is to be removed beyond the reach of mixture". (13)

Jefferson's solution to the degradation of man by man was simply colonization. He enlisted the support of one Ferdinando Fairfax (an influential Virginian) who shared his views that the presence of black persons within the white community would "endanger the peace of society". Together they ruled out intermarriage as "very repugnant to the general feelings". Fairfax, arguing in support of colonization in Africa, their "native climate", suggested that this would not only render any hostilities impossible but that the emancipated slaves would carry the torch of christianity to Africa's "rude race of men".

Meanwhile Jefferson's bid for the Presidency of the United States was assumed. This success alongside the influence of Fairfax made a tremendous impact on the members of the Virginia State Legislature and particularly on Governor Monroe. The legislature, in anticipation of identifying with this famous son of Virginia decided to uphold his thoughts as expressed in his notes. They therefore unanimously passed the following resolution:

"IN THE HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
December 31, 1800

Resolved, that the Governor be requested to correspond with the President of the United States on the subject of purchasing lands without the limits of this State, whither persons obnoxious to the laws or dangerous to the peace of society may be removed.

A copy from the House of Delegates.

WILLIAM WIRT, Clerk, H.D." (14)

Although Alexander argues that "this resolution by itself" bears no "reference to the free negroes" it must be seen in the

light of Jefferson's own position on the issue of ridding the United States of these people whose imagination he had referred to as "dull, tasteless, and anomalous". In that spirit and in his resolve to expel the black race from the United States his response to the Virginian legislators was most revealing. He suggested to them that the existence of such a colony would be undesirable within the confines of the United States and that the possibility that such a colony might in future sue to "become a part of our Union" was equally offensive. That it was also unlikely that Spain who had territories on United States' southern and western boundaries would be disposed to accept these people. He proposed the West Indies, peopled "by their own race and colour" with the appropriate climate conditions and shielded from the likes of other men, seem to have been naturally formed to "become receptacles of blacks transplanted into this hemisphere". He especially mentioned St. Domingo, of whose ruler he thought so little to have assumed his willingness "on many considerations to receive even that description which would be exiled for acts deemed criminal by us, but meritorious by him" (15). Jefferson earmarked Africa as a place of "last and undoubted resort" if all others failed to materialize. Thus Jefferson and the State of Virginia under Gov. Monroe had added the political will and leverage to the voices of the christian ministers in their search for a colony for the black race of America. Communications on this subject continued between Richmond and Washington until Jefferson's tenure came to a close but certainly that did not wet his anxiety to deport the black population to Africa. In response to a letter he received from one Ann Miffling requesting his opinion on the feasibility of a plan for a colony on the west coast of Africa which she was considering, Jefferson again

stressed how he had been always convinced that colonization was "the most desirable measure" for the black population. He reiterated how, during his incumbency as President, he had made approaches to the British and the Portuguese governments but none of those arrangements were successful. He assured Ann Miffling that were she to launch the plan, he would certainly "be willing to do anything ... to give it effect and safety". Jefferson then wished the "United States would themselves undertake to make such an establishment on the coast of Africa" which in his view, exclusive of motives of humanity, had tremendous "commercial advantages".

It can then be seen from this historical evidence that quite apart from the many other considerations associated with Jefferson such as being an emancipator and philanthropist, his real motives emanated from his deep-rooted racism; his untiring effort to see America get its share of the then flourishing trade and commercial activities of the African coasts which were then monopolised by European nations. This was a revelation of his die-hard capitalist attitude and mentality, and his desire to see America establish a sphere of influence overseas as European nations were doing. What better proof does one need to show that Jefferson was not an emancipator, than the fact that he did not even give liberty to his own slaves (16). In this respect he is likened to Dr. Samuel Hopkins, who in spite of his leading role in the rehabilitation of freed slaves was himself the owner of a slave whom he did not free but preferred to sell and allegedly spent the proceeds for the training of his black missionaries for Africa. It is difficult not to conclude that the primary motive of these so called benevolent men of God, philanthropists, who were also slave owners, businessmen of sorts, plantation owners, and powerful politicians was capitalist

expansion through colonialism. William Thornton, a physician, and one of the earliest individuals who planned to establish a colony on the African coast could not have betrayed this motive any better, when observed that from his colony commercial activity will be enhanced between the United States and Africa. "By proper encouragement and perseverance, a most valuable country would soon become the seat of commerce, of arts and the manufactures, of plenty, of peace, and happiness" (17).

Finley moved to Washington to launch his appeal to the national conscience to support his colonization plan. His arrival coincided with the meeting of Congress in session and through the instrumentality of his brother-in-law E.B. Caldwell, then Clerk of the United States Supreme Court and F.S. Key of "Star Spangled Banner" fame, the list of supporters and for sympathizers soon included some of the most powerful and influential in the land. Their organizational meeting of 21 December 1816 was presided over by Henry Clay (speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives) who made the opening remarks. Of this meeting Staundenraus wrote:

"Those present included congressmen, senators, clergymen, and wealthy citizens of the District ... Clay turned to slavery. Colonization was for free Negroes, not slaves. He bluntly warned colonization must avoid the "delicate question" of emancipation. Men of the South and West, he asserted, had attended the meeting upon this important condition. Clay's soft spoken warning was a rebuke to Finley's claim that colonization would eventually extinguish slavery." (18)

One week later a constitution was adopted in the hall of the U.S. House of Representatives and the "American Society for colonizing the Free People of Color in the United States" known later as the American Colonization Society (ACS) was formed. Heading its list of elected officers was Bushrod Washington, chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court as President, with Secretary of the Treasury William

Crawford and speaker of the House Henry Clay as two of its many Vice Presidents. The idea of Colonization had been consolidated and plans for putting it into effect had begun but not without opponents.

Throughout the length and breadth of the United States black people were opposed to the ACS and made their position known in newspapers, tracts, rallies, etc. They were joined by Quakers and other people who doubted both the sanity and sincerity of the Colonizers. Perhaps the most notable critic was William Lloyd Garrison who observed that conceived in error of judgement and selfishness, the society rested on "Persecution, ... Falsehood ... Cowardice ... and Infidelity" (19). In one of his many articles, antagonistic to the Society, he wrote in "The Liberator" of 23 April

1931:

"I am prepared to show, that those who have entered into this CONSPIRACY AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS are unanimous in abusing their victims; unanimous in their mode of attack; unanimous in proclaiming the absurdity, that our free blacks are natives of Africa; unanimous in propagating the label, that they cannot be elevated and improved in this country; unanimous in opposing their instruction; unanimous in exciting the prejudices of the people against them; unanimous in apologizing for the crime of slavery; unanimous in conceding the right of the planters to hold their slaves in limited bondage; unanimous in their hollow pretence for colonizing namely, to evangelize Africa; unanimous in their true motive for the measure - a terror lest the blacks should rise to avenge their accumulated wrongs..." (20)

From Garrison's thorough research into the documents, and activities of the ACS it is clear that the society was against emancipation, censured abolition, upheld the property claims of masters over slaves and condemned no one for being a slave holder (21). In spite of this and other opposition, plans were being made for the implementation of the idea of establishing a colony for free blacks on the west coast of Africa.



This account of the birth of the Idea of Colonization could of course be meaningless for its own sake, but when it serves to inform us that benevolence, philanthropy, and evangelism were a guise under which the colonizers hid their real and true motives - to deport free blacks from America; to make free blacks the agents of exploitation among the Africans and thereby benefit directly from the many commercial opportunities that would lay open to them on the West African coast, and by extension involve the American government directly or otherwise in the affairs of the colony, thus making the US a de facto colonial power in absentia - then it serves the indispensable purpose of providing the perspective in which the reality of the colonial state was established and therefore provides the guidance for its later analysis. Indeed it does show the connivance between the US government and the colonization society as was to be seen that:

"... for years the resources of Government were employed "to colonize recaptured Africans, build homes for them, to furnish them with farming utensils, to pay instructors to teach them, to purchase ships for their convenience, to build forts for their protection, to supply them with arms and ammunitions of war, to enlist troops to guard them, and to employ the army and navy in their defence"..." (22)

### 3.2 The Establishment of a Colonial State

1822-1827 is technically Liberia's Colonial Period.\*

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\* Many writers and commentators of the Liberian State have elected to sub-divide the period into "Colonial" and "Commonwealth" between which the significant difference was the glorification of the title of Agent to Governor but all structures remained the same until the end of the latter period when the colonial state was being ushered into independence and a period of neo-colonialism - the longest period of Liberia's history - which has continued to the present.

The colony was established, nurtured, and legitimised - with all the trappings of a colonial state - in this period, declaring its independence with the consent of the American Colonization Society (hereafter ACS) and the U.S. government in the second half of 1847. With the moral, financial and logistic support of the U.S. government, the ACS commissioned agents to locate and "purchase" a suitable place on the West African Coast for its colony. After several fruitless attempts by the agents to persuade the kings (as the chiefs were referred to), Lieutenant R.F. Stockton, captain of a U.S. schooner plying the coast at the time, was detailed to "assist" the agents in securing a piece of land for the colony (23). Stockton used the persuasion of gun boat diplomacy.

"At gun point Lt. Stockton attempted to convince King Peter and other minor Bassa and Day chieftains that the settlers had come as benefactors, not enemies. The American officer successfully negotiated the deed of Cape Mesurado to the colonization society in return for £3,000 worth of muskets, beads, tobacco, gun powder, clothing mirrors, food and rum." (24)

On 25 April 1822 "the American flag was raised on Cape Mesurado" to become the first settlement of what was to become the colony of Liberia - Land of the Free. Other settlements followed with the tactic of "persuasive force".

Some Liberian commentators have argued against Liberia's colonial status because the U.S. did not formally declare Liberia a colony. This narrow definition is to be regretted because it turns on formal status rather than the structural features of a colonial state - all of which we have seen Liberia to have possessed. It might be worth recalling that the British conquest of India too was not undertaken directly under the British crown but through the agency of the East India Company which formally ruled India for 100 years from 1757 to 1857 when the British government took over the government of India directly under the crown. The

characteristic identity of Liberia which was typical of all nineteenth century colonization of Africa - after the initial use of force - was its total dependence on its founder, the United States. Our earlier reference to the political will which gave rise to its establishment and the material support it received from the U.S. government for its continued existence cannot be <sup>over</sup>under-emphasized. These set aside, Liberia displayed other discernible features that made difficult negating its status as a colony of the U.S. For example, while the colonists were all black every agent and governor appointed by the ACS Board of Directors was white. Even J.J. Roberts who was the last governor of the colony and the first president of the Republic was not a full blooded black man. Each agent of the ACS was automatically named the overseer of American government interests in the colony (25). The colonists had no say in choosing who was to rule them. Laws for the governing of the colony were made in Washington and sent to the colony for implementation. Defence of the colony and the physical survival of the colonists were both firmly guaranteed by the mother country. Such accommodation by the U.S. government could not have been without expected returns. Jehudi Ashmun, generally referred to as the founder of Liberia was quick to oblige.

Ashmun had offered his services to the ACS with one purpose in mind - which incidentally was shared by a good number of members of the ACS, i.e. to create a vast commercial empire on the West African coast to be monopolised by American businesses. Curley, Ashmun's biographer had quoted Ashmun as saying:

"The objects of my visit to the African coast are ... To open and superintend a regular, honorable and a permanent trade in the productions of the country, between Cape Mesurado and the vicinity, and the United States. This trade must be first, advantageous to the interests of the society. Second, advantageous to the natives, third, advantageous to the American merchants and fourth, advantageous to myself." (26)

Ashmun's betrayal of the colonial rather than philanthropic intentions of the Board of the ACS could not have been more eloquently stated. One must of necessity be continuously reminded of the thin line between the U.S. government and the ACS, as even President James Monroe had by this time become an active member of the Society. Ashmun's statement therefore, has to be understood in more ways than one. It has to be understood that the vaguely delimited territory acquired by the ACS was no more than ten miles in length and about four miles wide. To have suggested beneficial permanent trade between such a territory and the United States was in the main preposterous. From the date of the ratification of the ACS charter there were outcries throughout the black population against the venture. To have assumed that the numbers of U.S. blacks would have provided the necessary population for the enhancement of a permanent and viable commercial enterprise to bring the kinds of benefits to the U.S. as envisaged by Ashmun was not foreseeable. Ashmun therefore must have been thinking of borrowing a page out of the typical colonial experience - territorial expansion and the subjection of the inhabitants of such acquired territories under U.S.-ACS rule.

Expansion of the territory had two immediate stumbling blocks: (i) the chiefs who had granted lands to the foreigners were under pressure from their peoples to rescind their decisions because the settlers insisted they had "purchased" the land contrary to custom of the indigenous people who could not sell land, and of course because their chiefs got the raw end of the deal (27). (ii) Even among the chiefs who had given their consent for the use of their territories, two of them, George and Kai are said to have issued the following statement:

"The Americans are strangers, who had forgotten their attachment to the land of their fathers; for if not, why had they not renounced their connection with the white men (presumably Ayres and Stockton) altogether and placed themselves under the protection of the Kings of the country?" (28)

The sporadic outbreaks of violence which followed between the indigenous peoples and the settlers threatened the continued existence of the settlement. And so as can be seen, thoughts of territorial expansion by Ashmun must have been entertained solely on the reliance of the use of force - an indispensable factor in the pursuit of colonies; or on deception - through making alliances with chiefs sympathetic to the settlers; or by destabilising the region, or through a mixture of two of the above or all of them. For, in order to turn this "philanthropic" operation into a commercially viable agricultural colony food gardens were not as important as large plantations of exportable commodities such as coffee, sugar and camwood. Food, Ashmun reckoned, could be bought from "natives" nearby in the short run or imported from America if only cash crop agriculture became successful. So the first prerequisite was more land which Ashmun set about to secure. From 1825 to 1835 Ashmun relentlessly pursued his colonial land acquisition policy.

Land already acquired had to be seen to be put to good use if funds for further acquisition had to be made available. Of course, the political and defence capacity of Ashmun to superintend the acquired territories was also one of continuous problem. First, he embarked on providing those infrastructural necessities that enhanced economic development. He built a pier, a market place, a couple of government buildings, and a few rough, all weather roads in the colony. To achieve these public services Ashmun used forced labour. Every male able bodied colonist had to work two days a week on these projects or lose his food ration provided by the ACS. It is to be seen that once these services were available the beneficial

results could be enormous. The pier expedited import-export activities and the market lured the indigenous people into bringing their goods for barter. Second, Ashmun turned his attention to agriculture. He gave every man in the settlement fifteen acres of farm land for farming purposes and if one chose to farm outside the settlement, one received fifty acres of land (29). He entreated the colonists to take agriculture seriously if they had to be independent of the U.S.-ACS connection. He even wrote a book on tropical agriculture for their benefit. The emphasis however, on exportable agricultural products was a far cry for the consolidation of the colony in food sufficiency. Besides these colonists loathed manual work. This summary in T. McCant Stewart makes the point:

"I have seen Liberians who went to the West Coast with reputations for industry sitting idly in dilapidated or rudely constructed houses or walking around abusing the government for not opening roads and building bridges, thus creating prosperity ... then some have plainly said: "I worked hard enough when I was a slave. Here I can lie down when I want and get up when I please; and there is no one to molest or make me afraid."" 30

Ashmun resented this indolent attitude for two reasons, the latter being a consequence of the former: (i) It delayed the consolidation of the colonial state in which the colonial economy could flourish, as in such a climate of affairs the reality of the dreamed ship-loads of coffee, sugar, camwood, and cotton, going to the U.S. from Liberia seemed a far cry. (ii) Ashmun saw in this attitude that the realisation of his personal objective for coming to West Africa i.e. to become rich could be seriously jeopardised. These he could not compromise and therefore used all means at his disposal to encourage a plantation economy in which the majority of settlers were to participate leaving the more lucrative business of trade to him and a few friends. For example, he convinced the managers that unless they granted a monopoly for the distribution of

liquor to a single wholesaler the colony would become a den of drunkards. The monopoly was duly granted but to Ashmun who distributed rum and whiskey at a profit of 300 percent (31). This policy of limiting trade to a few chosen settlers and forcing the rest into agricultural production was certainly not geared to self sufficiency as the agricultural products most emphasised were meant to link the colony to European and American markets. Of course the administration's role was to provide conditions conducive to the development of colonial capitalism, hence the necessary infrastructure like a pier, a market and a storehouse were already constructed.

The Agent pursued his commercial policies alongside his expansionist ones which were meant to protect American trade and shipping. He demolished towns in which French and Spanish traders were established, with the active support of the U.S. Navy and pleaded with them to help "crush" those who took advantage of the "exposed state of American commerce on this coast" (32). He used tremendous force under the guise of inhibiting the slave trade among the chiefs to bring their territories and trade under the colonial administration's sphere of influence - this was tantamount to virtual annexation. The chiefs fiercely resisted this coercion for two main reasons: Ashmun's own inability to distinguish between chattel slavery and domestic slavery or the pawn system which was then prevalent among chiefs and the relatively well-to-do people of this region. The abolition of all forms of slavery they reckoned would threaten the bedrock of the prevalent social relations of production. Secondly the chiefs were rightly afraid of subordinating their own authority to that of some alien agent. But in spite of the atrocities committed against the indigenous leadership and population their lands were seized, annexed, or given

away to the agent from the fear of sheer show of strength. And as the colony grew in size, population, commerce and influence but not in the much expected agriculture. Ashmun had seen the settlement grow by the time of his retirement in 1828 from one hundred and fifty six on Cape Mesurado to a few more settlements with a total population of about two thousand not including those slaves recaptured on the high seas, nor those sent by independent colonization societies which were mushrooming in Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania and Mississippi (33).

The years 1829-1839 were a difficult period in the life of the entire colonial enterprise. Of course the rather clear vision of both the Board of Managers and their site agents for the establishment of a great commercial empire in Africa to link its products with the markets of Europe and America still existed. This was clearly restated by every agent of the period. There was however, a perennial inadequacy of funds from the Board to the settlers and the inability of the settlers to get exports to the desired expectations of the Board and its agents. The indigenous people on the other hand were not unanimous in their approach to the settlers' requests (or rather demands) to accept "the friendship and protection" of the colonial administration. While some of them accepted (rather were coerced to accept) "the friendship and protection", others rejected it as a covert means to divest them of their lands and for the settlers to establish themselves as middlemen between them and the European merchants, with whom they had traded (although unevenly) literally for centuries. This rejection often resulted in open hostilities. Yet more settlers were sent, more recaptured slaves were brought and more settlements established. Prominent among these settlements were those at



Millsburg, Bassa Cove, and Caldwell. Added to these were the settlements of the independent colonization societies scattered on the coast. The cost of the welfare of these people was becoming enormous. All of these compounded the turbulence the CS was going through during this period.

These difficulties raised strong suspicions of the overall viability of this much expected African commercial empire in Washington. To forestall this anxiety the ACS, in consultation with the independent colonial societies and state sponsored societies, decided to bring all the settlements into a commonwealth - except Maryland in Africa whose sponsors had their own plans. In 1839 the Commonwealth was declared with Monrovia as its headquarters. A constitution was drafted and ratified in Washington and sent to the Commonwealth for its governance. It provided inter alia:

- "a) that a governor was to be appointed by the ACS
- b) the settlers could elect and be elected to the position of deputy governor.
- c) 109 seats were to be reserved for the settlers to be elected by direct settler suffrage
- d) the council was to enact laws subject to the governor's veto." (34)

Of course these changes were significant because from them can be seen the emergence of the structure for statehood. However, in order not to miss the colonial character of the Commonwealth, it is necessary to point out that the first person, Thomas Buchanan, named to the position of governor was, like all the agents before him, a white man taking instructions only from Washington.

The creation of the Commonwealth, in our view, was hastened for two significant reasons: (1) to enlarge the colony's territorial and thereby its political influence and economic base from which sufficient revenue could be accrued to meet local public payroll

thus lessening the country's financial dependence on the ACS and also widen the scope of its commercial influence (11) to forestall the powerful European colonialists from hampering this single U.S. colonialist venture in Africa. This exercise must also be seen as preparing the colony for statehood. Thus 1839 was an important point of departure for the colony not only in its political economy and history but for those hundreds of thousands of indigenous people with whom an uneasy coexistence was to be struck by the new arrangement and by the would-be Republic of Liberia. For even at this historic time in the colony's existence the new governor Buchanan was engaged against the prominent chief Gatumba of the Gola ethnic group. The latter, realising that he had been "cheated" of his land was simply trying to recover some. Gatumba was defeated and his town burnt to the ground (35). This rather harsh way of making friendship took its toll on the agricultural development that the settlers had put in progress on the banks of the St. Paul's River, bordering Gatumba's chiefdom. Spontaneous and carefully planned attacks on the workers brought the work to a protracted stand-still. Buchanan himself died the following year and he was succeeded by J.J. Roberts - said to be the first black man to have ruled Liberia. Most accounts refer to Roberts as a high mulatto or octoroon (36).

During Roberts' incumbency the Commonwealth was faced with a new set of problems. France became interested in territories on the West African coast including lands between Maryland and Liberia. Britain on the other hand increased its commercial activity on the Liberian coast. Roberts' tactics for warding off this imminent danger were various. He "bought" many tracts of land and made many treaties of friendship, peace and protection with many chiefs in

order to enlarge the Commonwealth. In concert with Russwurm (Governor of Maryland in Africa), they agreed on a customs tariff; the collection of which, they hoped, would accrue sufficient funds to lower their monetary dependency on the US. This meant that all commercial activities were to take place only under the watchful eyes of their customs officers. The significance of this arrangement is that it regulated the indigenous people from trading where and with whom they chose and subjected them to trading only with American merchants even if their prices were lower. In the wider context it meant that the indigenous population was continuously being engulfed into the external capitalist system to the detriment of their subsistence economy, as they were expected to produce only those items dictated by the American markets, and in large quantities, in order for the colonial administration to obtain substantial customs tariffs to ensure its own survival.

To successfully establish and maintain this strategy of expansion both of trade and territory, it was crucially essential for the colonial administration to integrate that portion of the indigenous population that had shown friendship or acquiescence or outright surrender to the American backed domination. This was to be done either through the now habitual method of outright use of force or through a process of gradually assimilating these people into their fold. To achieve the latter depended on the careful execution of a plan of cultural imperialism by the settlers. The means was by exposing the indigenous population to Christianity through some carefully chosen themes from that religion - like the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man - in preference over those of justice like the "Golden Rule"; and through enforcing, rather vigorously, their civilizing mission which was meant "... to

convert through them (the repatriated Africans) the wide regions of African barbarism, heathenism, cruelty and desolation into a garden of civilization, and make it a prominent portion of Christendom" (37) These manipulations served one intended purpose, i.e. to ensure the survival and legitimacy of the colonial state and through this means enlarge its markets which were already linked to the U.S. market.

The Commonwealth's tactics of enlarging its territory, monopolising trade and asking for customs tariffs from European merchants was soon challenged by the English merchants who abhorred the fact that the little commercial enterprise of a group of "philanthropists" was now arrogating to itself those rights and privileges usually reserved for sovereign states. The British Minister in Washington raised the issue with the U.S. Secretary of State in a letter in which he averred that there were arising some differences between the Liberian authorities and British traders which:

"... render it very necessary, in order to avert for the future serious trouble and contention in that quarter, that Her Majesty's Government should be accurately informed what degree of official patronage and protection, if any, the United States Government extend to the Colony of Liberia, how far, if at all, the United States Government recognize the Colony of Liberia, as a national establishment ..." (38)

The United States Secretary of State took an unusually long time to react to the Minister's note. A carefully worded reply sent some five weeks later, read:

"It is due to Her Majesty's Government that I should inform you that this Government regards it (Liberia) as occupying a peculiar position, and as possessing peculiar claims to the friendly consideration of all Christian powers; that this Government will be, at all times, prepared to interpose its good offices to prevent any encroachment by the Colony upon any just right of any nation; and that it will be very unwilling to see it despoiled or its territory rightfully acquired, or improperly restrained in the exercise of its necessary rights and powers as an independent settlement." (39)

The implications made in the Secretary of State's letter are a clear path to determining the relationship between the U.S. Government and Liberia inspite of what was publicly said and known.

As a result of this exchange of letters the ACS advised the Governor and his Council to consider the only reasonable option open to them - the colony was to consider declaring itself an independent sovereign state in the not too distant future. At that time the Commonwealth with a territory of ever increasing boundaries, a rather cowed hinterland population of unknown numbers, a semblance of internal administration, some sort of a representative Council enacting its laws with courts established to uphold them, franchise defined, and an unstable market economy, the colonial state was, as can be seen, established to face the uncertainties of the future. To its fate it tied those of hundreds of thousands of indigenous peoples in the hinterland whom Liberia was on its way to colonize.

### **3.3 Premature Independence and the Development of a Colonial Economy**

A coalition of the forces hastened Liberia's declaration of independence. The United States had refused to replace its de facto colonial master status with a de jure status inspite of the fact that it was the intervention of the U.S. on Liberia's behalf on several occasions - even long after independence - that saved the

comparatively defenceless country from crumbling under European colonialist schemes. There was also the perennial financial mismanagement which plagued the ACS resulting in a lot of strife among the members of the Board on one hand and between them and the benefactors of the organisation - especially between the early 1830s and early 1840s - on the other. The formation of several abolitionist societies which linked colonization to abolition opposed the ACS view which did not see emancipation as a necessary step to colonization. The refusal of British subjects to obey the colony's customs laws just compounded the haste to independence.

Of specific importance is the fact that if Liberians were to enhance their sphere of influence and thereby their ability to change the ingrained natural economy from what I have designated as the Chieftain Mode of Production to the Capitalist Mode, and tip the balance of trade in favour of the US, then it was necessary to heed the advice of the ACS and declare the colony an independent sovereign state. For up till this time the Grain Coast subsistence economy was connected largely to European commercial capital. To reverse this trend the would-be Liberian state would monopolize, expand and re-orientate the indigenous production process and render it the status of a supply line of raw materials to the capitalist market. The usual consequence of achieving a trade monopoly would then ensue i.e. higher prices for imported goods and lower prices for raw materials.

A constitution denying citizenship to the entire indigenous population which formed the vast majority of the population inhabiting the territory that Liberia claimed - but otherwise patterned after that of the U.S. in character and institutions - was ratified. This exclusion of the vast "silent majority" from

citizenship of the would-be state was due partly to the prejudices and stereotypes which the emigrants entertained and partly due to their intention to "colonize" the "natives" as they referred to the indigenous population. On 26 July 1847 independence was proclaimed and Liberia declared a sovereign republic. There were in residence about 3,000 American emigrants (40). Three years later the independent Maryland in Africa joined the new Republic and Liberia boasted of a coastline of about three hundred and fifty miles.

The vast acquired territory was no assurance for agricultural success but it had earlier suggested that the "natives" living in Liberia could be integrated not into the juridicial/political or economic boundaries of Liberia but into its geographical boundaries for two advantageous reasons a) expose them to the money economy; b) exploit their labour. In 1838 for example the settler administration made legal a phenomenon that had existed as far back as the 1820s that was variously known as the "Ward System" (41) or the "Apprenticeship System" (42) and after independence they launched the "Settlement System" (43). Under the first system indigenous children and Congoes\* were to be taken as wards into Americo-Liberian homes and in return for the basic necessities of life and tutoring in the "civilized" ways of the latter, they were

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\* The term (Congoes) was used to refer to the recaptured slaves brought to Liberia under American supervision. They were said to have originated largely from around the Congo River but some Ibos and Dahomeans were reported to have been among them. They were equally discriminated against as were the indigenous population and termed savages by the settlers. Consequently they were located outside the limits of the main settler township in what became known as Congo Town, which forms part of Greater Monrovia today. The choices open to these so called Congoes were so limited that they became completely integrated into the Americo-Liberian system either through the so-called "Apprenticeship System" or as wage workers. In Liberia today the term Congo is the most commonly used for the descendants of all settlers - be they from Congo, America, or the West Indies.

obliged to put their services - both at home and on the farms - at the complete disposal of their masters.

I could not disagree more with Liebenow when he observed firstly that the system when abused was indistinguishable from "domestic slavery" and, secondly, in his patronising conclusion, that the system provided one acceptable "early avenue for assimilation" of the under-dogs (44). The bare fact is that the system was domestic slavery at all times. And of course assimilation comes in more ways than through "apprenticeship". Consequently only a handful of indigenous people appreciated it. The bulk of the assimilated were Congoes.

The settlement system which was launched after independence was meant to establish settler towns in certain parts of the hinterland to serve as the nuclei from which American civilization was to radiate to the "heathens" in their neighbourhoods and thereby lure the "natives" into giving up their culture. The logic was that this kind of penetration would provide access to what was thought of as an inexhaustible supply of manpower and would have therefore encouraged the settlers to do large-scale agriculture. If the indigenous population totally acquiesced to this strategy in large numbers then two effects would have resulted, a) the peasantry would have been proletarianized, and b) the Chieftain Mode of Production would have been destroyed and the capitalist mode enthroned in its place through the establishment of capitalist plantation systems. Because this strategy was not embraced by the "natives" with the expected anticipation of the Americo-Liberian settlers, the proletarianization of the peasantry had to be postponed for later foreign capital infusion into Liberia. Even at that time it was not total. Of course the destruction of the Chieftain Mode of



Production in the subsistence economy has not, till now, been achieved. Mamdani, in discussing the Colonial State and the Articulation of Modes of Production placed the territories that capitalism controlled into two categories. In one category are those "capitalism populated, settler colonies" in which the "process" was the "destruction of the existing modes of production and the prevalence of the capitalist mode". In the other category are those "capitalism dominated" in which it did not just destroy their existing modes but "restructured" and "conserved" them and made their "productive forces" to "function strictly in the interest of capitalist accumulation". He placed Uganda in the latter group. But as we have seen, Liberia fits very well in both categories and it is this Liberian experience that makes the difference as will be seen later (45).

From the establishment of the colony its administrators had instituted the Western idea of land ownership through its "Land Purchase Grants" referred to earlier. This began the privatisation of land thereafter unknown on the Grain Coast. The anticipation that private ownership of land would have hastened the settlers to subsistence agriculture and create the atmosphere for export oriented plantation agriculture did not consider that land was just one factor of capitalist production. And so the equally important factors of capital and free labour willing to sell its services on the scale needed for plantation work presented themselves. The subsistence economy was therefore commoditized and monetized and the Congos and some so-called "natives" were enrolled into the workforce. The scarcity of capital stalled the transition and so capitalist agriculture began working large gardens of sugar cane, tobacco, vegetables and fruit. Between the early 1840s and the

1870s the settlers had graduated from gardening to plantation agriculture and coffee became the main export crop. The integration of the indigenous population into peripheral capitalism had virtually begun but without elimination of the pre-capitalist mode. At that time there was a coexistence of both modes and the pre-capitalist mode was still the dominant one because the young and weak state, without a capable administrative ability, was unable to integrate the peoples of those territories which it claimed. In fact the state of Liberia was limited to a small narrow coastline and the country was uninhabited in many areas.

It is important to note that inspite of lack of an efficient administrative machinery President Jame S. Payne had created a government department of Internal Affairs in 1868 - during the period of consolidation of the estate system. The importance of this action was that some indigenous people were recruited on plantations along with the Congoes for extortionate wages and cheap manufactured goods. \* This attempt at integration of the indigenous people into the Republic of Liberia also had the larger consequence of monopolizing the inland trade of the people by the Americo-Liberian settlers and therefore gravitate trade towards their interests. We refused to accept the widespread view that it destroyed the subsistence economy for two reasons: a) our research shows that collective ownership relations still exist in many hinterland parts of Liberia especially among the Mande peoples who are the focus of our research, and b) that about 65% of the Liberian population today, are still participants in the subsistence economy.

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\* Methods of, and mechanisms to recruitment for work on these plantations have not been fully discussed or recorded. However, later recruitment policies and procedures lead us to believe that there were elements of coercion and intimidation involved in the process.

In the period under discussion (i.e. the early 1830s - the early 1870s) trade and an export-oriented plantation agricultural system had been firmly established but commerce seemed to have had the edge. Commerce with the indigenous population along the coast and in the hinterland provided the major export items of "dye, ivory, camwood, palm oil, tortoise shell and gold". Many foreign ships visited Monrovia and its subsidiary ports during this period to participate in the booming import-export trade. The visible signs of prosperity lulled the Americo-Liberians into trade to the detriment of agriculture. Indeed the former was in any way less tasking and more comfortable than the latter. Ashmun had earlier drawn the attention of the settlers to the consequences that would ensue as a result of their preference. As an incentive:

"... he drew up and published a guide to the farmer in the preparation and laying out of his farm and holdings. The document contained the most exhaustive information available on clearing, planting and harvesting seasons and the approved methods of husbandry." (46)

Ironically Ashmun himself, a protagonist of an agriculturally based colony was, as has been pointed out earlier over his monopoly on the liquor trade, by no means a farmer. Like all the most politically and economically influential Liberians of this time, he was a businessman. Examples, we are told, are better than precepts. It is however important to note that one major reason for the demonstrated dominance of trade over agriculture was that to the disappointment of the Americo-Liberian settlers, "native" labour was not easily available.

And this is where the difference in the Liberian experience referred to earlier can be seen. The logic for the founding of Liberia fits in with what <sup>21</sup>Mamdani has referred to as "capitalism populated". But the settler community was soon quick to find out

that to destroy the existing mode would have been detrimental to their own interest as well. They (the settlers) knew that they equally depended on the existing relations of production for their primary reproduction. However, as the society became "capitalism dominated" the need to make the "productive forces" work "strictly in the interest of capitalist accumulation" took the letter of the Liberian economic decision makers. To date Liberia exists in this economic disarray.

With inland coastal and foreign trade firmly in the hands of the settler community and the state's enactment of "port of entry" law through which a few ports were designated for all foreign vessels to harbour, a relatively small number of Americo-Liberians pursued their commercial ventures overseas notably the U.S, Britain, Germany and the Netherlands. Profits from this commercial class were now used to respond to the world market demand for tropical crops. By the middle of the century the capital owning settler class turned its attention to an agrarian export sector by establishing estates. Large plantations cultivated sugar cane, coffee and cocoa. The indigenous cotton was supplanted by the southern U.S. species. It is significant to note however, that the Liberian response to the world demand for commercial crops was not by choice. When the "Port of Entry Law" was enacted in 1865 it had two important purposes. (1) It was to limit foreign merchant ships to designated trading posts thereby leaving a wider area of business activity to the Liberian merchant vessels. By this time they numbered 25 schooners and numerous small vessels. It is reported that by 1875 the number of ships had increased to 54. (2) It was to make easier the collection of import-export duties and other taxes. The unforeseeable happened. Foreign merchants who had used Liberian

vessels now turned to the use of their own national vessels and Liberian vessels submitted to this competition. Foreign trade was carried out exclusively by foreign ships. By this time Liberians were no longer playing the dominant role even in the inland trade. In fact they had become employees in European trade companies. However, the increase in Liberian trade gave rise to a rich class of traders who ploughed their profits into the expansion of the already established export-oriented plantation system.

### 3.4 Peasant Agricultural Production

The struggle for the consolidation of the settler state during its early days meant the introduction of what were radical laws in the indigenous territories - lying close to the settlements - in which the settlers had established some influence or made some treaties of friendship. Besides abrogating to itself the right of eminent domain by which the settler state prohibited the settlers from negotiating individually with the natives for land (47), the ACS had:

"Resolved, that the Colonial Agent be empowered to make a donation to any colonist, or association of colonists, not exceeding 500 acres of land on condition that the same be appropriated to the culture of sugar, cotton or sugar cane." (48)

These two actions marked the introduction of proprietary rights meant to replace the then entrenched usufructory rights which the indigenous population had always exercised over land. This state ownership of all lands was of course revolted against by the indigenous people, but marked a fundamental change in the structured relations between the peasant and his land. It was also the beginning of the creation of the landless in Liberia.

The new lands laws immediately created psychological problems of adjustment for the indigenous people. For although the land was physically there and in-built mechanisms were placed in the law to safeguard their rights to the use of the land for their primary reproduction, the indigenous people received a rude shock, awakening to the fact that the communal ownership of land was being undermined by the "Americans". It must be quickly pointed out that land shortage did not immediately become a problem in those early days because the country was always under-populated. Of course the picture is different today as a result of the later economic policies of successive governments in their attempt to "open up" the country which have brought catastrophic results to be discussed in the next chapter. Suffice it for now, to state that the indigenous population understandably found it difficult to reconcile the contradiction that "their" land simultaneously belonged to them and to a superstructure composed of people who did not share their language, values and customs. This attempt to alienate the peasant from "his" land caused bitter conflicts between the settlers and the indigenous population until the 1930s.\* Sections of, and sometimes entire ethnic groups openly defied the settler government's claim to their lands. To the so-called "natives" prohibiting their use of any or a combination of the facets which constituted land - physical terrain, productive powers of the soil, the village, farm land and forests - was a declaration of war. And so access to the ponds, creeks and forests was maintained.

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\* The Kru Rebellion of the 1930's was one of the recent examples of ethnic dissatisfaction with, and revolt against the central (i.e. Liberian) government's extension of its authority over Kru territory and its consequent imposition of various kinds of taxes on the Kru people.

The dissatisfaction among the indigenous population was certainly not due primarily to any levying of fees and taxes. These were to come much later on - what was a sore point was just the new definition given to the land which seemed to curtail their very survival. Also during this early period of consolidation the settler state had no economic policies for the well being of the peasants whose lands were being appropriated. In fact the Commonwealth Constitution of 1839 made two significant points relating to the indigenous people; that the "natives" could become naturalized citizens after a three year period of residence in the colony, with a total "abandonment of savage ways" and completed "a uniformed course of civilized life" (49); and that as far as possible the settler leadership contact with the "African tribes" was to be limited to the "conclusion of treaties" and the "regulation of commerce" between them and the colonists. These two are considered significant in the context of the grand design envisaged by the ACS - and implemented by the settler administration - as to the direction of peasant agricultural production. Indigenous people who took Americo-Liberian citizenship did not enjoy the juridical/political or economic benefits of that citizenship. They however, could be depended upon for the continuation of the peasant production process which ensured a continuous supply of food for the expatriate settlements. Also, the labour power of the members of such indigenous households could be appropriated by the so-called "real" Americo-Liberians at little or no cost. The "regulation of commerce" implied that the "natives" were to be organised in such a way that neither the production of commercial products nor peasant production would be impeded.

Originally land was always available for the growth of staple food crops particularly cultivated for household consumption and for bartering of one kind for the other product for which a household would be in short supply. Exchanges in the market places were introduced by long distance traders during the early phase of the development of the colonial economy. With the establishment of labour intensive plantations of coffee, cocoa and sugar-cane, "native" labour was badly needed and so was drafted to meet the need. The relatively small settler population was engaged in commerce and the defence of the colony. The exploration and exploitation of peasant labour for use outside the peasant communities - and not for the communities' benefit - on a temporary basis, at first, in exchange for money to the future detriment of the peasant production process and the subsistence economy in general had therefore virtually begun. In order to expedite a large-scale recruitment process of the indigenous population to the settler estates, the settler government reverted to the colonial tactic of legislating sporadic taxes which culminated later into the much hated hut tax.

The introduction of taxes and the physical force used in its collection forced an influx of food producing population to the non food producing estates. The inevitable high demand in domestic consumption of agricultural products, fish and meat were obviously immediately realised. The need to produce more rice and cassava (the staples) and the subsidiary food crops, sweet corn, yams, adodoes, sweet potatoes, various kinds of vegetables, fish, poultry, goats, cattle, pigs etc. to meet the new demand was immediately felt. The tax-burdened indigenous population who were not engaged in plantation agriculture, saw this as an opportunity to increase



their levels of production in order to market the surplus food commodities. In some areas production of other agricultural commodities at the expense of rice and cassava was the new order. The indigenous population on the sea coast were now producing cassava and fish as well as other crops well above their subsistence level, ostensibly for the market. Generally the peasants who resided near the settler communities were at this time engaged in producing surplus in order to meet the new demand placed on their original level of production. It must be noted that this territorial influence of settler administration was relatively small as the settler machinery of administration had by this time, not been able to subject the vast majority of the indigenous people under its umbrella. Consequently, this large portion of the population was still producing mainly for subsistence and did not work on estates. It took the huge infusion of foreign capital investment during the post colonial state - in the first quarter of this century to involve the vast majority of indigenous peasants to fall prey to the enclave economies of mining, larger plantations, mechanized fishing and logging.

The recession of the 1880s caused the collapse of coffee as an important and popular cash crop due to the decline in demand in the world market. The peasants however had been already introduced to the plantation work ethic so that when rubber replaced coffee much later on as Liberia's most important export crop, there existed a generation of experienced estate workers already available. At the time - early in the twentieth century - the settler state had consolidated into the Liberian state with a comparatively more sophisticated administrative machinery, defined boundaries and state functionaries throughout the country. The significant point is that

the hut tax which had then been imposed on all indigenous people (not without dissent) now forced a new generation into plantation work. The significance of this is that the production of rice dramatically decreased and Liberia which was always an agriculturally self sufficient country became an importer of its staple food.

This situation put the peasant economy in transition from mainly food based subsistence economy to a mixed based subsistence-commercial economy, or specialized food or non food economy, or at least "modified" peasant economy where some or most of the produce was marketed. From then on to the present there has been no serious development in peasant agriculture to reverse the trend. Liberia continues to import its staple food on an upward trend every year while the peasants split their time between the estates and market oriented production. With the introduction of new technology and the discovery of iron ore from the 1950s to the present, the situation has worsened as the production of more commodities has been made possible at the expense of peasant subsistence economy. While it can be categorically stated that the total destruction of the peasant economy is not in sight, a continuous upward trend of the present situation will no doubt see a cessation of pre-capitalist conditions of reproduction as the peasants continue to reproduce themselves in some forms of exchange relations in the market, i.e. the capitalist market which entails the circulation of commodities.

#### Conclusion

This chapter has sought to analyze what led to the establishment of a colonial state on what was the Grain Coast of

West Africa. As you can see, American intervention was for a combination of reasons more important than that professed by the American Colonization Society - namely to assist helpless black men to return to Africa armed with the torches of American civilization and Christianity to combat the tried forces of "heathenism, uncivility and ignorance". We have been able to show however, that the primary motive behind the colonization movement was the desire to exploit the possibilities of establishing plantations which would later provide a place of prominence for U.S. traders in the then much sought after tropical agricultural products, thus linking this part of West Africa with the then already expanding American capitalism. Secondly and equally importantly, as we have seen in the positions of some very politically prominent and influential Americans, was to rid the U.S. of the free black segment of the American population at the time. Thirdly - and this was the view of the wealthy slave owning class - that the presence of free blacks "running around" in the U.S. was a threat to their slave wealth. With the establishment of the colonial state they reasoned that most, if not all the motives of the Colonization Movement could be achieved. The U.S. could now expatriate the unwanted sector of its population thus alleviating the fears of the remaining slave owners. At the same time U.S. businessmen could now engage in direct trade with West Africa through the colony, thereby eliminating the expensive European middlemen.

Long before the establishment of the colonial state long distance trade had made rudimentary incursions into the peasant economy of the Grain Coast but could not alter the economic relations of the region because it was largely based on barter which was already a known and accepted means of exchange in the region.

It was when new relations of production based upon capital and a "willing and free" labour were introduced that a new direction was provided for the restructured peasant economy. It was precisely for this purpose i.e. the introduction of capital and the capitalist mode of production that the establishment of a colonial state became necessary. Its role was to provide the needed political, ideological, psychological and more importantly the legal superstructures which were indispensable tools for the successful implementation of the new mode. To this end the state had to make structural changes which negated the pre-colonial political, economic, and social relations and later replace them. It is in this structural context that the transformation of the peasantry had taken place and continues to take place now.

## FOOTNOTES

Chapter III

1. The coastal communities "owned" all the lands they could possibly demarcate for their own needs on the coast. After the leaders of these indigenous communities agreed to "give" a piece of land to the expatriates, the latter built a few settlements to which the power of the chiefs (i.e. indigenous laws and customs) did not extend.
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PART II - POST-COLONIAL TRANSFORMATIONCHAPTER IVPEASANTS IN AN INDEPENDENT STATEIntroduction

As a direct result of the founding of the colonial state and the imposition of a Western type of government and its values which drastically changed the land holding arrangements of the indigenous people, there occurred radical changes in the economic and social relations of the Liberian people - formerly the Grain Coast - and the basis for primitive accumulation characteristic of a colonial social formation was laid. Firstly, the colonial state appropriated all lands in the territory unto itself under the rule of "eminent domain". This automatically placed a pecuniary value on land thereby making it a marketable commodity. Secondly, the colonial state laid specific conditions for the usage of these alienated lands. Thirdly, the sale of land itself was conditioned by the payment of fee simple and survey fee. These changes radically altered the pre-colonial social relations and consequently altered the process of production and primary reproduction of the peasantry. It led to the involvement of a large number of peasants in the production and exchange of various commodities. A general feature of the economy was by that time, production and circulation of commodities showing the domination of the producers including the peasants, by peripheral capitalism.

Perhaps the most important factor responsible for the speed and intensity of this process was the change in both the political



structure and process which accounted for the new economic emphasis. To a lesser degree was the fact that demographic changes became a necessary by-product of the new reality. Needless to say these changes impinged on the total life style of the peasants and without choice they became very active participants in the dynamics of the new economics. In this way the Liberian peasantry was integrated into first the national and through it the world capitalist system. Their role is however, by virtue of this integration, subordinated by the developing capitalist mode of production. It can be suggested that the high degree of peasant transformation that has taken place in Liberia is due to the extent and variety of peasant commodity production; their ability and desire to discriminate in such production thereby becoming specialists in the production of one or more items; and of course their alienation from the ownership from the means of production provided the basis for a major structural differentiation.

In the post-colonial era the peasantry, more so than any other group, has faced very difficult economic and social problems caused by what I call the new poverty or "underdevelopment". This is due to the uneven development between the various sectors of the Liberian economy on the one hand and between the various regions of the country on the other: those regions with commercially viable natural resources and those without; and between the rural and urban areas generally. This means that in the urban, the mining, logging, and agro business areas, there exists a relatively high level of development and capital accumulation and therefore a comparatively high level of the organic composition of capital because of the high level of productivity that obtains there. The rural areas largely inhabited by the peasantry have the problems of low productivity for

such obvious reasons as (a) the attraction of the young and strong to the industrial enclaves and the urban areas (b) the rich and politically powerful "buying" the better lands for estate production etc. thus creating an artificial land shortage; low per capita income; and a high degree of economic and social misery.

These characteristics of the post-colonial Liberian social formation are responsible for the situation which some have referred to as "developed" urban and the "underdeveloped" rural areas.

These post-colonial years have witnessed many attempts at rural development, most of which are frantic, inconsistent, ill-defined, ill-advised, off-targeted and for all the wrong reasons. Most of the so called development projects were neither necessary ~~to~~ to bridge the gap between the relatively wealthy and the poor areas nor were they meant to induce a lasting improvement of the quality of life of these in the rural areas especially the peasantry. Basically they were meant to secure the continued political loyalty of the rural population and to cow them to acquiesce to the political might of the centre. Elections could not change the picture because "universal" suffrage was, at the time, only extended to the so-called Americo-Liberian expatriates who lived in the settlements on the littoral. When it was extended to the hinterland population by President Tubman about one hundred years after independence, it was restricted to only those men who owned real property on which they paid tax. The large percentage of peasants who did not fit into that category were not extended franchise. In the 1960s married women over twenty one years old were also granted suffrage. Finally all Liberians aged eighteen and above were granted suffrage in the 1970s.

We intend, in this chapter, to examine the forces at work in the post-colonial peasant transformation, the types of peasant production, what problems inhibit the use of peasant productive forces to their limit, government's strategies for rural development, and the economic and structural changes that have resulted among the peasantry.

#### 4.1 The Forces at Work

Two important events seem to be in our view, the most important catalysts in the post-colonial transformation process viz: the intervention of fairly large amounts of foreign capital into the Liberian economy and the Tubman style of politics and nation-building.

The intervention of substantial amounts of foreign capital into the Liberian domestic economy goes back to the 1880s with the decline earlier of the prices of Liberia's leading exports - coffee, cocoa, and sugar cane (1). Liberian shipping, another major source of income, was in European hands and no other industry had been given adequate attention. Internal revenues were grossly mismanaged by government officials. For example, a report by the Special Committee of Public Accounts investigated the Records of Secretary of the Treasury revealed that in a few years preceding 1870, a deficit of \$118,960 had resulted from the misappropriation of state revenues (2). The Liberian economy was now in total shambles. Government therefore desperately sought new avenues for finances to keep it afloat and to begin construction of roads into the interior. The conviction and urgency for such infrastructural development, it was reasoned, would make the vast profitable commercial potentials of the interior accessible to the sea coast thereby alleviating the economic slump (3).

It was agreed to seek an external loan to expedite their plan and if successful to commit a part of such loan to the development of human resources in the interior. This was the first time in Liberia's history that the development of the human resource base of the country was being seriously considered. The planned opening-up of the interior must however be seen in the light of the post-colonial state's attempt to expedite the transformation of the peasantry. It would (a) devise an efficient machinery for tax collection (b) to encourage the cultivation of more export-oriented crops (c) to allow for easier organization and control of what was considered the vast and untapped labour supply of the interior, in order that it would be easily accessible to foreign concessionaires when the need would arise. As you can see the peasants were in a no-win situation. Under this plan the use of their lands was to be redirected from subsistence to export crop farming. They were to provide a significant proportion of the domestic taxes which - under the corrupt system - could be embezzled by state functionaries. From among their ranks a rural proletariat was to be created. Indeed loans were sought and foreign concessionaires encouraged to invest in Liberia, among them was Harvey S. Firestone who "popularized" the country as the "Firestone Republic".

The next important event in the transformation process was the election of William Tubman to the presidency. Shortly after Tubman consolidated himself into power he sought to further expand the economy, legitimise the "exploitation" of the peasantry and to make a significant percentage of their numbers into the rural proletariat. To achieve these goals he introduced the most far reaching policies than any Liberian president before him. For example he manipulated the True Whig Party to sidestep the

constitutional provision giving presidents a maximum of two four year terms at any one time. He had earlier extended the limited suffrage referred to earlier, and representation in the National Legislature to the tribal majority. In this way Tubman abrogated the old system of tribal representation in the legislature for a fee of one hundred dollars per representative. This was part of his Unification Policy. He initiated and religiously followed the Open Door Policy under which he lured foreign capitalists through almost unlimited incentives to invest in the country. In this way he thought to accelerate the socio-economic development process of the Liberian nation and people.

#### 4.1.1 Early Loans and Concessions

Between 1871 and 1911 four major foreign loans were obtained to prop up the Liberian economy. In addition to these, two concession agreements were signed between the Liberian government and foreign financial operatives. None of these yielded any fruitful results as each left the country in a far worse economic condition than it was in before the loan or the concession right was granted. This was also a critical period in the life of the state itself. For example, the first major loan was from a group of British bankers and because the lenders rated Liberia's financial management as low and in the absence of a collateral other than the 30% discount and 7% interest, the loan was guaranteed by Liberia's customs receipts. The proceeds of this loan ended in a fiasco in which the President, E.J. Roye, lost his life.

As a result of this financial chaos the Liberian government started to consider the granting of concessions to foreign capitalists for the development of the country's natural resources. This consideration was based on a number of favourable reports, by

both Liberians and foreigners, of the abundant natural wealth of the country. In 1869 and 1874 B.J.K. Anderson, a Liberian led expeditions (under the auspices of the Liberian government) to Musardin\* (capital of the Western Mandigos) in the hinterland. His detail included the search for possible site for trading posts in the hinterland and any sources of valuable minerals in the region. Anderson had reported among other things that undoubtedly deposits of gold and iron ore are abundant in the country (4). Similarly a Swiss professor, Buttikofer, had earlier visited Liberia and spent two years studying the flora and fauna. He had reported among other things that the "Liberian forests down almost to the sea coast were equally well provided with rubber-bearing lianas and trees" (5).

These favourable reports were confirmed by other European travellers. As a result by the 1880s the government was seriously considering the granting of concessions to further explore and exploit the country's natural resources. Of course it was anticipated that this would improve the economic climate in general and consequently restore prestige and prosperity to the ruling class. Karnga, a distinguished Liberian historian of the period, has observed that "internal development" quickly became a political slogan. Between 1901 and 1904 three concessions were granted to foreign consortiums: West African Gold; Liberian Development Chartered Company, and the Monrovia Rubber Company. Labour was to be provided by Liberians, but one must quickly add that because the Americo-Liberians disdained manual work, the brunt of the burden was borne by the indigenous population. Of the three concessions, the effect of the Monrovia Rubber Company on the peasant population is most significant.

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\* This is now in the Republic of Guinea.

The staple food of Liberians is rice and the peasants are generally rice farmers. When the cultivation of rubber was introduced into the economy the government appropriated a considerable amount of farm land from the peasants and allocated the same to the rubber company for its use. The peasants were also supposed to sell their labour to the company as daily wage earners on the plantation, or contracted to collect latex from wild lianas for sale to the company (6). The significance of this development is that by limiting the area of staple cultivation while paying the workers disgraceful wages which could not meet their primary reproduction needs, was a threat to the very livelihood of these people and exposed them to capitalist development. But equally the government did not realise its anticipated revenues. For example,

"The royalty payable to the Liberian government on the rubber exported was to range from twopence to fourpence a pound according to selling price, paid in installments for the granting of this concession." (7)

The economy was neither generating revenues for its internal dynamics nor for the external debt servicing.

With no other clue as to how the first loan (1871) was to be repaid and the continued erosion of confidence in both the economy and its managers, the government considered a second loan. This time the purpose was not for "internal development" but for "the immediate relief of the floating debt" and for "improving the country and liquidating her total indebtedness" (8). This time the British brokers who provided the £500,000 loan required the government's customs revenues as collateral. Two Englishmen were appointed as receivers and financial advisers to the Liberian government. In spite of what seemed to be a careful arrangement, about 33% of the proceeds of this loan was given to the already

The collapse of the intended programmes for this loan attested to the financial mismanagement of the state functionaries. The victims were obviously the peasants who by this time constituted the largest percentage of taxpayers in Liberia.

Liberia appealed to the United States to protect its sovereignty which was under threat of its creditors - the British. Congress obliged. But this generosity could be seen in the light of a power struggle between the United States and Britain. Ironically Britain, the first foreign power to recognise Liberia's sovereignty, always undermined that sovereignty by always annexing parts of Liberia to its Sierra Leone colony. The United States on the other hand always wanted a viable independent American-oriented Liberia for two reasons. (a) Its own internal socio-political interests necessitated its patronising a haven for the so-called "free men of colour". (b) It wanted to keep a foothold on this side of Africa in order to break the European monopoly on West African trade and raw materials and future capitalist expansion.

The United States sent a Commission to study the Liberian economy and advise how best to resuscitate it. The gravity of the situation can be realised from a part of its report which reads:

"The aggregate revenues of the country are barely sufficient for its urgent governmental needs. ... There is a steady pull on the government treasury, and inelasticity. There is neither a reserve balance in the treasury nor are there any resources of income, capable of expansion, to meet government emergencies. An empty treasury is so frequent as to be almost the rule. This situation makes it difficult to meet extraordinary expenditure. Not infrequently, such expenditure has grown out of international relations, claims of foreign powers, the expenses of boundary commissions ... The lack of equilibrium in the budget has been aggravated sort of treasury management. There is no adequate check on treasury expenditure. Appropriations have frequently been exceeded and other unauthorised expenditure has been made. ... There is no check on fraud or dishonesty in the purchase of supplies for



government use. The result of all this has involved the country in a considerable debt. The Secretary of the Treasury can hasten or delay the payment of a government creditor, and thus reward friends and punish enemies." (10)

The United States, upon the recommendation of the Commission decided to take some strategic measures. Significant among them were:

- (1) The establishment of the Liberia Frontier Force which deterred further French and British encroachment on Liberia's territory but more importantly, consolidated expatriate rule over the indigenes.
- (2) The influencing of private banks to make a loan to Liberia and to establish control over her finances. In this way the United States would curtail the growing influence of Europeans in the country's internal trade. In spite of these measures, Liberia's total debts according to Buell, stood at about \$1,300,000 in 1910.

By 1911 the economic situation of Liberia was so grave that the United States, in a bid to enhance the survival and independence of Liberia arranged an international loan. Along with France, Germany, and Great Britain an amount of \$1.7 million was made available. Again Liberia assigned its revenues as collateral but the terms were critical. For example, each European party to the loan was to assign a receiver while the United States was to assign a receiver-general. Together they were to supervise the collection and disbursement of all assigned revenues without the intervention of any Liberian official (11). But quite apart from the assigned revenues, "revenues from exports and imports, duties on rubber, and all head monies were pledged" (12). What made the terms of this loan critical was that Liberia was essentially to become a mandated territory to these creditor countries without actually using the term. Brown stated for example:

"... the receivers had the power to suspend customs officials, make contemporary appointments, rules and regulations relative to the assigned revenues, without interference from the Legislature of the Republic. They were also given the right to furnish adequate patrol of the country by land and by sea if it was not supplied. Supervisory control of the Frontier Force ... was vested in them. Money bills, arising in the House of Representatives and approved by the Senate, as provided by the Constitution of the Republic, were not law, until the receivership approved them . . ." (13)

As can be seen, presidential assent was no longer necessary to pass a bill into law. Nor was the control of the armed forces the sole prerogative of the Department of Defence under the President as Commander-in-Chief. Obviously this period reveals a taint of colonialism in Liberia's post colonial era. Despite the harshness of the provisions of this loan agreement, the Liberian Legislature passed it into law by the end of 1911 and it became effective in January, 1912. In political circles it was seen as a release from hostile creditors and a new era in Liberia-U.S. relations (14).

This arrangement was quite significant for the peasantry as well. They suffered increased abuses through corrupt and reckless tax collectors and Justices of the Peace. Exacting illegal monies from whatever source, but more so from the peasantry became a preoccupation of some state functionaries. For example the Liberian press at the time had reported the following:

"It is customary for the native living in a village and native hamlet to be served with a writ of arrest, issued by a Justice of the Peace and sworn by one of the Tax Collectors ... charging him with having refused to pay his taxes ... the collector has never made a demand upon the same at any time previous. However, he is arraigned and ignorant of the advantages and privileges afforded him by our laws, and also without the professional services of a lawyer, the Justice proceeds to render judgement, ordering him, the Defendant, to pay tax and the previous cost of said suit, rarely less than \$15 or \$20." (15)

The undermining of the state structures was reflected in the "new problems" of the peasant communities. The tax collectors, now monitored under new "management", resorted to extortion of the hinterland in general and the peasantry in particular. Earlier the introduction of hut and poll taxes in the peasant communities had already meant a serious disruption of the socio-economic arrangement of these communities. Peasants had to resort to one of the following: (a) pay more attention to the growing of more cash crops at the expense of growing their own food, (b) work on the settler estates, (c) sell their labour power to the bogus chartered companies.

If peasants opted to remain in the subsistence (rather self sufficient) economy, then they had to double the size of their rice farms to enable them to pay their taxes; provide seeds for the following year; and to sell in order to meet the taxes of the "household". The problem in this option was that the settlers who largely constituted the middle-men class deliberately set the prices of farm products very low. This was to discourage large scale rice farming in order that the malcontented peasant labour would be made available to the estates for the production of export commodities. The protagonists of the capitalist system - eager to see the new system work successfully - assumed responsibility of putting peasant labour into "such workable condition" as to ensure productivity and the continuity of its increase, completely ignoring the cultural and psychological significance of his labour within his communal economy. It is significant to note that in 1911 the Treasury Department collected \$10,000 in taxes on native huts alone (16). From this point on, the peasant economy was never to be the same again in Liberia.

responsibility of manipulating peasant labour in such a way that it served both the capitalist system and the communal economy concurrently. Of course the psychological and cultural significance of the diversion of the peasants' labour from the community was completely ignored. It is significant to note that in 1911 the Treasury Department collected \$10,000 in taxes on native huts alone (16). From this point on, the peasant economy was never to be the same again in Liberia.

#### 4.1.2 "America Must Grow Its Own Rubber" - Firestone in Liberia

The price of rubber sharply declined after the First World War. Britain, which dominated the world production of rubber at the time, introduced measures under the Stevenson Plan of 1922 to reverse the situation. Under this plan, an artificial shortage was created and the supply of rubber on the world market restricted. The United States economy at the time consumed about two-thirds of the world's rubber output. Consequently, this protectionist policy jeopardised United States economic and other interests. Therefore an immediate alternative was to be sought to guarantee America's supply of this commodity.

Harvey S. Firestone, a leading American rubber manufacturer seized the opportunity of the situation. With the active support of U.S. President Harding, he lobbied Congress for funds to survey rubber producing countries. Half a million dollars was appropriated to Firestone for this purpose. After futile attempts in the Dutch East Indies and the Philippines and eliminating Mexico for what was considered its political instability, Firestone turned his attention to Liberia. Here, everything was suitable and only for the asking. The climate was ideal for rubber cultivation. The state depended on America for its survival - politically, economically and



physically, and the expatriates considered themselves more Americans than Africans. There was, what was thought to be an inexhaustible supply of cheap labour force. And a government very willing to oblige. Of course the government's willingness to comply with the American concessionaire was based on the assumption that such a presence would abort the threats of annexation of its territory, so repeatedly posed by colonial neighbours - the British and the French.

Firestone's team of soil experts arrived in December 1923 and favourable results of their tests six months later, started the negotiation between the Liberian Government, led by President C.D.B. King and Harvey Firestone. After the initial discussions four major proposals in three agreements emerged for consideration. They were as follows: (1) That Firestone was to lease for 99 years the Mount Barclay Rubber Plantation developed by the defunct Liberia Development Corporation at a rental fee of \$2,000 for the first year and \$6,000 for each of the subsequent years. (2) That the Firestone Company was to lease, also for 99 years, 1 million acres of land, to be selected anywhere within the boundaries of the Republic, for the production of rubber and other agricultural products or to engage in any operation other than agricultural, on the lands granted under this agreement (which became known as the "Planting Agreement"). (3) That Firestone was to make a loan of \$5 million to the Liberian government under terms which earned the country its most hated alias - the Firestone Republic (4). That Firestone was to construct a port near Monrovia within five years at a cost not exceeding £300,000. The government was to repay this sum in due course to Firestone. The second and third proposals constituted one of the three agreements that finally emerged.

The loan proposal which was just a clause in the "Planting Agreement" but which in our view constituted a major agreement on the merit of its implications, was the most vigorously opposed. The leading opponents of this agreement were Louis Arthur Grimes, the Liberian Attorney General, and Jeremiah T. Harris, Secretary of the Treasury. The Treasury boss in his Annual Report to the Legislature for the 1925 Fiscal year stated inter alia, that the government's financial situation had never been a better period in the history of the country. He observed that revenue was on a steady increase and that customs receipts and internal revenues exceeded the pre-war years 1912 and 1913 (17). Liberia's economic recovery from the World War years was remarkable and the Secretary's conclusion was that there was no need for a new loan of \$5 million. Louis Arthur Grimes, for his part opposed the proposed loan and indicated that many articles of the agreement were outrightly unconstitutional (18). Other legitimate fears expressed in Liberian government circles was that granting a concession of this magnitude and taking a \$5 million dollar loan from the same concessionaire would be giving that industrialist enormous power in the country. A compromise was struck that instead of the Firestone Plantations Company granting the loan, the Finance Corporation of America, a Firestone owned subsidiary would make the loan. In essence Firestone granted the loan anyway. As a result of this deal Firestone signed the Concession Agreement with the Government of Liberia representatives on the 2nd October 1926. By that time Firestone had retained former President Arthur Barclay and Senator William V.S. Tubman (later President of Liberia for 27 years) as his company's lawyers in Liberia.

The Loan Agreement was signed nine months after signing the agreement which established the Firestone Plantations Company and Firestone had his way. The rationale for making available the loan in the first place was to have a sway over the political decision making process in Liberia. Firestone realized that in the turmoil of the then existing world order it was of paramount necessity that he had some political control in Liberia, given the size of his financial outlay and nature of his enterprise. It can in fact be correctly argued that such practice was in consonance with European colonial disposition of protecting their investments and supply of raw materials. And given the uneasy relationship between Liberia and her colonial neighbours, Firestone wanted to ensure that neither France nor Britain (but more so Britain, because Firestone was undermining the Stevenson Plan) could have any pretext for occupation of Liberia. Part of the loan was to repay Liberia's European creditors and to ward off any interference in the country's internal (and Firestone's) affairs. The provisions of the loan only consolidated Liberia as a neo-colonial state of the United States. For example, the United States Government appointed among others, an American, as Financial Adviser to the President of Liberia. He (and not the Legislature) was to approve the yearly budget of the Republic. For these services he was paid an annual remuneration of \$12,500 by the Government of Liberia. Also, without a written permission from the Finance Corporation of America (actually Firestone), the government of Liberia could not contract new loans. The revenues of the Republic were to be deposited in another Firestone subsidiary - the United States Trading Corporation Banking Department for a commission of 1½% on its deposits. There was also a 1% service charge on all amounts transferred abroad for debt

services. From these arrangements, even the most conservative commentators have placed the cost for debt servicing alone at about \$10,000 a year.

No one (except those who personally benefitted from these transactions) can say that Liberia did not get a bad deal from the Firestone Loan agreement. Little wonder it was so unpopular. What interests this writer, however, is the fact that the outrage against the Loan Agreement was not extended to the Planting Agreement as well. For as much as the Loan Agreement undermined the very sovereignty of the State, so did the Planting Agreement railroad the fundamental structures on which the survival of the state abundantly depended. What was at stake was the appropriation of 1 million acres of peasant community lands and refusing those peasants their traditional rights to the use of the land, for 99 years - four generations. What was at stake was the large scale migration of whole communities to strange and sometimes hostile terrain to start life anew. The anticipated destruction of a tried and tested human based economic system for one based on capital, motivated by profit and devoid of that "humanness" which was the fundamental characteristic of the earlier. For us these were the real issues and strangely but understandably they did not constitute a good reason for concern to the Liberian authority. We intend to consider these issues in this discussion.

For the purpose of this thesis three provisions in the Planting Agreement need to be kept in mind:

- "a) that Firestone Company was granted the right to select a total of 1 million acres from anywhere within Liberia's territorial confines.
- b) that the Liberian Government was obliged to secure and maintain an adequate labour supply for the efficient operation of the plantation.
- c) that tribal lands set aside expressly for commercial use were excluded from this agreement."(19)



It is extremely important for the reader to note that the original Agreement placed no burden of revenue on Firestone except the agreed land rented of 6 cents per acre per annum to start after five years and revenue tax of 1% of the price of all products shipped from the Plantation to commence after six years. If lumber was to be exported a royalty of 2 cents per cubic foot was to accrue to the Government.

A supplement to this Agreement reached in 1935 simply exempted the Company from all taxes, duties licenses or other fees, harbour fees and all other charges existing or to be created, for the full length of the tenure of the Agreement. However motor vehicles in excess of one hundred and fifty were to be taxed. Even Firestone's expatriate employees were free from all direct and personal taxes. On the conclusion of these Agreements Mr. Harvey S. Firestone remarked:

"Liberia offered the best natural advantages. The labour supply is indigenous and practically inexhaustible. The government welcomed our proposals and offered the most advantageous terms and conditions. Liberians consider themselves more or less protectorate of America and want American capital to develop the country. They gave us the greatest concession ever made." (20)

Young could not have put it better. "If this was not actually American soil under American flag, no other soil or flag might be expected to reflect more of the American spirit". (21)

#### 4.1.2 Tubman Unshakes a New Liberia

When William V.S. Tubman succeeded E.J. Barclay as President of Liberia in 1944, he embarked on two major policies which remained the bedrock of his presidency for the 27 years of his tenure - the Open Door Policy and the Unification and Integration Policy. Under the Open Door Policy, foreign financiers were encouraged by liberal

concessions to invest in the country. They were also to explore and exploit Liberia's natural resources on a partnership basis with government. Two main benefits were to accrue to the rural population as a direct result: (1) Jobs in mining, logging, and agro industry would attract the peasantry into wage labour and therefore into the money economy. (2) The infrastructural and social development that would be undertaken by the concessions would be accessible to the rural people. Therefore this Policy was bound to accelerate Liberia's "development". Through the Unification and Integration Policy, structured changes would be made to ensure the closure of the wide and deep gulf between the descendants of the expatriates and the indigenous population.

In 1944 Firestone Plantations Company was the lone major concession in Liberia and the only foreign contributor to the national revenue. In 1943 the Liberian government's budget was \$750,000. Tubman quickly enacted laws to put the foreign investor in a *laissez faire* position in the Liberian economy. Several foreign investors were attracted to Liberia by the Firestone example, the political stability, and the incredible incentives that were offered. By 1964 thirty eight private foreign concessions operated in Liberia with a combined investment of nearly three-fourths of a billion dollars (22). One year earlier (1963) Tubman's government operated a \$50 million budget. In that fiscal year the Director General of National Planning reported:

"Gross domestic money income more than quadrupled between 1950 and 1961, government revenues increased more than eightfold, tonnage of goods imported nearly quadrupled, rubber exports rose by nearly a third from an already large base, iron ore exports increased from nothing to over three million long tons per year, the money sector labour force nearly tripled, net money income of tribal households more than quadrupled, mileage of all weather roads were multiplied by a factor of four. There was unprecedented expansion in all areas of the economic life of the nation." (23)

By 1974, according to the Planning Ministry, foreign private capital invested in the country was valued at \$55.4 million. The bulk of this was in the iron ore industry, some operated by subsidiaries of large multinationals but under individually negotiated concession agreements. The only typical provision common to the later iron ore mining concession agreements was that Government shares their declared profits at 50/50. Consequently this sector of the industry represents the largest contributor to the country's economy. Indeed the provisions in the concession agreements improved remarkably in these later years as compared to that of Firestone. Needless to say there was still abundant room for improvement. For example in both mining concessions agreements signed between the Government and the Liberian American Swedish Mining Corporation (LAMCO) in 1960 and the Liberia Bethlehem Steel Corporation (LIBETH) in 1974, the infamous exemption clause of Firestone days reappeared. Both companies are exempted from paying any taxes, fees, dues, excises, any charges imposed by Liberian laws of general application; securing import or export licenses; import duties; etc. (24).

Several other concessions were granted under the Open Door Policy. It is crucial for our later arguments to provide the following skeletal information. B.P. Goodrich was, in 1954, granted 600,000 acres for the development of rubber for a period of 80 years. The Liberian Agricultural Company (LAC) was allowed 600,000 acres also for rubber development, in 1959 for a period of 70 years. In the same year the Salala Rubber Corporation was allotted 100,000 acres for the same period. The African Fruit Company (which turned to rubber development) was granted 600,000 acres for a period of 80 years, earlier in 1952. 13 logging

concessions were granted. Liberia Mining Company and the Mine Management Associates enjoyed places of prominence as the earliest iron ore concessions. These were, in our view, the bitter fruits of the Open Door Policy.

Revenue realised from the operations under the Open Door Policy was used in part for the promotion of the Unification and Integration Policy. Bluntly stating the Policy, it was meant to integrate the indigenous people into the Liberian nation and to unify them with the minority expatriate group into the body politic of the Liberian state. But this was to be done through the President as it had serious political repercussions with the Old Guard of the minority element and far reaching political gains for Tubman. He immediately took the following positions:

- a) abrogated the system under which ethnic groups had to pay \$100 to be represented in the National Legislature.
- c) abolished the corporate voting system by which only the Chief as holder of the title to the tribal land, could vote on behalf of all the members of his community.
- c) granted suffrage to any man who owned a hut on which tax was paid.
- d) Women were granted suffrage.
- e) The provinces of the hinterland were reconstituted (as counties for the political sub-divisions on the sea coast are referred to) with the rights of the earlier counties.

There were many subtle ways in which Tubman tried to eradicate the chasm between the two divisions of the Liberian people.

#### 4.2 Effects on Peasant Production

An analysis of the Firestone Deal and Tubman's most important policies is necessary here as far as they affected peasant production.

In assigning 1,000,000 acres of fertile land to Firestone, the Government failed to consider that Liberia's staple food is rice farmed by shifting cultivation of the slash and burn method. This short sightedness was the beginning of Liberia's chronic dependence (till today) on imported rice. It was argued that with a population of about one million (at the time) to 38,000 square miles, Liberia could afford ten Firestones with enough land left for everybody to make two farms a year. In our view this was not the issue. Rather the issue was raised in two problems immediately posed to the peasantry as a result of Firestone's right to "... select land anywhere in the country ...". The first is that it necessitated an artificial scarcity of fertile lands for rice cultivation and deprived the peasant communities of an equally important part of what makes up the community land unit i.e. the forests. The other two parts are the villages and farms. The second problem is a consequence of the first. Whole communities migrated to places of low fertility which resulted in the disintegration of many households thus undermining the communal will and spirit of belonging. Peasant production was psychologically and physically adversely affected. The fact that Firestone may choose any fertile land area for its purposes was sufficient hindrance to production. Those peasant communities which refused to migrate soon realized that they were barricaded into tracts of land too small for their basic needs let alone raise surplus for tax purposes. Many members of such communities turned out to be Firestone's first prey for its

labour force. This caused a major structural change in the traditional communal societies.

To meet government's obligation to Firestone guaranteeing an adequate and stable workforce, the natural victims were the peasants. A quota system was worked out under the supervision of the Department of the Interior which assigned each paramount chief a quota of men to be recruited for work on the Firestone estate. McLaughlin put it this way:

"For filling his quota, each chief is paid a bonus of fifteen cents per man per month during the months of January through June, and ten cents per man per month during July through December. ... After the Company assigns quotas, the Department of Interior must approve the distribution. Once the Government has placed its stamp of approval on an assignment, the Department of Interior, working through the district commissioner in the area, assists the Firestone recruiter in meeting with chiefs ironing out misunderstandings, and at times bringing official pressure on a recalcitrant paramount chief." (25)

Some sources have claimed that the recruitment of the peasants to the Plantation was in effect done by the Chiefs and could not be blamed on the company or government functionaries (26). Our findings did not corroborate this. The truth is that the chiefs were on most occasions forced by the Frontier Force to provide those who would volunteer. It is simply compulsory volunteering.

The chiefs, more than anyone else, knew the disastrous effects of such dislocation of their peoples on their various communities. The system was unpleasant for many. It took away from the peasant communities the young and the middle aged who are customarily charged with caring for their old parents, relatives and community at large. Those who remained in the communities could not adequately provide for their subsistence and the expectations of the ruthless tax collectors. Needless to say that this situation

adversely affected peasant production in the communities in such a way that Liberia has not recovered from its wider implications. By the middle of the 1930s Firestone had recruited a labour force of about 10,000. Between 1946-47, the number had grown to over 25,000 (27). It is not difficult to see the ravaging effects on peasant production when one remembers that the total population of Liberia in 1947 was not even one million.

Wages for the labourers during this early period of Firestone were set at fourteen cents for a twelve to fourteen hour day and it was impossible to produce any proportion of his own food, but he may buy on credit from the company's stores. With time, most of the labour force was trained to become tappers. As skilled labourers tappers earned twenty-five cents a day making an average monthly income of \$7.50. Still the tapper's earnings were insufficient to reproduce himself and the nature of his work requires him to be physically present 365 days a year under normal conditions. The absences that resulted were the result of workers returning to their villages to bring back whatever food that was available. So while the labourer's wages were insufficient to reproduce him primarily he now turned to those he left in the community to reproduce him in order to work for Firestone. So while the community had lost his labour to Firestone, the community was now also assisting him by impoverishing themselves. Obviously productivity was on the decline as sometimes during the rice planting season the labour turnover was as high as 30%. To reverse this trend Firestone thought of selling rice to its labour force at subsidized rates. The plan was easy. Each labourer could get a basic ration of 8 lbs per week for twenty-eight cents. A married man could buy an additional 4 lbs, and everyone who had worked for six successive days a week could buy a further 4 lbs as bonus.

It is clear from this gesture that Firestone had undermined the natural economy. For some of the young people in the labour force, some of this imported rice was sent back to their old folks in the communities. Without realizing it, government was assisting Firestone to introduce the taste of imported rice throughout the Liberian food culture, which was eventually craved for by many Liberians and discouraged the peasants from producing large surpluses of traditional rice which could be snubbed for US long grain, par-boiled rice. Clearly other commodities usually produced by the peasantry to enhance the community's self sufficiency were also on the decline. All this was done in order to stabilise the labour force on the plantations. This steady decline of peasant production has to be seen in the general context of the Open Door and Unification Policies. For it was under this twin policy that a proliferation of concessions occurred which demanded a vast labour force. Consequently the peasants were recruited in their droves to the concession areas thus removing their labour power from their traditional production milieu.

These policies were launched at about the same time and one was supposed to influence the other to bring real development to the Liberian nation and people. It is however, our view that because the political goals lacked coherence the dynamics for a real and sustained development were not apt to come. Consequently the majority of Liberians i.e. those who live in the hinterland and largely peasants missed out on two counts. They (1) lost their lands to the concessions and therefore limited their capacity of production that assured their self sufficiency, and (2) the much professed integration would have given the indigenous Liberian equal opportunities with his expatriate compatriot was never realised.



The Open Door Policy, it was wrongly thought, would have provided the basic infrastructural development necessary for the operation of the businesses concerned. Because capital, in cahoots with the Government would have alienated the peasantry from their means of production and forced them into the fringes of the new economic order, the peasantry would have responded to the new situation by growing crops to meet the new demands. In this way, those who were in close proximity to the concession roads would have used this new service to supply the demands of the new system. More importantly, it was thought the peasantry would - as the rural proletariat - sell their labour power to the concessions. Either position would have located the peasants in the money economy which it was argued would have hastened their socio-economic development and that of their communities. So it was reasoned.

In assessing the Open Door Policy years after it was launched, Tubman remarked:

"The Open Door Policy brought about better and numerous roads to almost every part of the country, airfields and other means of communication and transportation which made the remotest parts of the country accessible to traders and businessmen and thereby motivated development in these areas, as well as affording to the people in different sections of the country the means whereby they could communicate with, visit and get to know more about each other." (28)

Conceptually therefore, it is clear that Government had no definition of development that visualised it in terms of the well being of the peasant, but we shall return to this later.

Overly the Unification Policy was meant to coalesce the Liberian people and to ease the mutual suspicion that existed between the expatriates and the indigeneous people. It was however fraught with serious contradictions which justify our earlier observation that it lacked coherent political goals. For example,

in Tubman's first inaugural address on 3 February 1944, he said,

inter alia:

"We must have more centres of civilization distributed throughout our territories. The task before us is great. What is termed the 'Americo-Liberian population' is fast diminishing. It needs vigorous new blood of our own race from without to assist in the Herculean task set before them as the bearers of the torch of civilization to their uncivilized brethren. I am therefore wholly inclined to the view that we should use every legitimate means at our disposal to encourage our kith and kin to Liberia from the United States ... I was very much impressed with the high education, thrift, initiative and wealth of a very large portion of our racial group in that country. It is from this class that we should select the type of immigrants that we desire and to whom we must extend the cry of Macedonia." (29)

On 14 February 1944 (about ten days later) Tubman proclaimed his Unification and Integration Policy. This cardinal contradiction informs us of two things: (1) that the President was far-sighted enough to realise that in the long run the swelling number of the indigenous people vis-a-vis the diminishing size of the expatriates will force political power into the hands of the former. This would have left the expatriates at the mercy of the indigenous population who would have taken so much for so long. To avert such a situation it was necessary to seek new immigrants into Liberia. (2) It is clear that the President was bent on maintaining a class society in Liberia. He made it clear that the immigrants should be drawn from the bourgeois and petit bourgeois classes. The obvious implications are clear.

Such policies were bound to create an adverse effect on peasant production. From this point on we shall examine both policies together as the successes of one clearly depended on the other. Under the Open Door Policy iron ore mining concessions were given to four companies. Each company was allotted from 300,000 acres to 500

square miles of land. There were four major rubber concessions including Firestone and one fruit company. Each of these was given 600,000 acres except one which got 100,000 acres. Added to these were 13 logging concessions spread throughout. Together these account for almost one quarter of the total land area of Liberia's national territory (30) (Appendix I). The tenure of these concessions was from 70 years to 100 years. With Liberia's population growth rate remarked at 3.3% per annum, you can see the startling negative effects of these policies on peasant production in particular and the national economy in general.

The first casualty of these policies was rice, the staple food of Liberians. Rice was first imported to Liberia during the Presidency of C.D.B. King in about 1924,\* when a large number of young Liberian peasants were recruited and sent to work as labourers on Spanish farms in Fernando Po. The quantities then were small. Even as of 1945 imports in some years were nil and the population was fed from domestic supplies (31). Contrary to this source that it was rapid urban population growth after the war years that made domestic production insufficient to meet the national demands, it can be seen that it was the concession boom which created the rice deficit. For example in 1964 where there were almost forty concessions operating in Liberia, importation of rice had increased to 32,000 metric tons. By 1971 Liberia imported 54,000 metric tons

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\* During King's presidency 1920-1930 a group of some prominent Liberians signed an agreement with a Spanish company, Syndicato Agrícola de los Territorios Españoles del Golfo de Guinea, to recruit and export to Fernando Po 3,000 labourers for a fee of \$45 per head and a bonus of \$5,000 for every additional group of 1,500 men sent to the Company's plantations. Thousands of people (largely peasants) were thus recruited and shipped to Fernando Po. In the scandal which earned a League of Nations Commission, King was forced to resign from the Presidency.

of its staple food for a population of less than 1.5 million. Since 1975 importation of this lifeline has steadily increased to 95,000 metric tons in 1981. In 1984 35% of the total amount of rice consumed was imported and this accounted for 70% of marketed supplies (32). Rice today, constitutes the second largest import item after crude petroleum. This increase can be explained simply in terms of the increase in demand for rice from the urban population as well as from peasants who, for one reason or another, have abandoned rice production.

These figures inform us of several facts. The vast land areas given to concessionaires puts a squeeze on what the government refers to as "traditional agriculture". What obtains therefore is that the law of diminishing returns is bound to take its toll. The staggering manpower needs of these concessions have turned the peasantry into a rural proletariat working for an increase in the production of rubber, cocoa, coffee and palm oil. What is more important is that these policies have changed the self sufficient status of the communal societies. Indeed the traditional communities did not only grow food but produced all of its needs including salt. With the undermining of the peasant economy, they have become dependent on company stores. Taking the example from Firestone, almost all concessions in the agro-logging industries (especially those far away from trading centres) operate food warehouses. From here labourers are issued rice, palm oil and canned fish (usually mackerel) supposedly at subsidised rates. Even the Liberian (usually absentee) large farmers have followed suit but with a difference. There is not subsidised and the cost of all items charged from these shops during a pay period is subtracted from the labourer's wages on pay day. The concessions either

operate shops like Firestone or negotiate with some businessman, as in the case of B.F. Goodrich (now Guthrie), to operate a shop on its concession. From these stores all other commodities can be bought or charged. The rural proletariat in their nouveau riche position now send back to the communities at home those commodities which would have been otherwise produced in the self peasant economy. This, as can be seen, has an adverse effect on peasant production.

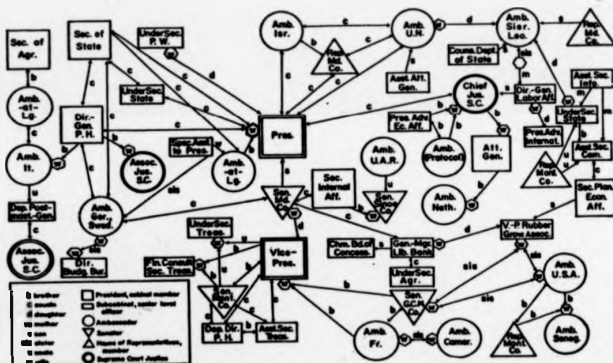
The ever growing upward trend of large scale importation of rice is a particular and significant case in point. Although it can be argued that such large imports of rice are justified for the sustenance of that part of the rice growing population which was forced out of rice production to sell their labour power to the concessions, yet the truth of the matter, it seems to us, is that the remaining rice producers, mainly peasants, are now attracted to the capitalist market by producing those crops demanded by the system and for which quantity and price are set by the dynamics of the same system. Consequently peasant production has declined at an alarming rate. The monetized economy has also brought along cheap, mass produced items on the market which have made the traditional production of such items become redundant. Families no longer produce their own soap or even cotton clothes (for which the Grain Coast was most famous in the 17th century) because the processes are "too expensive in terms of time". The same time can be used to grow rubber, cocoa, or coffee on their patches and use the income to buy cheaper clothes and other items which they would have otherwise produced. By the same token those concessions which sell "subsidized" rice to their employees created a healthy market for American (and other foreign) rice farmers, which spilled outside of the concession enclaves into the national market. In this way peasant production was further undermined.

In spite of the several tax exemptions the Open Door Policy granted the foreign investors the nation's revenue grew in real terms. Tubman manipulated both the people and the constitution to consolidate his power. He became a faction manager, manipulating one group and the other and won the loyalties of all groups. Although he was not the first President to have travelled throughout the hinterland as some commentators had suggested, his Unification Policy brought a degree of educational, health and communications facilities to the interior. This, added to the granting of suffrage and the fact he opened the doors of the Executive Mansion to the indigenous chiefs, won their hearts and loyalty. Tubman very easily established a personality cult around which loyalty to government was built. Of course Tubman was the government and the State.

In the first four years of his administration Tubman visited all the political sub-divisions of the country and held Executive Councils. During these Councils he reversed wrong decisions taken by public officials, settled inter-tribal boundary disputes, listened to pleas for educational and medical facilities and adjudicated public and private matters. He would not hesitate to dismiss a recalcitrant Americo-Liberian government official if his crime against an indigenous person warranted it. He, on more than one occasion, decided that lands that had been usurped by prominent Americo-Liberians be returned to the Chiefs. The indigenous population now gave their unflinching support to the President. While these token gestures were being made to integrate the indigenous population into Tubman's Liberia, the President was consolidating the Americo-Liberian hegemony. He appointed a few indigenous people to positions of trust and a large number as middle level state functionaries. But the expatriate community was in full

and firm control. For example, in his 27 years as President, he never chose an indigenous person for Vice President. The majority of the cabinet positions went to the minority settler group, and so were diplomatic positions around the world. In fact anyone that was anybody was closely or remotely related to the President either by blood or by marriage. The following rather notorious diagram by J. Gus Liebenow will illustrate the point.

### FAMILY AND POLITICS IN LIBERIA, 1967-68



SOURCE: J. Gus Liebenow, "Liberia" in Carter, Africa One Party States, p. 369.

The logical question in the mind of the reader is, what does this have to do with peasant production? The obvious answer lies in the results of Tubman's faction management. While infrastructural development was dragging the nation into the modern age, indigenous children were taking advantage of the educational facilities provided. The process soon produced effects undesirable to the archaic political, social and economic structures in the national body politic. Some politicians were worried about a boomerang effect of Tubman's interior "development" policy. The fear was that "huge doses of development" administered to the interior would eventually upturn the political fulcrum and dislodge the minority class from their privileged political, social and economic position. Tubman had intended a controlled social change which would be evolutionary rather than revolutionary. The new economic order instead of undermining Americo-Liberian control, might finance more efficient ways of control (33).

By this time indigenous Liberians had received qualifications in many professions abroad and were returning to Liberia in significant numbers. To forestall any uneasiness in their ranks, Tubman instituted a kind of welfare system with a difference. The beneficiaries were carefully selected at the pleasure of the President. They included relations of many of these newly returned students, some members of the lower classes of the expatriate group, and thousands of other indigenous people. They were recruited from the rural peasantry, the urban work force, the unemployed, market women, university students, secondary school pupils and employees in government ministries. Their salaries ranged from a few dollars to a few hundred dollars. In essence Tubman had created a huge network of spies under the title of Public Relations Officers. Their job



description was simply to report to the Executive Mansion or the nearest official of government anything they heard from any source, which in their view, could be detrimental to the State or the President. For the indigenous people in particular, this was a manifestation of the President's commitment to integrate them into the national body politic. It was equally their opportunity to ensure stability of their State.

But this gesture simply encouraged the downward trend in peasant production. Those peasants who were recruited into the new scheme abandoned the production process and joined the ranks of those state functionaries who depended on Government salary cheques for their subsistence. This author is aware of numerous such cases and will cite this example: a peasant with a family of seven was recruited as a Public Relations Officer with a monthly salary of \$75. Before this time he made a rice farm every year for the sustenance of his immediate and wider families. He participated fully in the development of the community as his personal skills would provide. Upon his appointment, he stopped farming as he now looked at himself in the capacity of a high official of Government. Perhaps this assumption was justified because at the time, secondary school leavers (high school graduates) who became pupil teachers received a monthly salary of only \$50. This peasant's wives and children now became vegetable gardeners for household consumption. The surplus was marketed in the nearby town. He spent \$15 a month at the time, for two hundred pounds of American long grain parboiled rice. He spent less than that amount for all his other needs a month. His monthly savings per month almost equalled the village teacher's net monthly salary. As can be seen this aspect of the Unification Policy had disastrous effects on peasant production.

Meanwhile President Tubman was criss-crossing the country appealing to peasants to produce more food under a new policy of "Operation Production - Feed Yourself and We Will Feed the Nation". This was one of the many contradictions of the President's policies. While he was removing young healthy and energetic tillers from the land into the ranks of what Alavi calls the "salarist" (34), he was at the same time appealing for an increase in peasant production. It is true to assert that peasant production since that time had never been resuscitated to meet the traditional needs of the communities.

#### 4.3 Types of Peasant Production and Peasant Economic Problem

The economic logic for establishing the Liberian Colonial State was to create a base for a large commercially viable and export oriented economy on the Grain Coast of Africa. The success of that attempt resulted in Liberia being a "plural society" of sorts (35). Market places were erected and trading posts established both along the coasts and in the interior. These became the necessary junctions for the meeting of producers and consumers, and the collection and distribution of commodities. In this way the modern market and its exchange system was introduced. The major hindrance to its rapid expansion was the lack of internal transportation and communication facilities. From the mid 1940s to the end of the 1950s, there was a relatively unprecedented development and expansion of road, railways and telecommunications networks. Through this accomplishment it became easier for Liberia to be fully integrated into the world market system.

Before the expatriates settled on the Grain Coast and long after they declared Liberia independent, the bulk of what could be

referred to as urban centres\* were located in the hinterland. Of course these places lack all the infrastructural development that has now come to be associated with the term. The vast majority of the inhabitants of these places were peasants. This picture has changed dramatically. In 1976 70% of all Liberians practised what is generally referred to as "traditional agriculture". These peasants had minimal interaction with the money economy but supported the majority of the population from the products (36). A manpower survey conducted by the Liberian government in 1980 showed an economically active population of about 670,000. Agriculture and related activities - forestry and fishery - accounted for 538,000 or 79.6% of this number, about 60,000 or 12% were paid employees in commercial agriculture and forestry, constituting the rural proletariat. Mining and quarrying, manufacture and services account for about 18.13%. The remaining 49% are peasants or those engaged in agriculture, fishing, animal husbandry, and crafts using relatively simple tools and technology, mainly using family labour in their production process.

It may be argued that since the beginning of trade between the Europeans and the inhabitants of the Liberian littoral, some peasants had participated in some form of market relations which places a burden on their characterization as self sufficient peasants. However, this group was a very small percentage of the total Liberian peasantry who could not nullify the fact the Liberian peasantry were self sufficient subsistence farmers. Because the representative majority of peasants lived in the hinterland, they were unaffected by these proceedings. In fact it was only with the

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\* Today the Liberian definition of urban centre is any place with a population of 2,000 persons.

introduction of estates in Liberia and as a consequence of it, that peasants diversified into commodity production basically as a response to the demands that were now being made by the rural proletariat who could no longer adequately reproduce themselves. For this reason the extent of peasant commodity production varies widely from those who produce little or nothing for the market to those who have specialized basically in commodity production.

(a) Rice

Rice is the most important crop grown by Liberian peasants because it is the staple food. Two kinds of this crop are grown i.e. Upland rice and Swamp or Paddy rice. A confidential World Bank Study of the Liberian economy in 1984 reported that peasants, whom it chose to call "traditional farmers", dominate the food economy. In that year rice was grown by about 90% of the agricultural households estimated at about 167,000. The average size of these households is 5.4 and this sector utilised over 60% of the total Liberian labour force. The estimated area cropped by the peasantry was over 543,000 acres accounting for about 40% of total cropped area in the country. The typical size of a household holding is approximately four acres, but there are some holdings which are five times that size and some are one-fourth the average size depending on the membership of the household which also varies considerably depending on a number of factors.

Rice production is predominantly for subsistence as our consumption rate has been estimated at between 242-286 lb per capita (accounting for one of the highest levels in Africa). In 1981 for example, total rice consumption in Liberia was estimated at 242,000 metric tons, of which 40% was imported. Rice grown by peasants is usually intercropped with other food crops such as sweet corn,

bitterball, okra, pepper, cassava, etc. (sometimes as much as 15 different crops are grown on a single rice holding). Until recently surpluses were mainly used for traditional feasts, feeding the boys and girls who attended traditional schools, the following year's seeds and for emergencies. With the government's policy of reasantisation, the whole idea of sale of surpluses has been introduced. Consequently there is now the emergence of those peasants who grow rice with the intention of generating fairly large surpluses especially for the market. This group is so small that one cannot yet establish a typology of small, medium and large peasant rice farms in Liberia.

(b) Rubber

Rubber is the most important commercial crop grown in Liberia and has been for a long time. Firestone was followed by other concessionaires and so did well-to-do Liberians follow the rubber culture. Soon the Liberian peasants started experimenting with rubber and by 1960 there were over 2,000 independent Liberian rubber farms.

Distribution of Independent Liberian Rubber Farms Selling to Firestone in 1960 by Size and Acreage

<u>Size of Farms (Acres)</u>	<u>Number of Farms</u>	<u>Acres in Rubber</u>
1-10	1,426	6,437
11-20	346	3,659
21-50	325	10,370
51-100	125	8,960
101-200	43	5,970
201-450	29	8,025
451 and over	6	4,700

Sources: Clover et al., Growth Without Development, p.286 (37)

It is easy to see from the above table that three groups of producers emerge: the small, middle and large farmers. The farmers

with farm sizes ranging from 1 to 20 acres are in the main peasants. They however account for 1,872 farms with a total area of 12,096 acres averaging about 6 acres per farm. Farmers who cropped areas between 12 and 100 acres are the medium size farmers, and like the peasants, they participate in most of the activities on the farm and also provide the supervision where need be. They own 450 farms with a total cropped area of 19,330 acres averaging 43 acres per farm. We have categorised farms over 100 acres as large, owned by the high and mighty absentee farmers. There are only 78 of such farms but with the cropped area of 17,695 acres with an average of 227 acres per farm. This compares badly with the peasant's average farm of 6 acres.

According to Government statistics, by 1974 the number of independent Liberian rubber producers (including the peasantry) had risen from 2,300 in 1960 to 4,800 in 1974 showing an increase of over 100%. This number accounted for about 52% of the total cropped acreage of rubber while the seven concessions accounted for about 48% (with Firestone alone cropping 31%). Although the acreages and number of farms are not given for that year, the experience of the 1960s is a good indicator of the percentage of that Liberian figure which represents the number of peasant rubber farmers. In that year rubber employed 40,000 persons or 35% of all paid Liberian workers. In 1982 the picture looks almost the same as almost 10 years earlier. According to a confidential World Bank document rubber was cropped on an estimated area of 296,400 acres which represented about a quarter of the estimated total cropped area in the country. The area in concessions is about 48% of the total and Liberian farms occupy the remaining 52. The Document indicates that the majority of the Liberian farms are less than 25 acres averaging about 7 acres

per farm. The total production for that year was 146.4 million tons. Out of that figure the local farmers produced about 25 million tons or about 24%. The industry employed a workforce of 42,000 which is still 35% of the total Liberian workforce but it had been at 42,000 since 1970.

In all of this, it is the peasants on the small rubber plots that are taking the beating. All of them sell their yields to the large independent Liberian farmers who in turn sell to Firestone or the other concessions. In their middle man role, the large independent farmers rob the peasants of some of their profits thus making it impossible for the peasants to depend on rubber production and therefore consolidates them in the mixed economy. Besides those peasants who own their own little patch of rubber and continue to participate almost fully in the other spheres of the mixed economy, peasants who work directly for either the Liberian large independent farmers or the concessions also participate near fully in one or more spheres of the mixed economy. The table below shows how participation in the rubber industry has been stagnant since 1970.

Total Employment in the Rubber Industry, Liberia

<u>Year</u>	<u>Concessions</u>	<u>Liberian Farms</u>	<u>Total</u>
1950	21,000	4,000 <sup>a</sup>	25,000
1955	22,000	5,000 <sup>a</sup>	27,000
1960	24,500	11,400	35,900
1965	24,300	14,000	38,000
1970	25,000	17,000	42,000
1982	n.c.	n.c.	42,000

a. Estimate based on average output per employee.

n.c. Not computed

Sources: Department of Planning and Economic Affairs, Economic Survey, 1970, p.79.

Clower et al., Rubber Planters Association of Liberia, in Growth Without Development, op. cit., pp.157, 286.

G. Dalton and A.A. Walters, "The Economy of Liberia", in P. Robson and D.A. Lury (Eds.), Economies of Africa, p.300.

(c) Oil Palm

Until the late 1970s oil palm grew in wild groves and was the exclusive domain of the peasantry. There was never a tradition to cultivate this very important crop as they grew in fairly large quantities throughout the hinterland to meet the needs of the peasant communities and the surplus is marketed. Because they grow more in some areas than others the tree is one of the most important assets of a peasant community. The thatch may be used for roofing. The most widely used edible oil is procured from the berries around its kernels. The kernel itself provides an exotic oil which is used for many purposes including eating and cream used as a skin care product. The trunk is tapped for wine and a kind of fibre is obtained from the leaves which is used by hunters to trap animals. When the tree is rendered useless the trunk can be used across a stream for a bridge. Reproduction is through dispersal of seeds. There are no area estimates of the wild oil palm groves available but about 45% of all agricultural households produce the oil, the wine and other necessities from the oil palm. Since colonial time there has been a demand to export oil and kernels but because surpluses were relatively low, only the Liberia Produce Marketing Corporation was the sole exporter.

During the late 1970s the government established a parastatal (Liberia Palm Products Corporation - LPFC) to make oil palm estates purely for export purposes (Appendix II). At the same time a couple of oil palm concessions were granted: one to a Liberian and another to a foreign concessionaire. By November 1982 LPFC had cropped an area of about 9,386 acres but the statistics for the concessions were not available at the time of my research. As a result of this innovation some peasants are now undertaking oil palm production on



their small holdings as a major crop next to rice and cassava. As this venture is relatively new the number of peasants that are presently participating directly (as owner producers) is not available, nor is there available data on the sizes of their holdings. The fact that they have for some time now sold their surpluses is evidenced by the table below:

LPNC Purchase of Palm Kernels and Palm Oil

<u>Year (1)</u>	<u>Palm Kernels (Dry)</u>	<u>Palm Oil</u>
1971/72	11,568	2,992
1972/73	11,786	4,987
1973/74	15,486	6,743
1974/75	13,797	5,811
1975/76	12,399	5,168
1976/78	8,779	3,418
1978/79	7,389	2,556
1979/80	6,593	1,919
1980/81 (2)	2,152	758

(1) October-September

(2) October-June

Source: LPNC

(d) Cocoa and Coffee

It is estimated that about 20% of all agricultural households grow cocoa and coffee and that the total area under these crops together constitutes a little over 10% of total cropped area in the country. Nationwide statistics are not available for neither the actual number of peasants now growing those crops nor of the sizes of their individual holdings. Our own research findings and statistics from the area we worked will be discussed in the next chapter. Suffice it to say that of the two crops cocoa has been

declared unfit for Liberia's soil and climatic conditions. This coupled with the fact that there is little or no use for cocoa in the average peasant diet - have not generated much enthusiasm for cocoa. However, about 4,000 metric tons was produced in the last few years.

Coffee on the other hand, has shown progress as exports in the last few years have ranged from 8,000 to 10,000 metric tons and has a domestic consumption estimated at about 600 tons per annum.

(e) Cassava

Cassava is the second most important food crop in Liberia. It is cultivated on about 70% of all agricultural holdings but it is difficult to even estimate its cropped acreage because it is grown on its own on the one hand and intercropped with rice and vegetables on the other. It is the least nutritious of all Liberian food crops but can be grown in the worst soils. Traditionally it was only grown for consumption during "hard times" when the rice crop was adversely affected and the harvest was bad. Today cultivating cassava as a primary food crop is on the increase which reflects the fact that many peasants have been moved from good, rich lands to very poor land - and after all they need to survive. Cassava cultivation however, is still the exclusive domain of the peasants.

(f) Mixed Economy

Traditionally most peasants are engaged in the production of several crops and other products for direct consumption with a small percent for barter. Exchange in the market is a late phenomenon and later still is the whole idea of specialist cropping or production like growing only rice, or engaging in only hunting, or fishing, etc. This trend started in the colonial period and was accentuated in the post-colonial state. Before these periods, peasants in this region practised the "mixed economy" system which was a necessity

for their survival. However, the introduction of new technological methods and the huge demand on the peasants to provide for themselves and also for the rural proletariat created a new situation. Peasants now tend to produce more surpluses for exchange and to practise more of mono cultural production. It must be noted however, that among the Mande peasants the percentage following this trend is rather small. It can therefore be said that in this period of transformation the mixed economy can still be rightly said to be a characteristic of the Liberian peasantry. The table below gives an indication.

Principal Crop Production in 1978, 000 metric tons

Rice	268	Oranges	6
Cassava	272	Pineapples	7
Sweet Potatoes	16	Bananas	68
Other Roots & Tubers	47	Plantains	29
Coconuts	7	Coffee	9
Palm Kernels	14.3	Cocoa Beans	3
Vegetables & Melons	62	Natural Rubber	85

Source: Encyclopedia of the Third World, pp.1071-1085.

#### 4.3.1 Peasant Economic Problems

Liberian peasantry occupies the lowest level of the nation's socio-economic arrangement in terms of standard of living and the available means to improve that standard. This is the result of several factors important among which are Liberia's peculiar colonial experience, its peculiar brand of the democratic process and the lack of a genuine political will among its post colonial leaders to seek lasting solutions to the problem. The fact that many Liberian academics (never mind the politicians) think that the term peasant itself smacks of communism or socialism and should therefore be neglected for "traditional" or "small farmers", compounds the peasant problem in Liberia. The long alienation of the peasantry from the political process especially during the

period when they were denied the franchise referred to earlier, points to the lack of fulcrum which could have provided a political compulsion to seek the welfare of what is the vast majority of the Liberian people.

We shall summarize some of the most important problems faced by the peasantry in post-colonial Liberia. We shall later look at government's development programmes geared towards alleviating the worsening socio-economic conditions of the majority of the rural population.

(a) Population Pressure

What in our view is fast becoming a crucial problem for the peasant agricultural economy is simply the ratio of peasants to available cultivable land. Because of the apparently favourable ratio of Liberia's population to her land area there is always the assumption that there is enough land for everybody to participate in agriculture. This assumption however, ignores the fact the rubber, mining, and logging concessions now followed by the oil palm concessions and now government's own parastatals engaged in the cocoa, coffee and also oil palm cultivation account for almost half of Liberia's arable land. Added to this are the large tracts reserved as national forests. The available land suitable for agricultural cultivation and accessible by good all weather roads is therefore small and has worsened from demographic pressure marked by a high population density per square mile. The tables on the following page will illustrate the point.

Other factors responsible for the emergence of this demographic pressure on the land are i) the sharp rise in the growth rate of the rural population, ii) the existence of administrative constraints to land alienation, and iii) the wide inter-regional differences in population density.

Estimated Population by Sex and Rural/Urban Residence of Specified Years

Total Population	1980-81			1981-82			1982-83			1984		
	All Areas	Rural	Urban	All Areas	Rural	Urban	All Areas	Rural	Urban	All Areas	Rural	Urban
Both Sexes	1,905,612	1,217,421	688,191	1,971,636	1,239,845	731,791	2,037,662	1,262,269	777,393	2,109,186	1,266,560	822,626
Male	960,695	612,347	348,348	993,803	625,777	368,026	1,026,913	659,208	287,705	1,062,780	653,757	409,023
Female	944,917	605,074	399,843	977,833	614,068	363,765	1,010,749	623,051	297,688	1,046,406	632,803	413,603

Note: In the Liberia context, any settlement of 2,000 inhabitants or more is designated as urban.

Source: Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs, Republic of Liberia, Second National Socio-Economic Development Plan, July 1981-June 1985, p.41.

#### b) Unequal Development

In Liberia as in most West African countries, some sectors or regions develop faster than others. It is true that the plantation and mining sectors developed (and continue to do so) faster in terms of income and per capita than the peasant sectors which are either on the fringes of these concession areas or away from them.

There is uneven development in the peasant sector as well. The farther one goes away from the concession enclaves and of course from the motor roads the more this phenomenon becomes apparent. The policy of distributing high yielding grains and other agricultural inputs to peasants in better placed areas, which are relatively limited (and not to others), would further widen the disparities in levels of yield and productivity in both rice and cash crops in the small holdings of the peasants in the two types of areas. This highlights and exacerbates the problem. In the rice sector some peasants are provided with seeds which facilitate double cropping and raises the income of such peasants while those who had not benefitted from such modern agricultural input remain at their original low levels.

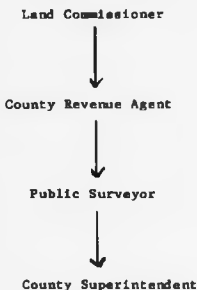
Some rubber smallholders have benefitted from planting or re-planting high yielding clones while some have not. The same goes for cocoa and coffee. In fact in some areas where there are branches of the Agricultural Development Bank, some rich and middle level peasants have received loans to improve the sizes of their farms and consequently their yields in swamp rice, cocoa and coffee. Such a practice continues to widen the gap between those peasants who get such assistance and those who do not. Consequently there are bound to be disparities in the standard of living and income reflecting an improvement for the former and a state of stagnation and continued poverty for the latter.

It is safe to conclude that on the whole the peasant economy has experienced uneven development which has divided it into the larger part being "traditional" and backward and the smaller being "modern" and relatively more prosperous. However, both parts of the agrarian economy are well integrated into the world capitalist system but the incidence of poverty is higher in the former than in the latter.

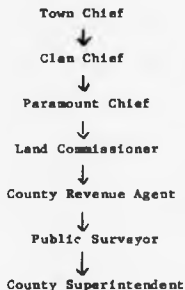
(c) Land Alienation

The process of land alienation is a very complicated business (and rather too expensive) for the average peasant in Liberia. As noted in Chapter Two, the state has eminent domain over all land within the Republic but title to, and occupancy of land falls under three major categories: Privately deeded land; Public land; and Tribal land. The last category is legally public land but reserved for use as tribal towns, tribal farms, fallow land and bush occasionally used, native authority forest reserve, and communal forest. The alienation of any part of this land is guided by traditional law and custom (37). Public land can be however privately deeded after an onerous process and because of this there is a gradual depletion of tribal lands and a total loss of control over land by the tribal people. To alienate a piece of public land a summary sketch of the process is shown in the figure below:

(To alienate town lots)



(To alienate farm land)



President of the Republic of Liberia



Although this process erodes confidence in the traditional system it has created one effective constraint on land grabbing by the rich and powerful, usually urban dwellers. In order to establish a lasting claim on some land without passing through public lands law procedure, many farmers plant permanent tree crops such as cocoa and coffee in order to encumber or engage a tract of land. These tree crops are hardly cared for or harvested but at least the land is successfully taken out of circulation. In this way a vicious circle is set in motion leading to an increased amount of land going into unproductive use and increased pressure on land.



#### 4.4 Government Policy on Rural Development

From the establishment of the colonial state in 1822 to date and after 140 years of independence, no Liberian government has been committed (1) to raising the standard of living and alleviating poverty or (b) to provide the kind of development process that will be geared towards developing the total man i.e. in education, health, sanitation, infrastructure, politics, and economics. Of course much has been said about minimizing the socio-economic problems of the rural dwellers over the years but very little has been actually done.

At the conceptual level Liberian governments over the years have never defined development generally or rural development particularly and have therefore always used the term in abstraction. Since independence in 1847 Liberia has launched two four year National Socio-Economic Development Plans. The first was from July 1976 to June 1980 and the second was from July 1981 to June 1985. The objectives of both plans are basically the same:

- a) diversification of production;
- b) dispersion of sustainable socio-economic activities throughout the country;
- c) total involvement of the entire population in the development;
- and
- d) equitable distribution of the benefits of economic growth and diversification so as to ensure an acceptable standard of living to people throughout the country (38).

By mid 1976 government (with the cooperation of the World Bank) established the first of the three Agricultural Development Projects in Lofa as part of its development package. Its basic objectives

were to increase production of rice, cocoa and coffee in small farms in an area that had a population of about 800 farm families. The project was intended to increase the average per capita income from US\$63.00 to US\$182.00 (39). The project provides high yielding varieties of seeds and seedlings to some peasants to improve their yield per acre. Cash loans are also given to other peasants (in some cases some peasants got both the material and financial support) to either rehabilitate or enlarge their cash crop farms or increase the acreage of their rice farms. There are attempts at providing rudimentary community services.

It is our view that these attempts at alleviating rural poverty and improving the quality of life have not succeeded. It is regrettable that the planners and implementers of these projects believe for some reason, that an increase in productivity and per capita income will in themselves ensure development and the good life for these rural dwellers. For example, achieving increase in the productive capacity of the land does nothing to arrest the rising economic inequality among the rural population. These so-called development projects as pursued by government are based on the conservative nature of the government and therefore lack much needed reformist approaches. Consequently the emphasis is on increasing efficiency and productivity while the structure of the peasant economy remains basically the same. The benefits of these so-called development projects are therefore pre-empted by the upper strata of the rural community like the rich peasants and the petty traders in areas with better quality land and importantly, areas well served by modern roads beyond which government's agencies made little effort to reach. The economic condition of the poor peasants may have probably worsened. This indicates that the structure of

rural society is characterised by a noticeable degree of economic and class disparities and differentiation.

#### **4.3 Model of Transformed Peasant Economy**

Peasant transformation in Liberia can be calculated by the extent to which integration into the wider Liberian society through exchange relations and commodity production has taken place within the peasant community. Such involvement is dependent on the peasant community's location in relation to markets, ports, road and communication networks as these are the major links between peasant communities and the outside world. In fact these are like catalysts in the transformation process.

The reason for the building of this infrastructure was to meet the needs of the colonial economy which was in turn to service the demands of the capitalist centres, also represented in a peripheral condition in many parts of the world. As a result of this expansion, capitalism was able at a very early stage to penetrate pre-capitalist peasant economy and society. That penetration continues even today. As has been seen earlier in Chapter Two, pre-capitalist system and relations of production were subordinated to the new system of capitalist commodity production and exchange relations. What emerged from this new situation is that peasant economy is now characterised in three ways: modified natural economy, mixed subsistence commercial economy, and commercial economy.

**Modified natural economy:** During pre-colonial time production in this milieu was almost exclusively for use; unplanned surpluses were bartered. The peasants produced almost everything they needed either directly or through skilled craftsmen through a division of

labour within the peasant community. In this way the peasant community produced everything it needed from food items to non food items. This ensured their survival because first and foremost they were food producers.

That "natural economy" was modified by population growth and the introduction of health services which have assured more manpower in the production process resulting in larger surpluses than in the pre-colonial time. Also the pressure posed on the food producing population by the relatively expanding non food producing population in the urban areas and in the foreign concessions, has provided an incentive to produce larger surpluses for the market. The peasants' need for imported cheap manufactured goods were also an added reason for large surplus production. The production of surplus was also stepped up to meet the new cash needs (like taxes, education, and other fees). In this phase of the transition the peasants still produced largely for direct consumption.

Mixed subsistence - commercial economy: Peasants in this economy produce food crops like rice, cassava, and vegetables for consumption and commercial crops like coffee, cocoa and rubber and rather palm nuts (for the kernels) exclusively for the market. Besides the cash needs referred to above the peasants also aspire to the possession of cheap luxury goods on the market - the most common in Liberia being the transistor radio (sometimes with a cassette tape player).<sup>4</sup> There are also socio-cultural needs like sending children to the traditional schools of poro and sande. Hence the need for the peasant to grow more crops for the market in order to raise the necessary funds.

Doubtless this model of the peasant economy represents a more advanced level of transformation than the one described earlier.

However because the household has now diversified its cropping to accomodate commercial crops, it has similarly lessened its capacity for food production. What obtains as a result is that the income received from the sale of its commodities may be used to purchase more food to augment the household's own produce until the next harvest season. Peasants in this model also invest part of their cash income into inputs like fertilizers in order to increase production.

This level of peasant transformation also indicates a higher level of peasant integration into the market economy. Peasants are, at this stage, partly dependent on the market for the total satisfaction of their subsistence needs. In spite of this, experience has shown that peasants are quite capable of reverting to production solely for their own consumption if and when the need arises (in times of declining demand for cash crops). In this respect peasant production is capable of adjusting to the changing market situation.

Commercial economy: This economy depicts the highest degree of dependence of the peasant economy on the market (i.e. the cash income from the sale of their products) for their own subsistence. There is the tendency in this economy to grow only cash crops or produce entirely for the market. Usually the peasants in this

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\* The transistor radio is a visible part of almost every peasant household in Liberia today for two reasons: First the government's own radio station does transmit occasional messages in the major indigenous languages whenever there is a need. Second, one of the two Christian stations, ELWA (Eternal Love Winning Africa), regularly broadcasts news, health programmes, obituary announcements, sickness messages and light entertainment in almost all the local languages on a regular basis. Alongside these public services the station carries on numerous christian instruction programmes also in the local languages.

economy specialise in either one crop (rubber or cocoa or coffee) or a combination. The important thing is that these peasants produce only for the market.

This model constitutes an advanced phase of peasant transformation and a higher level of development of the economy. It suggests that the decision to produce non-food commodities is taken in the light of the quantity of remuneration received from this exercise vis-a-vis food production. This choice may also be dictated by the appropriateness of the soil for some crops and not for others. However, in this model the peasant is not entirely in control and is most vulnerable to the forces of both the national and world markets.

The models of peasant economy in the post transformation phase are dependant on several things including ecology, uneven nature of capitalist domination on the agrarian sector and policy on rural development.

### Conclusion

We have attempted to give a general picture of peasant economy and society among the Mande of Liberia generally. We shall now examine a specific regional case of the nature of peasant economy and society between February 1984 and August 1985 (the period of our empirical fieldwork). While we shall permanently reside in one part of the region we shall visit other parts of it for comparative purposes. Rice, cocon and coffee are the predominant crops in this region. As has been shown, although the destruction of the natural economy started in this region over 100 years ago, yet it is still constituted by all three of our models.

FOOTNOTESChapter IV

1. R. Buell, op. cit., pp.763-764.
2. Brown, op. cit., p.142.
3. E. Yancy, Historical Lights of Liberia's Yesterday and Today (Ohio: 1934), p.142.
4. B. Anderson, Journeys to Musardu (London: 1971), pp.100-111.
5. H. Johnston, op. cit., p.288.
6. Brown, op. cit., p.164.
7. H. Johnston, op. cit., p.289.
8. Brown, ibid.
9. R. Buell, op. cit., pp.799-800.
10. R. Buell, op. cit., p.801.
11. R. Buell, op. cit., p.805.
12. Brown, op. cit., p.169.
13. Brown, ibid.
14. R. Buell, op. cit., p.725.
15. Brown, op. cit., p.146.
16. Brown, op. cit., p.184.
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18. Reports and Opinions of the Attorney General of the Republic of Liberia, December 15, 1922 - July 31, 1930, Louis Arthur Crimes, Attorney General, pp.291-292.
19. Copy of Firestone agreements from the Concessions Secretariat, Ministry of Finance, Republic of Liberia, Monrovia.
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21. J. Young, Liberia Rediscovered (New York: 1936, p.29.
22. L. Marinelli, The New Liberia: A Historical and Political Survey (London: 1964), p.76.

23. J. Weeks, 1962 Annual Report of the Director-General of the Office of National Planning, October 30, 1962, p.14.
24. Documents from the Concessions Secretariat, Ministry of Finance, Republic of Liberia, Monrovia.
25. R. McLaughlin, Foreign Investment and Development in Liberia (New York: 1966), p.63.
26. Clower et al., Growth Without Development (Evanston: 1966), p.63.
27. Clower et al., op. cit., p.157.
28. Speech Delivered by President Tubman to the National Unification Council, Kolahun, Liberia, 14 February 1963.
29. E. Townsend (Ed.), President Tubman of Liberia Speaks (London: 1959), p.27.
30. Clower et al., op. cit.
31. World Bank Document, Liberia Agricultural Sector Review, Vol.II, 1984 p.2.
32. World Bank Document, ibid.
33. G. Liebenow, op. cit., p.71.
34. H. Alavi, op. cit.
35. The concept of plural society was introduced by J.S. Furnivall to refer to the situation where traditional society is segmented as a result of the introduction and imposition of the colonial economic system. In popular usage, plural society refers to a society which is marked by social divisions along ethnic, racial, religious or linguistic lines. The Liberian plural society is characterised by the broad division between the descendants of the expatriates and the indigenous population.
36. National Socio-Economic Development Plan July 1976 - June 1980, Report of the National Planning Council, Government of Liberia, Monrovia, 1976.
37. Clower et al., op. cit. pp.248-249.
38. National Socio-Economic Development Plan, op. cit., p.7.
39. Lofa County Agricultural Development Project, Phase II, Working Paper 10 - Farm Planning and Land Registration, Voinjama, Liberia (n.d.).



CHAPTER V  
THE CULTIVATORS OF LOFA COUNTY

Introduction

In this last chapter we have identified three variants of the post transformation peasant economy - natural economy, mixed subsistence - commodity economy, and non food base economy. Our study will focus on each of these three kinds of peasant economies as they exist in Lavalazu in particular (and Lofa Country in general).<sup>\*</sup> We will begin by paying specific attention to those peasants engaged in rice production mainly for household consumption. Of course these peasants also sell any little surplus they may have on the local market. We will then focus our attention on those peasants engaged in both the mixed and non food based sectors.

The major argument of this study will follow along lines suggested by Karl Kautsky; i.e. that the development of capitalism in agriculture is different from that of industry. Our next argument is informed by a position of some contemporary Marxists, that the development of capitalism in agriculture in peripheral societies is completely different from that which exists in metropolitan capitalist societies. In the former (and given the benefit of our own experience in the light of our study) the Marx-Lenin prediction of a total class polarising effect is yet to emerge among these people or may just not occur at all. Although class differentiation appears to be the main distinguishing

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\* Lavalazu served as the resident base for our study because it provided all the variables for which we were looking. However, we studied another community - Kolahun - for comparative purposes.

characteristic of the agrarian development, the middle peasantry continues to stubbornly persist rather than be dissolved. Of course their socio-economic well-being is declining rather rapidly. In relatively recent times the post-colonial state in Liberia has introduced some interventionist policies that have been rather vigorously pursued. As a result it can be said that peasants are generally sort of stabilizing their economic position if not actually improving it. This stabilization is to be seen in a wider context of those peasants among whom such state intervention has taken place and those among whom it has not yet taken place.

We shall seek to explain the persistence of peasant differentiation in the Liberian economy by examining the patterns of inter-class household mobility in the community and how this can be related to the phenomenon of peasant class differentiation.

### 5.1 Rice Cultivation

There is a long tradition of rice cultivation in the Upper Guinea Coast of West Africa. Rice is the most important staple food among most Mandes and Liberians generally. This fact should help explain the region's longstanding history of rice cultivation. Fairly recently swamp rice cultivation on a relatively big scale was introduced to the Liberian peasants; until then peasants practised upland rice farming. This method constitutes clearing, slashing, burning the bush or forest and ploughing the seeds to be exclusively rain-fed. After the harvest the area lies fallow for about three to five years while the peasants cultivate other areas. In the mean time crops of less importance are grown on this plot during this period.

Since the 1960s successive Liberian governments have continued to encourage the peasants to undertake the swamp rice cultivation. There are two major reasons for this exercise: 1) The variety of swamp rice introduced is said to yield at least two harvests from one crop and there is no fallow period needed. 2) It inhibits the destruction of the physical surroundings (as is the case in upland rice cultivation) which tends to give rise to soil erosion. It is also argued that the widespread cultivation of upland rice may cause an ecological disequilibrium. In spite of these arguments upland rice cultivation is still more popular among the Mandes of Liberia. But even if swamp rice cultivation was to be preferred by the peasants the limited swamp land area available poses the greatest hindrance to this transition. In fact swamp rice cultivation is not a new phenomenon to Mande peasants (as we learnt from our fieldwork). What is new is the introduction of this new variety and the importance that the post-colonial state attaches to it. In this method the rice is cultivated in a prepared swamp and is fed by the water from the swamp. If the swamp does not provide adequate water supply for the rice fields then it is irrigated in order to meet the necessary demand.

By the end of the 1960s government was aware that the conversion to swamp rice cultivation was not becoming a success. It was decided therefore to introduce a high yielding variety crop to the upland rice cultivators. In 1972 the government along with assistance from the World Bank launched the first of its Agricultural Development Projects in Upper Lofa County (an area noted for its generally high levels of rice production). As part of its integrated rural development programme its broad objectives were, in part, in their own words:

"... to assist 8000 farming families in the development of 13832 acres of upland rice, 4693 acres of swamp rice, 6916 acres of coffee and 5681 acres of cocoa." (1)

The fact that the target acreage for the swamp rice is about one third of the upland rice target is an indication that the government now accepts that the latter is more popular with the peasants than is the former. However, the size of the swamp rice target suggests that the post-colonial state is prepared to open, develop and supply with proper drainage and irrigation facilities, fairly large areas of land to encourage swamp rice cultivation even though it may be at an enormous cost. Whether this position will produce the double cropping which will increase the yield per acre and so improve the economic lot of the peasant remains to be seen. Of equal importance is whether this will help to reduce Liberia's high dependency on America for the supply of its staple food (which is a major reason for this exercise) can only be assessed after some time of operation.

#### **5.1.2 Research Area: Lwalaxu - Upper Lofa County**

To do a detailed study of a community that is engaged in the three kinds of peasant economies which we have earlier identified, we have chosen Lwalaxu (a large farming community of over 270 houses) in particular, and Upper Lofa County in general. The region is endowed with abundant fertile land and a people who possess a proven inclination to agriculture. There is sufficient evidence to believe that they have always produced more rice and other food crops than their subsistence needs demand. When the colonial state placed some emphasis on coffee production and later the post-colonial state encouraged cocoa, the people of this region again showed their high degree of productivity. Several cooperative

societies were established in the area designed to serve the commercial needs of residents. They built some basic infrastructure (like farm to market roads) necessary for the development of agriculture on a self help basis.

When the colonial state was established the American long grain, parboiled rice was introduced to Liberia. This drastically changed the tastes of many indigenous Liberians (some of whom considered eating the new variety of rice as a sign of status). First the use of this rice widely spread to the urban areas and the concessions and then to the rural areas, but the eating habits and tastes of the people of Upper Lofa County remained largely unchanged. They have continued to produce and consume local rice until recent successive governments singled them out as hard working and very productive. For these reasons, when the government decided to launch the first of its County Agricultural Development Projects, Lofa was rightly chosen as the pilot project area. On that occasion it was reiterated that a major consideration for the project was to increase the average per capita income of the average peasant from US\$63 to \$182 (2).

What we found out is that the post-colonial state tried to solve a host of pressing problems from this venture without perhaps realising the external political interests at stake. Peasants in the region were to participate in the activities of the project to increase their yield per acre and acreage under cultivation. In ten years time it was planned, along with the other projects that were in the pipeline, that Liberia would be self sufficient in rice production. The renewed emphasis on cash crop cultivation was to ensure a steady flow of foreign exchange since iron-ore (the largest single foreign exchange earner was on the decline). So from

Upper Lofa County the state was preparing to meet the rather high demands placed on the food economy by the non agricultural population. A success story from this region would be bound to reflect a decrease in the nation's dependency on the U.S. as the rice bowl of Liberia. The politics of such a policy is a completely different matter altogether.

Long after rubber became a success story in Liberia some Liberians (either of some economic means or political power or both) got interested in the industry and started alienating large tracts of public land for rubber farming. Upper Lofa County situated some 450 miles from Monrovia on the northwestern-most part of Liberia and for a long time accessible only by light aircraft was never successfully besieged by the new "farmers". Much later when the post-colonial state built a road to this region only a part of it was macadamised and the longer part remained all weather and impossible during the rainy seasons. This helps to explain why land grabbing that took place in the counties close to Monrovia did not take place in Upper Lofa County. This also helps to explain why production of food crops (and later coffee and cocoa) was always a serious business here.

Rice cultivation among these Mende people has always been carried out by the household - the unit of production and consumption. Before the establishment of the colonial state, it was done on relatively small parcels of land between 2 and 5 acres depending on the size of the household. The plot generally averaged about 4 acres and the produce served the consumption needs of the household for the year, provided seeds for the following year, and some was reserved for unforeseen circumstances. After all these the surplus if any, is bartered. Today, while for the majority of the

peasants cultivate an average of about 5 acres traditionally, some middle level and rich peasants in this region, cultivating with an eye on the market, are now farming much larger acreages.

When the post-colonial state extended its influence to the hinterland of Liberia and alienated all lands under its policy of eminent domain it was careful to reserve some lands as "Tribal Lands" for the exclusive use of the communities. These lands consist of "tribal" towns, farms, native authority forest reserve and communal forests. However, the laws stipulate:

"The interest of a tribe in lands may be converted into communal holdings upon its application to the Government. The proposed holding shall be surveyed at the expense of the tribe making the application. The communal holding shall be vested in the members of the Tribal Authority as trustees for the tribe, but the trustees shall not be able to pass title in fee simple in such lands to any person whomsoever." (3)

The traditional communal ownership of land and the new individual ownership concept of land took a very long time to be reconciled. As a result individual appropriation of land among the peasants of Upper Lofa county is a relatively new phenomenon. Most of those who appropriate individual lands do so at the behest of either their educated children or other relations who had had some exposure to or been in association with the idea of private ownership. Pieces of lands thus appropriated are intended mainly for the cultivation of cash crops. In Upper Lofa County that means the cultivation of coffee and cocoa. In spite of this new phenomenon of private land alienation in this region it is very difficult to foresee landlessness becoming an issue here. For that to happen the fundamental structure of chief and community relationship would have to be destroyed. This is not in the foreseeable future.

Our base during fieldwork was Lawalazu, a community of 270 houses and the second largest town of the clan next only to Voinjama, the county headquarters. In 1985 this community had a population of 1627 persons, constituting 23 households,\* an average of approximately 8 persons per household. Like all traditional communities in Lofa the Chief and his Speaker (Assistant Chief) represent the community to the national and county government officials and agencies. Along with the council of elders they sit in judgement on all matters brought to their attention as well as encourage reconciliation. We did not meet anyone who remembers or has ever heard of any occasion when an appeal was taken against the judgement of any chief or in concert with his council of elders.

Farming is the major occupation in this community and everyone is directly or remotely involved in the production of food and cash crops. There are however, some people in the community who provide specialist services like blacksmiths, teachers, weavers, tailors, zoas (leaders of the poro and sande societies and leading herbalists), merchants, pharmacists, carpenters, masons, medical assistants and civil servants. The county agricultural development project has a nursery here and some of its employees live here. There is a customs post in Lawalazu manned by a collector, his assistant and two soldiers as the town is on a main route to Guinea which is not too far away.

There is an elementary-junior high school with a pupil population of over two hundred and fifty and a staff of seven teachers. The community also has a health clinic staffed by a resident medical assistant and a practical nurse. A market is held

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\* We took a population and housing census of Lawalazu after our arrival there in 1985.



every Wednesday that attracts buyers and sellers from Voinjama (the county headquarters) which is connected by a seven mile road. Many others come from towns off the road and from as far away as the Guinea border. Some traders come to buy foodstuff in bulk to send to Monrovia. There is also a cooperative agency which buys rice, coffee and wood.\* There are two merchants with small shops dealing in limited ranges of imported merchandise. Of course a local daily market exists. A vibrant traffic system exists between Lavalazu and Voinjama and beyond. A study shows that over a seven day period between December 1980 and January 1981 the traffic to this community consisted of 16 motor cycles, 118 lightweight and 6 heavy duty vehicles (4). Lavalazu can therefore be said to be a dynamic community where tradition meets modernisation.

Our fieldwork here was conducted over a nine month period. During our survey we interviewed a total of 150 economically active household heads. 40 were not engaged in agricultural production. They were teachers, petty traders, labourers at the project, etc. 50 were engaged only in rice farming and 35 were engaged in both rice and cash crop farming, while 15 cultivated cash crops only. A detailed analysis of the occupational, class, and economic differentiation of the participants is given in 5.3 of this chapter.

### 5.1.3 Cultivation Cycle

There is a single method of upland rice cultivation among the Mandes of this area. There may be slight variations as to the timing of when to do what depending on the collective experience, the personal experience, and the kind of land under cultivation.

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\* This cooperative was inactive.



In the following discussion we will attempt to outline the processes of cultivating both the upland and swamp rice as practised by the people in the area studied. Upland rice cultivation takes place in three stages: brushing, felling, and burning; ploughing, weeding, and bird-driving; and harvesting. Swamp rice cultivation on the other hand goes through four stages: land and nursery preparation; transplanting; bird-driving; and harvesting.

### 5.1.3A Upland Rice Cultivation

The bush on the land to be cultivated is cleared with machetes by February of the year of cultivation. The bigger trees are isolated and felled by the use of axes usually in early March. The area is left for the sun to properly dry the bushes and felled trees (March is the second hottest month of the year in Liberia). By mid-April the area (now considered dried enough) is burnt and becomes ready for ploughing the rice when the rains begin and the prepared ground is deemed cool enough for planting. All of these activities are normally done by men and at this time they now retire to engage in other agricultural activities while the women take over. In this part of the region largely populated by the Lormas there is a strict division of labour on sexual lines. Further north of where we studied, among the Mendes and Ghandis, the division is less strict.

Ploughing is normally done by the women. They use hoes which are locally made. The rice seeds are broadcast over an area which is to be ploughed that session. The ground is scratched with the hoe and the soil covers the seeds until the area that was broadcast is completed. The process is continued until the whole farm is ploughed. When the rice begins to grow some weeds grow along with the rice and it is the women who normally do the weeding. As the rice progresses and begins to bear, birds begin to pick grains from

the stalks. Very small huts are erected throughout the farm as watching posts from which children (boys and girls) and women use slings and stones to drive away the birds. Scarecrows are sometimes used as well to assist the human effort. This process continues until the rice is ready for the harvest.

Generally women are responsible for harvesting the rice depending on their number in the household and the size of the farm. If the farm is very large and even with extra household support if it takes too long to harvest, the rice is destroyed. In such cases the men will also join in the harvest. The harvesters use very small knives (locally made) and the children use bamboo sticks for this purpose. Many persons nowadays use cheap imported pen knives. They cut the bunch of rice from the individual stalks and kept in one hand until a handful is collected. This is tied and put away. The younger members of the household (supervised by an elder) collect the bundles of rice at a central location. This process is repeated until all the rice is harvested.

### 5.1.3B Swamp Rice Cultivation

Preparing the main swamp and the nursery are usually done simultaneously. The men prepare the main swamp while the women prepared the nursery.\* Since beasts of burden have not yet been introduced into Liberian agriculture, preparation is by slashing the weed with specially made heavy headed chopping and the stubs are

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\* When the head of household decides to cultivate this traditional division of labour is affected. If he however, decides to cultivate upland rice and his wife (or group of wives) decides to cultivate a swamp as a private venture (as is usually the case in this area), then that is entirely up to her (or the group). This labour is however, in addition to what is traditionally expected on the family farm. In this case the men's help is usually minimal.

uprooted with a hoe. The weeds are left in the field to decompose for some time and what is left of them is raked to the edge of the swamp. Then the plot is levelled using spades or shovels.

Meanwhile the seeds which have been soaked for some time are now planted in the nursery. We learnt two methods of doing this. In the first the seeds are broadcast on a soft dry land in a corner of the swamp that is drier than the rest of the plot. If however, this kind of area is not available as the plot might be always overflowed with water then the second method - the dry nursery - is used. In this case the nursery is prepared on a piece of dry land a little distance away from the selected swamp. The seeds are nursed there and constantly fed with water. This is usually the case with the traditional variety of rice because the new variety is said to require much more water and cannot therefore be nursed in this way. In some cases a second nursery is used before final transplantation. Whether a second nursery is used or not the new rice plants require between 6-8 weeks to be transplanted to the main swamp. The process is a full time job as the peasants begin by about 7 o'clock in the morning, breaking about noon, returning to the swamp between 2-3 p.m. and finally breaking for the day by about 6 p.m.

The seedlings which by now would have grown to about 2 foot or more are carefully removed from the soil at the roots and carried to the prepared plots for transplantation. The commonest method we observed is by using the hand to push the roots of about two or three seedlings into the soil and let them stay upright. They are cultivated about one foot apart - some people used ropes to grow the seedlings in straight lines.

The level of water allowed during the transplantation stage is usually low - a few inches above the surface. In fact, seedlings can be transplanted even if there is no water in the swamp but as long as the plot is always kept wet and muddy. This wetness is necessary because the seedlings require an appreciable volume of water during the early growing stages and would die if such supply is inadequate.

The period between transplanting and harvesting varies with the variety planted. The traditional variety has been observed to take between 4 and 8 months maximum while the new introduced variety has been observed to take between 3 and 4 months. Attempts at double cropping have been made in the region but the enthusiasm died down with the comparatively low productivity. At the time of our study the latter was not largely practised. It must be noted that the government, through its agent, the County Agricultural Development Project, has tried to encourage farmers to this new method of swamp rice cultivation. Since the continuation of the project into its second phase has been seriously jeopardised by the present chaotic effects of the declining national economy, the hopes of achieving this goal seem to be impossible for now.

There is usually less activity in the period between transplanting and harvesting but attention has to be paid to the weeds, otherwise they will strangle the young seedlings. This does not usually take very much time and so the women (whose task it is to weed the rice field) participate in other economic activities. The men generally use this time to do a variety of things: go on hunting expeditions; produce palm oil from oil palm trees; do necessary repairs on homes and barns; distill local gin; tap palm trees for palm wine which is a favourable beverage in this

part of Liberia; repair fishing and hunting nets, etc.

We observed two methods used in the harvesting of swamp rice. In one method, which in our view is time consuming, small knives (made by the local blacksmiths) are used to cut each stalk individually between the grains and the roots with one hand. The rice stalks are gathered into one hand. The rice stalks are gathered into the other hand until a handful is collected. This is then tied with a stalk. This bundle is then collected along with the other by someone else and carried to a central position. In the alternative method, a sickle-like instrument is employed to cut a handful of stalks between the rice and roots at one time. When it is big enough for a bundle it is then tied and dropped on site from where it is carried away to a central point of collection. The grains that fall off are easily collected over the water - an advantage over upland rice. The bundles of rice are then collected in a shared barn from where the rice is threshed, dried, cleaned, and disposed of as necessary. We shall examine the economies of this exercise later in this chapter.

## 5.2 Cash Crop Cultivation: Cocoa and Coffee

The gradual destruction of the natural economy beginning from the middle of the last century brought the reconstruction of the Liberian peasantry as simple commodity producers producing partly or exclusively for the market. The increasing domination of the peasantry by peripheral capitalist mode of production makes it necessary for the farmer to realise exchange value to make possible its own reproduction. In order to meet the needs of the expanding colonial economy, it was essential to polarise the pre-capitalist Liberian peasant economic activities in order to provide for the

increasing division of labour under the emerging capitalist mode of production.

Earlier we examined that part of the community that produced only food, now we shall examine that part of it that produces early cash crops - in this case cocoa and coffee - as a response to the demand for these products by metropolitan capital. These producers are directly linked (unlike those producing food largely for consumption) with the complex system of commodity relations at the global level. In order for them to have been totally integrated into the market relations means that the pre-capitalist basis for their peasant reproduction has been destroyed and replaced by a new basis in which exchange value is the prior condition for the reproduction of their households. Their choice in agricultural commodity production as against food production makes them dependent on the market for their own basic consumption needs. In this way they have been completely transformed into what Kautsky called "pure agriculturalists".

We shall later examine two groups of commodity producers in Lalawazu and Upper Lofa - those peasants cultivating their crops with traditional inputs, expertise, and resources; and those peasants who have become "project farmers" relying on the cash loan, input, and expertise provided by the project.

#### 5.2.1 Cocoa Cultivation

Cocoa can be planted from seeds, seedlings, and/or cuttings in land which would have been earlier cleared, brushed, and prepared for this purpose. It is cultivated in deep, porous, well-drained soil which is rich in humus. Care must be taken to make a provision for shade from higher tree canopies so as to avoid the direct heat of the sun from scorching the seeds or seedlings or cuttings. In

whichever form (of the three named) that one chooses to cultivate cocoa, they are spaced at intervals anywhere from 5 ft-15 ft. As the crop grows a small amount of weeding becomes necessary. Pruning may also be done where necessary. In fact we were informed by peasants experienced in cultivating both cocoa and coffee, that growing and caring for cocoa is not as tasking as what is needed for coffee.

Cocoa, we were told, begins to bear from as early as three years to as late as eight years old. Its yields per acre vary and the range is determined by a number of factors such as variety, quality of soil, if diseased, care, etc. Most of the initial labour involved in this process (like brushing, clearing, planting and weeding) is usually provided by men and boys. Women participate in harvesting and removing the seeds from the pods. Thereafter they (women) are not actively involved again until they oversee the drying period. Harvesting can proceed all year round but the bulk of the crop is gathered in the two flush periods occurring from October-February and from May to August.

Ripe pods are cut from the trees with pea knives (or as in most cases) with small knives, made by the local blacksmith, which could also be used for rice harvesting. The pods are collected in bags or baskets to a central point. When all the ripe pods are collected (over a period of time and depending on the size of the farm), they are split open with machetes, knives, or against rocks. The beans are removed from their pods with their surrounding pulp and gathered in leaf-covered heaps, or in leaf lined holes dug in the ground, or in large shallow boxes having perforated bottoms to provide for drainage.



The pulp is allowed between 3 and 7 days to ferment. The seeds (along with the pulp) are frequently turned over and again to dissipate whatever excess heat that might have accumulated and thus some degree of uniformity (of heat present) is provided. During fermentation, the juicy sweatings of the pulp are drained away, and whatever germs present among the seeds are killed during the fermentation period by the increased heat - or so we are told. From this point the development of flavour begins. The beans become plump and full of moisture, and the interior develops a reddish brown colour and a heavy, sharp fragrance. The beans are then spread on mats to be properly sun dried and thereafter they are bagged for sale.

### 5.2.2 Coffee Cultivation

Coffee is usually grown in forestland that had been cleared, and prepared for the purpose. This work is usually done by men. In fact women, we were told, are not actively involved in the crop cultivation. For example in the cultivation of coffee, women are only needed to help in picking and gathering the fruit, and in the drying and decortication process. The rest of the work is usually done by men.

Before the intended area for cultivation is brushed and cleared, a nursery is usually prepared where seeds and/or cuttings are first raised. These seedlings are then transplanted onto the prepared plot at the beginning of the rainy season (about May). Some peasants prefer to cultivate in the shade and others without shade. Once planted, care for the crop is limited largely to the trimming required to give a robust balanced frame to the crop and to stimulate fruiting. The crop takes between 3-4 years to produce. Time between blooming and maturing of the fruit varies with variety

and climate. In this case robusta is the variety largely grown in Liberia and it takes about 9 months between blooming and maturity.

When the fruit is fully ripe it becomes red purple in colour. Men, women, and children are recruited to harvest the crop. It is hand gathered into baskets and collected at a central point. When all the fruits are collected, they are then placed on mats or on the ground in specially prepared areas to be dried by the sun. They are covered by nightfall with mats or old rice bags to prevent them from contact with the dew.

After the fruits are properly dried, they are generally hulled by pounding in a mortar with the use of a pestle. This is usually done by women. Rich farmers mechanically hull their crops for a fee. The seeds are then bagged and sold.

#### 5.2.1 Land Acquisition

Land in Liberia in pre-colonial times, was plentiful and members of a local community could appropriate in accordance with customary procedures (discussed earlier elsewhere) to enable peasant households to subsist and to reproduce themselves generationally. From the beginning of the colonial period these procedures were regulated by the state; but the influence of the colonial state (established in 1822) did not penetrate the hinterland to reach this part of Mande 'country' until 1911. This was after the boundary between French Guinea and Liberia had been properly demarcated after several earlier fruitless attempts. Thereafter, colonial and post-colonial land laws were slowly introduced in these parts especially after the chiefs negotiated treaties of cooperation with the post-colonial state which relegated the latter to protectorate status. The economic system which provided the rationale for the promulgation of these land laws had to grapple with the strong

traditional and cultural values which, in these parts, guarantee an "eating space" to every household.

Peasants in Liberia do not generally seek to acquire individual plots of land because they can hardly use all of what is legally apportioned to them for their use. Land acquisition therefore, is generally undertaken by those outside the peasant communities but who have ambitions for future farming, or land speculators, or those with the capitalist tendency of making property out of anything. For such interested parties the procedure to acquire private land is briefly described below. A flow-chart of the procedure is on page 207.

The purchaser establishes that the land in question is not encumbered and seeks the consent of the tribal authority. They issue the former a "tribal certificate" which s/he takes to the District Commissioner who certifies that the land is not part of a tribal reserve. The Land Commissioner also certifies that the land is unencumbered. Payment of 50 cents per acre is made and the receipt and the earlier certificates are signed by the County Superintendent. An "Application for Land purchase" is attached and sent to the President of the Republic who approves by signing the application. The County Surveyor then surveys the land and prepares the deed which is taken to the Land Commissioner who forwards it to the President for his signature. After receiving the signed deed the applicant probates and registers the deed with the County Registrar, who sends a copy to the State Department's archives.

In many peripheral capitalist societies one of the peasantry's biggest observable problem is that of landlessness. In spite of the demographic pressure already referred to and the large tracts of land alienated for multinational corporations and other concessions,

the newly created permanent cash crop (in this case coconuts, coffee and oil palm) parastatal and the new group oriented to farm land acquisition; landlessness is not yet an issue in Liberia and will not be in the foreseeable future. The reason for this is that the right of each tribe to occupy as much land as it needs for farming and related activities is guaranteed by law.

For example, under the "Aborigines Act", a tribe can petition the government to permit the latter to divide "tribal lands" into household holdings. In this arrangement the government can grant deeds in fee simple for each household for up to 35 acres, while providing an adequate reserve for future households. The law also provides that each tribe has the first right of possession against any outsider (5). Fairly recent political happenings in Liberia seem to us to be appealing to "aboriginal" sentiments<sup>\*</sup> and a repeal of such an Act which protects "tribal" interest and passed into law by Americo-Liberians, seems politically inexpedient and therefore unforeseeable in the near future. For Liberian peasants generally, the question therefore is neither how to acquire farm land nor even landlessness as in many other parts of the world, but simply how to acquire capital in the event one wishes to undertake large scale rice farming for commercial purposes or cash crop farming in the new trend of re-peasantisation.

The vast majority of peasants do not have the kinds of collateral that banking institutions require. For example, land in the rural areas can only be used as a collateral if it is cultivated

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\* On 12 April 1980 a group of non-commissioned soldiers, led by a Master-Sergeant, which claimed to have been representing the majority "tribal" population, overthrew the over 130 years old Americo-Liberian oligarchy. In its place they instituted the present dictatorship which is both military and tribal.

in permanent cash crops already. Otherwise the land the peasant cultivates belongs to the community and cannot serve as a collateral. The peasant's "hut", in the judgement of the bankers, is of no commercial value. A peasant's income is irregular and therefore cannot be a guarantee against a bank loan. This is where the usefulness of the government's agricultural project (referred to hereafter as the Project) to some peasants was realised. This will be discussed later under the appropriate heading.

Among the 150 economically active household heads whom we interviewed extensively in Lavalazu, we categorise 110 or 73.3% as peasants or those whose main source of sustenance is derived from agriculture. 60 or 40% of these cultivate only rice (along with those crops traditionally inter-cropped with rice. There are 35 or 23.3% household heads who produce both rice and cash crops (the rice being mainly for consumption). 15 or 10% of the household heads produce only cash crops. Of the 110 peasant household heads included in this sample, the 35 or 23.3% who cultivate rice and cash crops can be said to be middle peasants; the 15 or 10% who grew only cash crops can be classified as rich peasants discussed in Section 5.3.2 below. Of the 40 non agricultural household heads in the sample, 16 or 40% indicated to us that they have acquired some land (from the public lands) for future cultivation of cash crops. All of them happen to be members of what Alavi refers to as the "salarist" class and can therefore afford the relatively low statutory fees. Secondly, they are all literate (which is a bonus) and could have used that asset in the unnecessarily complicated bureaucratic red tape that obtains in the individual alienation of public land. The 60 or 40% of the household heads who produce only rice (and mainly for consumption) are the poor peasants. This

sample should be seen as truly representative because it covers 64% of the total number of household heads in Lavalazu.

As one might have realised by now, the basic unit of production and consumption in this peasant community is the household. The poor peasants identified here cultivate invariably between 3-5 acres which is dictated by the number of their dependents and the manpower available to them. All social and economic activities of the Unit are generally organised and managed by the head of the household in consultation with his wife. If he has more than one wife as is generally the case in Lavalazu, he consults his head wife who in turn informs the other wives. For such activities, the first and most guaranteed source of labour is that of the members of the household. Of course other sources of labour can be depended upon especially that of kinsmen (see Appendix 3).

The reliance on the participation of all able bodied members of the peasant household in economic activities has been lessened with the introduction of Western type educational institutions and the high values attached to them. In this part of Upper Lofa generally, a child is considered "small" and not assigned any responsibilities until she is nine years old. At this time the child was assigned chores at home and on the farm. Nowadays, this is the age at which children in the peasant communities are sent to school. These "school children" do not any more actively participate in the rice cultivation any more.

Parents, as we found out, do not mind the loss of this much needed labour (which will be lost for as long as between 7-13 years). The children are in fact encouraged to continue to pursue education for as long as their ambition takes. During this period, they put in the occasional time as their school work

allows. This impetus is meant to make the children work hard and qualify for well paid jobs or higher education in the urban areas. Many peasants told us that they do not want all their children to be exposed to the vicissitudes of poverty and ignorance as they (the parents) have had to live with all their lives. The latter believe that education will improve the quality of life for their children who will in turn take care of their parents when they become economically inactive.

Most rural Liberians (especially the peasants) now "make the sacrifice" to send their children to school because they say, it is the commonest available way to achieve class and occupational upward mobility. Among the peasants of Lawalazu education is seen as a "guarantee for the good life". In short, not many peasants bring up all their children in their tradition of toil and poverty any more. The trend now (especially for those who live near urban centres and concession areas), is to send some of their children (especially the boys) to school, with the hope that after their education these centres will provide them with employment opportunities. However, those whose education and/or training is inadequate to secure them jobs will usually remain in the villages. Of course some of them do venture to the urban centres to seek casual employment or form part of the lumpenproletariat. The former however, continues the reproduction of peasant community as has always been.

### **5.3 Occupational, Class, and Economic Differentiation**

Liberian rural society today does not constitute a homogenous group but rather a heterogeneous one. The extent of its heterogeneous composition varies from one region to another and the degree of heterogeneity depends, to a large extent, on the proximity

of that part of the rural area to urban and concession areas and communication centres. For example, the nearer a rural community is located to a market town and transportation network, the more heterogeneous it is, and the farther away the rural community, the less heterogeneous its composition is.

The rural communities in Liberia generally (and specifically in Upper Lofa) are characterised by three observable forms of prevailing differentiation namely occupational, class, and economic. Students of rural communities in Liberia employing the participant-observation method especially (and of course any other sociological approach) will not fail to recognise these dimensions of differentiation. This is particularly true of Lwalazu and Upper Lofa. We shall attempt to analyse each of these types of differentiation below.

### 5.3.1 Occupational Differentiation

Two groups that are to be identified on this level are those who are engaged in full time agriculture and subsist from it; and those engaged in other kinds of employment from which they earn their living. Lwalazu, we have noted earlier, is only 7 miles from the administrative headquarters of Lofa County which is also the headquarters of the Lofa Project. Among those engaged in other kinds of employment, there are those who are salaried public employees who own cash crop farms operated solely by wage labour, there are public employees who do not participate in any kind of agricultural production, and there are those whose income is partly derived from agriculture (through the labour of their wives). Some of these, classified as non-agriculturalists, are present in our sample. We consider them as non-agriculturalists because their monthly income is derived mainly from non-agricultural employment even though some of them are part time agriculturalists.



As we have earlier noted, 40 to 26.6% of the 150 households we have selected for our study can be appropriately regarded as non-agriculturalists. Among these, 32 of them derived their income solely from non-agricultural employment. 6 of these 32 household heads own cash crop farms which are operated on their behalf solely by wage labour. 8 of them own farm lands they hope to cultivate in future.

Lawalazu's proximity to the administrative and project headquarters (and a road joining the two) accounts for the relatively high number of non-agriculturalists as compared to those communities which are located farther away from a road or a town. The non agriculturalists can be divided into two categories; those who are taking advantage of the cheaper house or room rent as compared to rents in the town seven miles away. The second category is comprised of those who rather live in their villages and work in town seven miles away, or are employed in their own villages. It is usually in this latter category that we find those 8 household heads who have acquired land for future farming purposes. Of the household heads whom we designate as the emerging land owning class (and may be future landlords) or non peasant bourgeoisie, none is among the highest income earners in Lawalazu. A breakdown of the number of household heads classified according to the types of employment and those who have acquired private farm land is given in the table below.

Table 1 Types of Occupation of Household Heads whose income is mainly from Non-Agricultural Employment

Occupation	Not Owning Private Land	Own Private Land	Total Household Heads
School Teacher	4	3	7
Soldier	2	0	2
Customs Officer	1	1	2
Druggist	1	1	2
Blacksmith	1	0	1
Tailor	1	0	1
Petty Trader	3	1	4
Health Assistant	2	0	2
Carpenter	1	1	2
Project Labourer	7	0	7
Project Clerk	3	2	5
Government Clerk	0	4	4
Taxi Driver	0		1
Total	<u>26</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>40</u>

The above breakdown of non-agriculturalists can also be seen in the light of those employed by the government (and the project which is government owned) and those in the private sector or self employed. The former number 29 and the latter number only 11, thus the public sector accounts for more employees than the private sector.

Those classified as agriculturists are comparatively homogeneous occupationally in the sense that all of them are cultivators either directly or indirectly. They are however, differentiated along class lines between those who cultivate rice only or subsistence and those who cultivate it for consumption and the market; between those who cultivate rice and cash crop and those who cultivate cash crop only. We shall discuss in detail below.

### 5.3.2 Class and Economic Differentiation

We address the concept of classes on the basis of social relations of production. Our primary distinction cannot be between those who own land and those who do not own land (given the peculiarity of no landlessness in this area). Also only 9.3% of the

total number of household heads in the sample own private land for other types of agriculture other than rice production. This is insignificant, therefore those who cultivate rice and cash crops will be subdivided according to the sources of labour that they exploit. There are Rich peasants, who cultivate substantial amounts of land, work on it with members of their families but also rely substantially on hired labour. Middle peasants cultivate just about enough land mainly using their own family labour and that of their kin. Occasionally they could use the traditional labour exchange system if the need arises. They however, do not sell their labour. Poor peasants on the other hand usually cultivate very small acreages of land. They generally have small households. They do not use the traditional labour exchange because the members of the latter team have to be wined and dined by their host(ess). They do contract their labour to those who may wish to hire them and the proceeds augment their income. Finally there is a class of Rural Proletariats who do not want to make farms of their own largely because they do not have families of their own or for a variety of reasons. They do sell their labour to those who would wish to hire them. The following table will give details of these categories.

Table 2 Class Stratification and Economic Differentiation of Agriculturalists in Lawalzu according to Size of Land Cultivated

<u>Class Position</u>	<u>No. of Household</u>	<u>Average Size of Land Cultivated (Acres)</u>
Rich Peasant	15	6.5
Middle Peasant	27	3.2
Poor Peasant	52	1.2
Rural Proletariat	16	-
Total	<u>110</u>	

We shall attempt to explain below the criteria used for differentiating the household heads into classes as given in the table above and discuss the economic status of each class according to the average income earned at the end of each farming cycle. Care has been taken to include only land cultivated under upland rice as it is the major agricultural activity among these peasants.

a. Rich Peasants (15 household heads; all males)

They cultivate more land than an average peasant household usually cultivates. 5 of them are aged between 31-45 years old; 6 are between 46-60 years old and 4 are above 60 years old.\* The largest rice farm cultivated by a member of this class is 7.6 acres and the smallest farm is 5.7 acres. So the smallest farm in this category is about twice the size of the regional average of 3 acres (7). As a class, they are in the highest echelon of income per cultivation cycle as compared to the other two classes. Their average income is US\$1427.75.

This class of peasants can be appropriately referred to as the emerging capitalist farmer class because of the following reasons. Firstly, they all hire labour for most of the main phases of the cultivation process because family labour is inadequate. In this region the average household has 8 members including four children, two of whom are usually sent to school (8). Secondly, they constitute a rather small minority with each member having a savings account which they hope to invest into other areas of agriculture in the near future to generate more income. 5 of them indicated to us that they have to invest so that they can use the surplus income accrued to hire more people to make bigger farms.

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\* The life cycle (in this area) is divided into four parts: young: 30 years old and below; middle aged: 31-45 years old; late aged: 46-60 years old; and old is to be above 60 years old.

b. Middle Peasants (27 household heads; 26 males, 1 female)

The middle peasants constitute those who largely cultivate their own land without hiring extra household labour except using the traditional labour exchange system when there is an absolute need. 9 of the members of this class are young, 6 are middle aged, 8 are 'late aged', and 4 are old. They do not hire out their labour to others but can work in reciprocity in the labour exchange system. The range of land area they cultivate is between 4 acres (highest) and 1.5 acres (lowest) with an average of 3.2 acres. This average is barely over the 3 acre mark considered as regional average. The highest income in this class (accrued from the rice farm) is \$742.00 the lowest is \$265.55, and the average is \$609.05. This income does not include whatever remittances that are regularly (or occasionally) made to those members of this class whose children are employed elsewhere (probably in an urban centre or concession area). About 33 per cent of the members of this class did indicate that they have extra sources of income. Given the average membership of a peasant household in this region which is 8, the average income in this class is quite above the per capita income of \$63.00 for the rural dweller in Liberia.

c. Poor Peasants (52 households; all males)

The poor peasants are those who generally do not cultivate large acreages for any number of reasons. 23 members of this class (nearly 45%) are young, 15 of them are middle aged, 9 of them are late aged, and 5 are old. Their cultivated areas range from 2.2 acres (highest) to .5 acre (lowest) with an average of 1.2 acres. As a class they occupy the lowest rung of the income ladder. The average income per household is approximately \$264.00 which is far below the average per capita income (assuming under the

law of averages that there are 8 members in the household). However, the highest income households in this class are better off than those in the lowest income households of the "middle" level but both are so classified on the basis of their social relations of production. All of the members of this class except the 5 that are over 60 years old, hire out their labour as wage earners to earn some extra income. Over 60% of them indicated that they receive monthly remittances from their children (or other relations) who are employed elsewhere.

d. Rural Proletariat (16 household heads; all males)

The main source of income for those who constitute this class is from selling their labour power. 4 of the household heads cultivate vegetables on small tracts of land but they depend on the income from the sale of their labour power for survival. They are not regularly employed but they accept contracts to perform specific tasks for agreed amounts of money. 12 or 75% of the members of this class are young young. It is difficult to estimate their income per cultivation cycle. About 50% of them do leave the town for the nearby urban centre for protracted periods but maintain their homes in Lavalazu. However, after careful calculations and intensive interviews, we estimated their average yearly income as US\$300.00.

We will classify the non-agriculturalists who derive some income from land into two main classes as shown in the table below:

Table 3 Non-agriculturalists who obtain some income from land differentiated along class lines according to the average area of land owned and cultivated

<u>Class Position</u>	<u>No. of Heads of Household</u>	<u>Ave. Size Owned (Acres)</u>	<u>Ave. Size Cultivated (Acres)</u>
Non-Peasant Bourgeoisie	6	23.4	11
Emerging Land Owners	8	10.5	-

The non-peasant bourgeoisie consists of those who have bought their holdings for large scale farming purposes from the public lands. Full-time employment for members of this class is not agricultural cultivation and, therefore, their main source of income is not from agriculture. However, they have alienated substantial acreages of land (23.4 acres average) and this implies that the amount of income obtained from land is equally substantial. This income however, is smaller than the income they receive from their full time occupation. In our sample survey, the six non peasant bourgeoisie own 30, 28, 22.4, 20, 20, and 20 acres respectively. Although no one in this class actually cultivates all the land they own, the proceeds form substantial percentages of their total household income. Table 4 overleaf illustrates the point. It should be noted that the non-agricultural bourgeoisie are generally the richest people in economic terms in the rural areas. They derive their income from both the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors and there is always the tendency for them to invest in the cultivation of larger acreages of cash crops.

After carefully analysing and grouping the peasants and non-peasants into a number of classes based on their social relations of production which is on the ownership of the means of production (land) and the exploitation of labour power, we will now show how income is also differentiated on class lines. We shall now make a comparison of the classes within the peasant and non-peasant categories of Lawalazu. This, in our view, will give a vivid economic picture in as far as average monthly and average yearly income of each class of peasants and non-peasants in relation to other classes in the community.

Table 4 Source and Amounts of Income of the Non-agricultural Bourgeoisie Calculated Per Farm Year

Full-time Occupation of Household Head	Income Per Year	Occupation of any other person in household in full-time employment	Income Per Year	Income Per Year from Farm	Total Income of Household Per Year
Head Teacher	\$2400.00	Wife (Nurse)	\$1992.00	\$3412.50	\$7804.50
Teacher	\$2160.00	Wife (Teacher)	\$2160.00	\$2936.50	\$7256.50
Project Clerk	\$3600.00	-	-	\$1809.00	\$5409.00
Customs Officer	\$2400.00	-	-	\$222.50	\$4622.50
Government Clerk	\$2400.00	-	-	\$1652.00	\$4052.00

Note: We calculated income per farm year from prices of cash and food crops compiled by LCADP in 1985. LCADP Review, op. cit., Tables 29-36.



Table 5 Classes and Income Differential of the  
150 Households in Lawalazu

		Total	Ave. monthly income
I.	Non-agriculturalists		
A.	Public Sector Employees		
1.	Income from occupation only	14	
2.	Income from occupation and other sources	19	\$180.00
B.	Private Sector Employees		
1.	Income from occupation only	12	
2.	Income from occupation and other sources	13	\$173.00
C.	Self-employed		
1.	Income from occupation only	1	
2.	Income from occupation and other sources	8	\$35.00
		0	
		40	
			Ave. yearly income
II.	Emerging Land Owners		
D.	Cultivated/Uncultivated		
1.	Household heads with cultivated land	6	
2.	Household heads with uncultivated land	14	\$2460.83
		8*	\$1818.74
III.	Agriculturalists		
1.	Rich Peasants	15	\$1427.75
2.	Middle Peasants	27	\$609.05
3.	Poor Peasants	52	\$565.00
4.	Rural Proletariat	16	\$300.00
		150	

\* already shown in average monthly column

Note: Average income for agriculturalists is calculated on yearly basis in consequence with the agricultural cycle. This includes those of the non-agricultural bourgeoisie and the emerging members of their class. For the non-agriculturalists their income is averaged on a monthly basis.

The rich peasants have the highest average yearly income among the agriculturalists because they cultivate over twice the average acreage of the peasant classes. Although they fall far below the non-peasant bourgeoisie (with the latter's many sources of income), the rich peasants do not trail far behind the private sector non-agriculturalist employees. As it was repeatedly stated by members of this class, after all they do not buy many things.

The differentiation in the average yearly income between the middle peasants and the poor peasants is not represented by the fact that the poor peasants cultivate an average of only 37.5% of the average land area cultivated by the middle peasants. What the small difference indicates is the fact that the poor peasant does sell his labour which the middle peasant does not do. In the process of selling his labour power the poor peasant obviously gets exploited. Perhaps the most exploited class is that of the rural proletariat with an average yearly income of approximately \$300.00. In spite of these discrepancies all the peasant classes under the agriculturalist sector of Lavalazu earn above the national per capita income of rural dwellers which is estimated at \$63.00.

While it is interesting to note that in spite of the differential in the acreage of land cultivated, and some do not cultivate any land at all, it seems that all peasant classes do earn above the per capita income. Certainly this is not to deny that there are some whose income is far below the estimated national per capita income of rural dwellers. What seems clear however, (at least to us), is that although peasants are highly differentiated along class lines, the nature of the rural economy and the make up of Liberian traditional society make it possible for every household to reproduce itself in this community. It must be also noted that this reproduction does take place sometimes in circumstances that suggest a decline in the quality of life in the peasant communities.

### **5.3.3 Lofa County Agricultural Development Project Farmers** **("PROJECT FARMERS")**

A very important dimension to the development of agriculture has been the government's active role in organising the County Agricultural Development Projects especially in Lofa and Bong

Counties. Under the semi-autonomous Project Management Units, the projects were designed to improve productivity, incomes, and the quality of life for poor, rural Liberians in these regions.

For our purposes, the major strategies to achieve the above goals included (1) improvement in upland rice production and productivity; (2) rehabilitation of old and development of new swamp rice acreage; (3) rehabilitation of existing and planting of new coffee and cocoa trees; and (4) improvement of existing and construction of new feeder roads in conjunction with the Ministry of Public Works (9). The projects were the result of a multilateral agreement among the Government of the Republic of Liberia, the World Bank and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

The project in Lofa started in 1976 and it was planned to provide development and seasonal credits, and to establish a revolving fund to finance the production and development of:

Upland rice :	Improvement	5,600 ha.
Swamp rice :	New and rehabilitated	1,900 ha
Coffee :	Rehabilitated	500 ha.
Coffee :	New	2,300 ha.
Cocoa :	Rehabilitated	800 ha.
Cocoa :	New	1,500 ha. (10)

The prominence that was given to cash crops (cocoa and coffee) was in response to Liberia's declining mineral resources and the determination to break the rubber monopoly in the agricultural sector. Although rice is the country's staple food, Liberia has, for the last half century, depended heavily on the United States for its supply. One of the major considerations of this project was to

minimise this dependency from its present alarming level. In human terms, about 8000 farm families (households) were targetted to benefit directly (and many more indirectly) from the project.

The participating farmers could take advantage of one or two of three schemes. The simplest scheme was the seed exchange in which the project exchanged improved rice seeds for the traditional variety. The second was that under which the participating farmers were provided seed varieties of rice for a small fee payable after the harvest. The third and perhaps most important, was the development scheme in which cash was given (on loan) to the rice farmer to be used for tools; land clearing equipment; and for seeds and fertilizers. This loan was to be repaid with 10% interest after each harvest. For the cocoa and coffee farmers, the loan was to be used for tools, sprayers, fertilizers, seedlings and chemicals. This loan is payable in twelve years with 10% interest after a grace period of four years for cocoa and 8 years for coffee (11). The loans were to be channelled to the farmers through co-operative societies under the project management supervision.

In the first year of the project all participating farmers had single accounts, but by the fourth year of the project's life, any participating farmer could negotiate any number of loans. It was possible for any single participating farmer to have a loan account for swamp rice, cocoa farm, and coffee farm or any two combinations. By the end of the first four years, according to the project documents, there were 6,900 participating farmers. The table below shows the total farmer participation.

Table 6 Summary of Farmer Participation (1976-1980)

(No. of Farmers)

Crop	Appraisal	Actual	% Achieved
Upland Rice	8,000	5,021	63
Swamp Rice	2,775	3,078	111
Coffee	3,540	1,697	48
Cocoa	2,306	1,453	63
All	16,621	11,249	68

Source: LCADP Review, op. cit., p.50.

Two problems which perhaps were, or not, foreseen, are the complicated land tenurial system in most peasant communities and how this could affect the entrepreneurial spirit that was being introduced; and the traditional labour exchange system which is arranged on an ad hoc basis cannot be totally depended upon, especially if the demand on the system becomes larger than its supply base. After all 68% of all Liberians live in communities of less than 200 people, and it is some of these people that the project had targetted.

The use of land is crucial to the participating farmers of the project. As long as the "Aborigines Act" cited earlier remains in force it is impossible for individuals to alienate large acreages of community land for their personal use. This means that lands in the closest vicinity of communities are largely to be used for the direct primary reproduction of the community. Cash crops are usually cultivated on tracts that would have been bought and deeded from public lands. In most cases these lands are far away from peasant communities - far enough for those who purchase them to build a couple of residential huts on the farm. Of course there are smallholdings of cash crops (about one acre or less) cultivated behind dwelling houses in peasant communities. This practise

(though acceptable) has become so common that many peasant villages are almost, if not altogether, surrounded by cash crops.

The problem in this rather complicated land tenurial system and the small available manpower resource base in peasant communities makes the wisdom of this rather capitalist oriented venture quite questionable. In fact in all of Lofa County only 2.3% of the total land area is under individual title (12). This sharply differs from the view that "individual households possess land; villages do not hold land in common" (13). Our own knowledge and experience of Lofa does not also corroborate the latter view.

For the first time, in this part of Liberia, peasant farmers received agricultural imports and cash loans for their individual farms. The profit motive was at least introduced into peasant farming on a fairly large scale at once. Besides the loans which were geared to improving the economic well-being of the individual participating farmers, the project was to provide the communities with some social and physical aspects of infrastructural development. For example, over 100 water wells were dug in various villages in the region and there was about an equal number in the pipeline. In its fourth year of operation the project had built 44 pit latrines in 44 peasant communities out of 80 originally programmed for 80 communities. In its desire to emphasise the market economy in these peasant economies the project constructed about 257 miles of town-to-town roads and farm-to-market roads. The Ministry of Public Works had also reconditioned about 160 miles of town-to-town roads. The Schistosomiasis Surveillance Unit (SSU) of the project checked a number of swamps for the possible presence of schistosomiasis. Specimens were collected from villagers, school children, and peasants in the project area to monitor the rate of

both Schistosoma Mansoni and Schistosoma Haematobium (14). Some measures have been taken both to treat the disease at town and village levels and to provide some advice to the peasants to enable them to keep working in the swamps.

The peasants who sought participation in the project were to accept two main conditions before receiving the necessary benefits. They were to: (1) accept the technical advice that would be given by the project's experts; and (2) market all their crops through the services of the co-operatives located in five major towns in the region but with representatives scattered around the region. The project trained and posted about 250 assistants throughout the region as on the spot "consultants" to peasants. In order to ensure that the co-operative served the peasants efficiently, the project conducted management workshops; training programmes for co-operative managers and book-keepers; and the establishment and operation of a revolving credit fund.

Participation in the "project farming" is open to all Lofa citizens and residents of long standing and good character. In addition to accepting the project's major demands cited above, one must be:

- 1) over 21 years - no upper limit set.
- 2) preferably married and with children
- 3) peasant background
- 4) physically fit\*

Once these criteria are met a loan is there only for the asking. In spite of (or perhaps more so because of) this, the large number of participants attracted by the project is not, in our view, justified by the rather insignificant amounts of land cropped by the

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\* There are no medical checks conducted to ascertain physical fitness.

individual farmers. The following tables show a summary of achievements by the project; loans disbursed and recovered; and the average areas cultivated per crop.

#### The Case of Lavalazu

There were 32 Project farmers in 1985 when this study was done. 14 of them or 44% approximately cultivated only cash crops (cocoa and/or coffee) on their holdings; and 18 or 56% of them cultivated both rice and cash crops on their holdings. Of those who cultivated only cash crops, 7 or 50% cropped only cocoa, 5 or 35.7% cropped only coffee, and 2 or 14% approximately cropped both cocoa and coffee. The largest holding among this group was only two acres and the smallest was 1.5 acres per crop, giving an average of about two acres. None of these peasants hired any extra family labour and they all considered themselves economically better off than their counterparts who cultivated a comparable acreage of rice.

Among the 18 peasants who cropped one or both cash crops and rice, only one peasant or 5.5% cultivated all three crops. 10 or 55.5% of the peasants cultivated cocoa and rice, while 7 or 38.3% cultivated rice and coffee. The average acreage under rice cultivation for all 18 peasants was 2 acres, and that of either cocoa or coffee was 1.8. The peasants' preference for the kind of rice to be cultivated was almost evenly split between upland rice and swamp rice. Those who preferred to cultivate upland rice accounted for 55.5% or 10 of the 18 peasants. The remaining 8 or 44.5% chose to crop swamp rice. 7 of the peasants in this category (i.e. who cultivated both rice and cash crop) hired extra family labour and 11 did not. They were unanimous in their position that the rice they cultivated was largely for consumption. They indicated that they sold just enough of it to repay their loans to



the project and kept the balance for their domestic needs. Obviously their major source of income was the proceeds from the sale of cash crops.

The general feeling expressed in this group as well, is that the members would eventually stop rice cultivation as soon as their cash crops reached the full level of maturity. They complained that rice cultivation is more tasking than that of cash crop cultivation, especially cocoa. All the so called project farmers were also unanimous in their response to our question of why they cultivate such small acreages, given the kinds of resources available to them. They indicated that the project shifted all the risks to its farmers and that did not provide a comfortable situation for taking larger risks than necessary. They informed us that in the event of natural catastrophies like late rains, and technical problems like the plots not being properly burnt in the case of upland rice, the project farmer is still held responsible to repay the full loan. In the case of cash crop cultivators, if the crops fail in a certain year for any number of reasons, the project farmer is still to repay the full cost of his loan at the same stipulated rate. Hence plots are so small.

What we do foresee in Lavalazu is that by 1990 all the so called project farmers (who are all men) will only cultivate cash crops. This will allow the women to move into swamp rice cultivation, negotiating their own loans with the co-operatives. The danger in this practice is that sooner rather than later, these peasants will be completely dependent on the production of cocoa and/or coffee for their subsistence. What is more important is that all of these peasants indicated their desire to alienate more land and enlarge the cropped acreages as soon as they have repaid their

present loans to the project. All of them also expressed their desire, when that time comes, to depend largely on extra family labour. This is bound to further polarise the peasant community at Lalawazu.

Table 6 Summary of Project Participants and Acres cropped under Each Category 1977-1982

	Year/Participants				
	1	2	3	4	5
Cr. Farmers	381	1359	1200	1514	2129
SE	-	301	1024	1188	165
Total Parts	381	1660	2224	2438	2357
No. of Loans	391	1537	1317	2022	2192

Area Cropped (Acres)

UR-CR	151	279	54	306	4426
UR-SE	-	477	2564	3957	400
Total UR	151	756	2618	4273	4826
SR	183	914	1294	999	-
Cocoa	74	593	469	610	314
Coffee	259	593	509	324	150

Source: LCADP Memo, LCADP Highlights (Voinjama 1982), pp.6-7.

Table 7 Loans Disbursed and Recovered by LCADP 1977-1982

	1	2	US\$000 3	4	5
<u>Credit</u>					
<u>Development Loan</u>					
Disbursed	55.9	294	394.2	29.3	49.90
Recovered	-	-	-	-	-
<u>Seasonal Loan</u>					
Disbursed	9.2	39.5	59.6	49.5	18.88
Recovered	9.2	37.4	41.2	-	-
<u>Both</u>					
Disbursed	65.1	333.5	453.9	78.8	68.78
Recovered	9.2	37.4	41.2	-	-

Source: LCDAP, LCDAP Highlights (Voinjama: 1982), mimeo, pp.8-9.

Key: SE : Seed Exchange  
 UR-CR : Upland Rice - Credit  
 UR-SE : Upland Rice - Seed Exchange  
 SR : Swamp Rice

Table 7 Average Project Farm Size/Crop

Period	Crop	No. of Farmers	Area (Acres)	Acres/Farm
1976-77	UR-CR	77	85.4	1.11
	SE	135	103.6	0.77
	Coffee	209	147.0	0.70
	Cocoa	93	130.2	1.40
514				
1977-78	UR-CR	109	119.0	1.10
	SE	180	219.8	1.22
	SR	597	518.0	2.87
	Coffee	463	462.0	0.99
	Cocoa	288	336.0	1.17
1637				
1978-79	UR-CR	38	30.8	0.81
	SE	970	1453.2	1.50
	SR	760	733.6	0.97
	Coffee	236	288.4	1.22
	Cocoa	179	266.0	1.49
2183				
1979-80	UR-CR	133	200.2	1.51
	SE	1501	2452.8	1.63
	SR	670	562.8	0.84
	Coffee	164	183.4	1.12
	Cocoa	374	345.8	0.92
2842				
1980-81	UR-CR	100	140.4	1.40
	SE	1588	1700.0	1.50
	SR	916	770.0	0.88
	Coffee	625	700.0	1.12
	Cocoa	519	560.0	1.07
3748				

Key: UR-CR: Upland Rice - Credit  
 SE: Seed Exchange  
 SR: Swamp Rice

Source: LCADF Review, op.\_cit.

### The Comparative Case of Kolahun

Kolahun is the district headquarters of Kolahun District and about 25 miles away from Voinjama, the county headquarters of Lofa County and the project. It is a large town situated between Voinjama and Foya (on the Liberian-Sierra Leone border) where a large weekly market is held every Sunday. The market draws sellers and buyers from Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea. Kolahun itself is an agricultural town - with one of the earliest co-operatives in the country - and had diversified into small holdings of cocoa and coffee, long before the project was established. Of the nearly 400 households in the community, slightly over 300 of them are agriculturalist households. About 40 of the remaining households are businesses of sorts (large, medium, petty) dealing in a variety of commodities and services. The balance consists of government employees in the lower levels of bureaucracy, co-operative workers, project workers, and the rural proletariat.

The socio-economic history of Kolahun serves as a very good model of a case of the transformation of the peasant economy from the phase of "traditional" or more appropriately the natural economy to the phase of specialisation in the production of cash crop only, going through the intermediate phase of the mixed subsistence-commodity economy of rice cultivation for home consumption and cocoa and/or coffee production for exchange in the market.

The history of Kolahun as was reiterated to us proved very informative in constructing a clear picture of the phases of the transformation of its peasant economy. Initially it was the natural economy, of course, in which production for direct consumption was predominant. There was very little surplus to enter the barter market, as this was before this part of the country agreed to become

part of Liberia after the French-Liberian boundary was permanently agreed in 1911. It can be deduced from this, that the prevalence of the natural economy was before the 20th century. According to our informant, the town was started in the 19th century by a family (extended) and was later joined by others. The families worked co-operatively building houses for each family, and using the labour exchange system for the more difficult phases of rice production - which was the main occupation of everybody at the time. As a result they were able to produce some surpluses which they bartered for the things they did not produce. Essentially, various individuals with various skills in the small community produced all the community's needs - salt, soap, utensils, and tools - and traded them off with one another.

Apart from rice cultivation, clearing footpaths, putting logs over nearby streams, they participated in economic activities like growing fruit trees, hunting and trapping wild animals, and fishing in nearby streams and rivers. They also domesticated cattle, goats, and poultry and largely for ceremonial consumption like at the end of the poro and sande schools, weddings, etc. One can conclude without much fear of contradiction, that given the community's high level of isolation at the time, it was largely self-sufficient in its struggle for survival.

When the Liberian government extended its political juridical power throughout the boundaries of Liberia, Kolahun had become so large as to be named a district headquarters (with a resident District Commissioner). With this leverage in its political status and being fairly close to the Sierra Leone border, helped to make Kolahun a commercial centre. As such, goods produced from all over the district and even from Sierra Leone and Guinea, were brought to

this area. Taxes were introduced by the government and with the introduction of the modern system of education, parents were obliged to send their children to school. This means buying uniforms, books, and paying school fees. These together accentuated the need of cash, and since there was a market in the town to absorb surplus, the peasants enlarged their production in order to produce more surplus to meet their new financial obligations. But even at this time, according to our informant, labour could not be sold or bought.

In the 1960s the Ministry of Agriculture established a rice research project at Foya (not far from Kolahun) and some peasants from Foya were recruited to the project. Since then there has been dispossessed labour available for agricultural and other types of work in the area. Before that peasants were growing cocoa and coffee (along with rice) on very small holdings which they sold across the boundary in the then British colony of Sierra Leone. There were virtually no roads in the hinterland of Liberia at the time to join the larger market centres which bought these products. When roads were finally constructed joining these production centres to the larger markets a large number of peasants opted to grow only cash crops.

We met 80 heads of peasant households who produce only cocoa or coffee or both to the neglect of rice. Each one of them argued that they are better off economically, concentrating on the production of only cash crops rather than combine it with rice as many peasants still do. This argument is winning as many peasants in Kolahun declared their intention to abandon rice cultivation in a few years time. For many, as soon as they reap their first harvest of their cash crops they will not cultivate rice. Our conservative

estimation is that by 1990 over sixty percent of the peasant households in Kolahun will produce only cash crop for their subsistence. This forms a new basis of their reproduction where only the production of the cash crop and its valorization in the market ensures their continued reproduction. This constitutes the second phase of their economic transformation, the first having taken place when they combined rice cultivation with cocoa and/or coffee.

There are, in this community, several families engaged in agricultural production with one or two members employed outside the agricultural sector to supplement the household's income from agriculture. This seems to be a common feature of peasant villages which are located in relatively short distances from places of economic buoyancy. This factor is important in the explanation of the continued reproduction of peasant production, rather than its disappearance through class polarisation. It may well serve as a basis for explaining the survival of the peasant families, in the face of deteriorating socio-economic well being, as a result of the continuous decline in the prices of cash crops; pressure on the land from non agriculturalists thus reducing land available to the peasants and the high cost of cheap, imported commodities, including food items. This process of survival will only continue as long as there are non-agricultural employment opportunities available outside the peasant communities. And so in a social formation such as Liberia, which is dominated by the capitalist mode of production, peasant communities are served by economic activities outside their own environments, as being one of the many means by which peasant production will continue to persist rather than be eliminated.

The project is generally considered a success in Lofa County and in Liberian official circles. For those who hold this view, the project is seen as a successful integrated approach to reduce the incidence of poverty in rural Liberia and thereby raise the level of income to a relatively higher level than average among rural households. Conceptually, the project can be seen as a state sponsored repessantisation process in which peasants are given all the necessary inputs and cash loans and required to operate their pieces of land depending largely on family labour.

Our own evaluation of the project is outside the intent of this thesis. However, what must be commented upon is the fact that one of the expressed goals of the project is to help to make Liberia self sufficient in rice production. What was observed on the contrary, is that by 1990 over 50 percent of the so called project farmers will abandon the rice fields for the cash crop bushes.

### Conclusions

Quite a few general theories about peasant differentiation in many peripheral capitalist social formations seem to indicate that a total polarization of the rural class structure is caused by the concentration of economic power (land), in the hands of the rich peasants, and the alienation of the poor peasants from the land. Our findings do not support this view as far as the Mande of Liberia is concerned, and indeed in most of rural Liberia. Here, landlessness is not a known phenomenon because every member of the peasant community has the right to a piece of land for his household's primary reproduction. Such land remains the exclusive property of the community and the peasant has only a "usufructuary" right to it. Even in those areas where community land has been



divided into individual holdings, such land is held in trust by the head of the household for succeeding generations of his household.

We have earlier indicated that the idea of buying land in "fee simple" for cash crop farming in rural Liberia is relatively new in Lofa County, and in counties like Lár, that are situated farthest from Monrovia (the national capital). In the counties adjoining the latter (where relatively good roads exist and consequently made them accessible), the politically and economically powerful from Monrovia quickly bought up all such public lands.

In Lofa County however, (especially in Upper Lofa), we found out that most of those buying public land in "fee simple" are the literate and numerate non-agriculturalists, whose main source of income is not from agriculture. We have preferred to refer to this group as the "non-peasant bourgeoisie" who are normally government employees, employees of parastatal organisations, school teachers, private sector employees, and the self employed. People in these categories usually have more saving or potential saving ability than the average peasant. Because of this advantage, and more so because of their "connections" (i.e. who they know), it is easier for them to obtain substantial loans from the agricultural or other commercial banks, credit unions, and other sources. Proceeds from such loans could be used for the purchase of public lands for farming purposes. It is this group of non-peasants living and working in peasant communities, and those urban dwellers from peasant backgrounds, that are the potential buyers of public, agricultural land.

Of course the individual alienation of agricultural land by some members of the non-agriculturalist group in peasant communities, bears on the question of differentiation and

polarization of classes in the peasant sector as raised by Marx, Lenin, Kautsky and others (15). The argument that seems to be generally accepted in this regard, is that when the rural sector of a peripheral capitalist social formation becomes integrated into the monetary economy, which is dominated by the capitalist mode of production, then Marx's law of economic concentration begins to operate. In fact some neo-classical economists and neo-Marxist anthropologists have positively contributed to this point (16). The model that obtains from this argument (and which may hold true in many peripheral capitalist social formations) is that the rich peasants and some well-to-do middle level peasants who have savings, use the same to purchase more agricultural land from the poorer, and not so well-off middle level peasants, who may be forced by circumstances to sell their land on the open market. The poor peasants (who by this transaction have become landless) join the ranks of the rural proletariat, and in turn, sell their labour power to the rich peasants who have dispossessed the former, of their means of production - land. At the same time the rich peasants are in an emerging class of rural capitalists.

What exists in Liberia generally (and Upper Lofa County in particular) contradicts the above model because of the cultural taboo on landlessness. An observable general trend in this area however, is that with the establishment of a growing number of parastatal plantations and the individual accumulation of public lands, there is bound to be a reduction in peasant landholdings from one generation to another. What is crucial to note is that even though there exists a statutory provision for the alienation of adequate land for the primary reproduction of the members of peasant households, the sizes of their cultivated holdings have been an

average of about 3 acres. With the intervention of the Lofa project and the introduction of high yield varieties, the peasant cultivated acreage have shrunk further. This is however, being compensated for by the improvement of the general forces of production and the significant increase of output per acre.

Out-migration which is one of the major indicators of rural poverty, accounts for a number of young people seeking employment in urban areas, some of whom send back occasional (in some cases) remittances to their parents or relations in the peasant communities. In this respect some peasant households are being subsidised through income from non-agricultural employment. The Lawalazu peasant community is highly differentiated along class lines - so also are the other peasant communities in Upper Lofa County as a whole. The middle peasantry however, far from being dissolved or disappearing as a class, has stabilised and continues to persist. It is no doubt that the class structure in these communities have become more complex over the years than they were earlier, the form of production, and therefore the predominant mode of exploitation, continues to remain non-capitalist and the capitalist form of production and relations of exploitation though noticeable, is taking a very long time to emerge.

FOOTNOTES

1. Lofa County Agricultural Development Project, LCADP Highlights (Voinjama: 1982), mimeo, p.3.
2. Lofa County Agricultural Development Project, Educational Highlights of LCADP (Monrovia: n.d.), p.4.
3. Liberia Code of Laws of 1957, Vols. 3 and 5, Titles 27-38, Ithaca.
4. Lofa County Agricultural Development Project, LCADP Review (Voinjama: n.d.), Annex 15.
5. Liberia Code of Laws, op. cit., Section 272.
6. Gershoni, op. cit., Chapter III.
7. Lofa County Agricultural Development Project, Farm Planning and Land Registration (Voinjama: N.D.), p.2.
8. LCADP Review, op. cit., Appendix 38A and B.
9. John Harbeson, "Integrated Agricultural Development and Agricultural Policy in Liberia" in Rural Africana, 22 (Spring: 1985), p.8.
10. LCADP Review, op. cit., p.2.
11. World Bank, Project Document, op. cit..
12. LCADP, Farm Planning and Land Registration, op. cit., p.9.
13. Harbeson, op. cit., p.6.
14. LCADP Review, op. cit., pps.26-28.
15. We have dealt with this question in detail in Chapter I, Subsection 1.1.1.
16. See for example, P. Bohanan and G. Dalton, Markets in Africa (Evanston: 1962), and K. Griffin, The Political Economy of Agrarian Change (London: 1974).

CHAPTER VICONCLUSION

The intent and primary concern of this study has been the transforming result of the impact of capitalism on the rural economy and the peasantry and secondarily with the introduction of a new mode of production, colonial or peripheral capitalism, in a social formation that had operated on the principles and dynamics of the natural economy. We have drawn inspiration from the works of Lenin and Kautsky and from the current Marxist debate on the transition to capitalism in peripheral social formations. We have located our study within the problematic of the "the agrarian question" by examining generally and specifically what has happened to the peasantry under the increasing domination of the capitalist mode of production.

6.1 The Agrarian Question in a Peripheral Social Formation

We have broadly discerned three different views from the debate on the agrarian question. The first view is that expressed by classical Marxists exemplified particularly in the works of Lenin and Kautsky which are inspired directly from the works of Marx as they relate to the logic of the influence of capital in agrarian societies. Both Lenin and Kautsky have based their observations on the experiences of Russia and Germany respectively towards the end of the 19th century. The general thrust of the arguments in their works is that under the transformative impact of capitalism, the peasantry will be differentiated along class lines; that the development of capitalism in agriculture necessarily entails, as in

industry, a process of polarization of two opposing classes, the rural bourgeoisie and agricultural proletariat, and therefore the disappearance of the middle peasantry. When these processes are seemingly fully completed, agrarian capitalism will be fully established in the rural sector of the national economy, thus laying the groundwork for the movement towards a socialist revolution through the alignment of rural and urban proletariats in their struggle against the rural and urban bourgeoisie. Kautsky's singular contribution, however, was to recognize the basic difference between the processes of capitalist development in agriculture and industry respectively and the consequent slowness in the pace of capitalist penetration in agriculture and the varied forms in which this process takes place in metropolitan social formations.

Our own case study in Liberia as well as many other such studies done by many others, based on the experiences of transition to capitalism in less developed societies, have shown that the above "classical case" or model does not appear to be directly applicable to our own experience and those of many other peripheral social formations. In these societies the peasantry far from being dissolved by the impact of capital, appears to persist.

Many theories have been advanced by different theoreticians to provide answers for the explanation of this persistence. The common consensus among them (to which I contribute) is that the major difference between these social formations and those in the "classical case", is one of colonialism. That in the latter the capitalist mode of production develops naturally from within while in the former most if not all of the countries were colonised by Western imperialist powers and have therefore either undergone the

process of colonization directly or (as in the case of Liberia) indirectly. Consequently, capitalism was introduced or "injected" into these social formations from without. It is rather conclusive from these studies that there are variants of the development of the capitalist mode of production, that of metropolitan capitalism which is the general case of the capitalist mode of production and the case of colonial or peripheral capitalism which is historically specific to our situation in Liberia and most developing countries.

Earlier in this study we have discussed the structures of metropolitan and peripheral capitalist modes of production. What we intend to emphasise now is that they are quite different structurally and that in the dynamics of development, they also differ one from the other. While the development of metropolitan capitalism has the tendency to dissolve the peasantry and establish agrarian capitalism in the country-side through the process of formal subsumption of labour under capital by virtue of the separation of the producer from the means of production and the creation of a new set of social relations of production, which is followed by real subsumption of labour under capital, this is not so in the case of peripheral capitalism. In the latter, some part of the peasantry disintegrates and puts into momentum the movement of labour to the capitalist sector, thus becoming proletarians created by colonial capitalism. The other part which remains in the peasant sector is then subsumed under capital without the separation of the producer from the means of production, or, as some would rather put it, this sector of the peasantry remains pre-capitalist, being "subordinated" by capital. This, in our view, is the most central issue in the present debate among students of Marxism who are dealing with peasant or "pre-capitalist" societies in the peripheral social formations of Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

A number of anthropological and sociological studies conducted among the peasantry in developing societies indicate that the peasantry continues to persist although in our view, in a structurally different form. Our own study of the Liberian peasantry shows that while it is structurally differentiated along class lines, there is no evidence to suggest that it is moving towards the disappearance of the middle peasantry and a total polarization of classes between capitalist farmers and rural proletariat. This phenomenon of the non disappearance of the peasantry, as you have seen, has therefore, to be theorized from a different perspective. It is our view that it has to be located within the context of transition to peripheral capitalism in peripheral or "post-colonial" social formations.

Perhaps one of the most important attempts at adequately theorizing this phenomenon has been undertaken by the protagonists of the Althusserian tradition of French structural Marxism developed in the 1960s. Most of them like Meillassoux, Godelier, Terray, Rey, etc. are in fact social anthropologists who have been working in pre-capitalist societies mainly in Africa, and to a lesser extent in Latin America. In the view of these scholars, the persistence of the peasantry in these social formations signifies the survival of the pre-capitalist mode of production which, however, is subordinated by the capitalist mode of production. This has given rise to the now frequently used term, "the articulation of mode of production", that is the articulation between the dominated pre-capitalist mode is, in their view, due to its usefulness for the development of capitalism because it is the source of cheap labour. Foster-Carter's contribution to this discussion deals specifically with this problem (1). This is certainly a functionalist argument. Because of its usefulness to capital the pre-capitalist mode has



been preserved instead of destroyed. It has been argued that the impact of colonial capital results in the co-existence of two modes of production in a symbiotic relationship with one another thus raising questions about the Marxist concept of contradiction between modes of production. This situation informs the conclusion that the protagonists of the "articulation" thesis have resorted to the essentialist interpretation of the situation in which the peasantry (the pre-capitalist mode) survives, not being dissolved, because capital "wills" it so; i.e. capital "preserves" the pre-capitalist mode for what the former benefits from the latter.

There are, in our view, some major weaknesses in this kind of interpretation. Firstly, it seems to be derived from an empiricist appreciation of the situation and ignoring the forces at play in the overall matrix of the social formation and the structural whole in which the peasantry is located. This could have arisen from some unsatisfactory conceptualization of capitalist mode of production which was presented in rather simple levels of abstraction of relations of exploitation. Secondly, such functionalist interpretation which accounts for formal appearance of social forms in terms of "function" of the pre-capitalist mode of production tends to suffer from all the drawbacks of the functionalist kind of explanation. Thirdly, in this logic capital has been reified; because it is the perception of the 'needs' of capital that preserves the pre-capitalist mode of production and does so voluntarily. This kind of explanation is a significant departure from the historical materialist approach which particularly emphasises the notion of "irreconcilable contradiction" between two opposed modes of production as forces that set in motion the progress and development of a social formation.

A totally different line of argument, but which in our view is more convincing, has been advanced by Alavi (2), Bernstein (3), and McEachern (4) to explain this phenomenon of the continued persistence of the peasantry. While there are differences among these scholars in the theoretical approach to the situation, yet they hold two significant points in common: firstly, all of them reject the notion of symbiotic "articulation" of modes of production and their views are in line with the classical Marxist view of the development of modes of production in social formations. Secondly, for them, that part of the peasantry comprised of petty commodity producers are considered part of the overall capitalist mode of production rather than remaining untransformed as "pre-capitalist" mode of production as suggested by the articulation theorists. Of these three authors Alavi's contribution to this discussion will be considered last.

The generalization of commodity production among the peasantry is seen by McEachern as a necessary and sufficient condition for the development of capitalist relations of production. Indeed Marx had earlier observed that, "... the production and circulation of commodities are the general prerequisites of the capitalist mode of production ..." (5). It becomes crucial to remember to distinguish between the category of relations of exploitation from those of production, because it is the latter which is derived from the laws of motion governing the social formation (6). Bernstein, writing largely about African peasantries, has expressed the view that it is inaccurate to regard the peasant sector as "pre-capitalist" since the essential mechanism for the production and reproduction of the peasants is determined by commodity relations; and therefore their survival is dependant upon the production of commodities and the

market value of such commodities (7). Alavi, who has worked very extensively on the Indian sub-continent in particular and whose contribution to this debate is earlier than the other referred to earlier, has observed for example, that in the course of the transformation of the feudal mode of production in India, the relationship between the landlord and the direct producer appeared superficially unchanged. He noted however, that in fact the structural basis of the relationship was changed. In his words, "... its essential substance was transformed" by the formal subsumption of labour under capital creating new social relations of production (8). Elsewhere, Alavi warned against the empiricist tendency of reading the notion of social relations of production as if they exist between individuals; like landlord and tenant, "thus ignoring the structural bases of such relationships" (9).

Alavi has further argued for a distinction to be made between metropolitan and peripheral capitalism along the line already discussed above and for the development of the Marxian concepts of "formal subsumption" and "real subsumption" to be utilised when discussing the situation in the developing societies. Alavi has even raised the wider question of the subsumption of the peasant production under capital without the separation of the producer from the means of production which according to him, is the primary basis of capitalist development (10).

The findings from our own study of Lawalazu in particular and Upper Lofa County of Liberia in general suggest that the Liberian peasantry are at the first stage of formal subsumption by capitalism where capital through its own dynamics has indirectly exerted effective control over the production process but not undertaking the direct organization of the labour process. This of course is an

indication that those peasants who have been structurally transformed into petty commodity producers are not fully separated from the means of production; and further that the predominant mode of exploitation is seen to be still a non-capitalist one.

Lenin, writing at the close of the last century had admonished against, "too stereotyped an understanding of the proposition that capitalism requires the free, landless worker" (11). His discussion of the process of "vertical integration as against horizontal concentration, which denotes the forms by which capital attempts at regulating production without undertaking its direct organisation, is directly relevant to the context of our own analysis and argument" (12). It is therefore untenable, in our view, to suggest that the peasant sector represents a "pre-capitalist" mode of production when in fact these pre-capitalist conditions of reproduction which existed in the natural economy of the pre-colonial era have been nearly destroyed by colonial or peripheral capitalism and their present conditions of reproduction are dependent on the production of commodities for the capitalist market, and purchase of commodities from the same capitalist market. This practice is of course the organic nature of the structure of capitalism in peripheral capitalist societies.

## **6.2 Colonial Transformation: A Historical Process**

An attempt has been made in the second chapter to describe the nature of class relations including the conditions of reproduction of the peasant economy among the Mande of the Upper Lofa County in Liberia in the pre-colonial period. We have argued that the pre-colonial social formation was dominated by what we have called the Chieftain mode of production. One of the distinguishing

features of the organisation of production in this social formation was the complete absence of the large landed estates characteristic of say the "feudal manor" for agricultural production. There was also a total absence of forced labour and tribute paying as was the case in the social formations that practiced the Asiatic mode of production. Also the agricultural economy was characterised mainly by small family farms cultivated by peasants who were owners of the means of production and very few relatively large farms owned by a few politically, economically or militarily powerful individuals who had access to the labour of pawns or slaves.\* Both these individuals and the peasants had a direct access to land. The term land in the Mande peasant communities (and indeed in all other peasant communities in rural Liberia) constitutes village, forests, and rivers and lakes that may be available to them to produce and reproduce their mode of production. During this pre-colonial period, the peasantry was able to reproduce itself without having to produce commodities for the realisation of exchange value but solely for their own survival.

In Chapter Two, we described the characteristic features of the general type of the natural economy. This however, should be divided into two sub-types which have been described by Marx as, i) land as the object of labour, and ii) land as the instrument of labour (13). The former which implies the extraction of subsistence products or raw materials as part of the peasants' economic activity which was combined with the latter and made land to become the instrument of labour. This means that the Mande (and of course the Liberian) peasant invested his labour in land in the form

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\* The idea of relating slave labour in these parts to a slave mode of production has been thoroughly dealt with in Chapter Two.

of agricultural cultivation and this formed the major part of his economic activity.

Mande peasants were politically dependent on their chiefs and dominated by their strong traditional and cultural beliefs, but socially and economically their dependence on the communal will was paramount for the individual's and community's survival. There was an absence of a centralised Mande state controlling all Mandes in the various Mande chieftains. In these Mande social formations the dominant mode of production lacked the internal mechanism for its transformation into the capitalist mode of production. This was not however, too far away because by the 17th century merchants from metropolitan European social formations began trading relations with the littoral Mandes - the Vais.<sup>\*</sup> These exercises continued sporadically until the first quarter of the 19th century.

By this time, the link between the entire Guinea littoral and representatives of metropolitan Europe had significantly increased through trade and particularly through the expansion of monopoly capitalism which was seeking new localities outside of its own geography for the purpose of investing surplus capital. The investment of colonial capital in this part of the West African coast began in the second quarter of the last century after the international bourgeoisie had successfully completed its class struggle against the indigenous people and their ruling class, and established the Liberian colonial state. This success of the interest of the international and especially metropolitan bourgeoisie set in motion the dynamics of capitalist development among the Mandes, although it was a capitalist mode of production of

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\* The Vais are one of the smallest ethnic groups in the Liberian Mande cluster.

its own kind, i.e. colonial or peripheral capitalism. The capitalism that was established here was concentrated in two areas, first in plantation agriculture and later in mining, employing foreign capital and largely local labour.

The logic of capitalist development brings about the rise in the social division of labour. While some of the peasants were recruited and employed in these capitalist ventures, the bulk of the Mande peasants were to remain in the "traditional" food producing sector but with a new function, mainly that of producing and marketing surplus food commodities for the growing non-food producing population. In this way the peasant sector was integrated with the mainstream capitalist economic development forming a part of the wider capitalist mode of production. The "division of labour in general" which separates agriculture from industry (14), was the type initially developed. This was later further divided into the "division of labour in particular". In the latter, the peasant food producing sector has been divided into rice production and hunting, and the production of other crops (vegetables, fruits, etc.), and non-food commodities. The last group represents the manifestation of the direct participation of the Mande peasants in the newly developed capitalist world economy, the structure of which has been extended throughout rural Liberia.

We have also discussed elsewhere how the colonial state introduced and imposed new land-use laws and regulations and later introduced several measures like the hut and head taxes, geared to enhance the cash needs of the peasants. By this time several kinds of cheap manufactured goods were imported from industrial Europe and introduced into the market to further help increase the peasants' need for cash.

Consequently the peasant economy was not just modified but was transformed by capitalism. There has been a shift of emphasis in the peasant production process since colonial time which has extended into the post colonial period as peasants are no more simply producers of use values as in the pre-colonial era. As producers they are now a link in a long chain producing commodities demanded firstly, by the national capitalist who is an overseer for the international or metropolitan capitalist market. Secondly, the peasants have to meet the new demand placed on the urban sectors of the national economy. The new conditions of reproduction of the peasant household is, therefore, the production of commodities and their valorization in the capitalist market and not otherwise as in pre-colonial times. This certainly does not imply that we have elected to define capitalism in terms of relations of exchange rather than relations of production, but what we do point out is the principal mechanisms through which peasant production in Liberia was subsumed under colonial capitalism. In other words, peasants who are now commodity producers are subsumed under capitalist mode of production, albeit for some the subsumption remains at the formal phase without moving to the second phase of real subsumption. We therefore share the view that it is erroneous to describe the peasantry as being a part of the pre-capitalist mode of production "articulated" with the capitalist mode. What presents itself as a fact in our view, is that they are now transformed as an integral part of the wider capitalist mode of production, engaged in generalised commodity production both at the national and the international levels.

As a consequence of the domination of the social formation (including the peasantry) by the capitalist mode of production and



its attendant peculiarities, the social division of labour in the peasant sector is now in its developed form. The production of commodities has become generalised to reflect the almost complete transformation of the peasants into what Kautsky called "pure agriculturalists", or pure hunters, specialising in the production of one commodity for exchange in the market, as shown by our case studies in the last chapter. It must be pointed out however, that the process of domination by capital is an uneven one caused by the proximity to or distance away from the urban centres. Those areas which are near these centres are relatively more developed as compared to those areas which are further away from their influence. It must be noted however, that this differentiation only seems to us to be in degree rather than in kind.

### **6.3 Differentiation, Repossession, and Proletarianization of the Mande Peasants**

The case study we conducted of the peasant communities in Upper Lofa County has been concerned primarily with the present nature of their economy as a direct consequence of the structural change and transformation which has taken place since the first quarter of the last century. We note that in both the rice growing and cocoa and coffee smallholding sectors of these communities the peasantry is highly differentiated along class lines. This is perhaps the only general consequence of the felt impact of capitalism which is commonly experienced by peasants in both the metropolitan and peripheral social formations. However, unlike the experience of capitalist development in the metropolitan social formations, the class differentiation is not developing into the phenomenon of class polarisation between peasant bourgeoisie (capitalist farmer) and

rural proletariat by virtue of peasant dispossession which also signals the disappearance of the peasantry. Conversely, the situation which we observed among the Mandes in the Upper Lofa County in general and in Lawalazu in particular, can be appropriately termed as differentiation without polarization of peasant classes. While it is true that the middle peasantry has not been dissolved, their socio-economic well-being continues to gradually decline, thereby signalling an imminent pauperization of the majority of the peasantry. This process is in our view, essentially similar to those experienced by the German and Russian peasants as they were observed by Kautsky and Lenin, respectively.

The aggregate decline of the socio-economic conditions of the Mande peasantry in Upper Lofa in particular (and indeed throughout rural Liberia) is evidenced by the important indicator of outmigration, which has been so noticeable that the post-colonial state has decided to stem the situation. In this effort, the post-colonial state embarked on interventionist policies just under a decade ago, geared to perpetuate the present post-colonial economic and class structure as they best serve the interests of the State. The interventionist policies and their attendant programmes included (but were not limited to) development and seasonal credits, the introduction of high yielding varieties, and various support schemes. All in all, the project represents a process of re-peasantization of the pauperized peasants who are "vertically integrated" with the state and state capitalism.

#### 6.4 The Continued Persistence of the Peasantry

In spite of the many pressures which have caused significant decline in the overall socio-economic welfare of peasants, the

peasantry in general have completed their own mechanisms for survival. One way of doing this has been by diversifying household economic activities. This has diversified their sources of income such as by combining farm with non-farm income, where part of the family labour may be engaged in occupation outside the agricultural sector. Some peasant families whose children had migrated to the urban areas or to the "enclaves" of the concessions in search of employment, do receive regular remittances sent back by their children to help support them. These, and other combinations of strategies for survival explain the great resilience of the peasantry under the domination of capitalism. The demographic pressure on the land coupled with the relatively new interest in the accumulation of agricultural land by the "salarist", the politically powerful, and the "non-peasant bourgeoisie", which is a strange combination, have much delayed the process of dispossession of the peasantry if it is to come at all.

While this study was in progress the post-colonial state, in addition to the above, introduced what it called the "green revolution programme". For whatever its worth, the peasant sector (is able) and will develop its forces of production which would increase output significantly, the class bias of this green revolution programme notwithstanding. This adds to the possibility of the peasant family farm being transformed into a "capitalist" family farm with the developed forces of production but cultivating the land by utilizing family labour principally.

For some peasants in the peripheral social formations, they see their own future in the image provided by the examples heard of in some Western European countries, where family farms have survived especially in dairy and horticulture. In a social formation in

which the capitalist mode of production is the dominant mode, it may be possible to develop peasant capitalist farming without having to separate the producer from the means of production and the formation of two opposed classes of capitalist farmers and rural proletariat. This in our view, cannot be done without the introduction of radical land reform programmes geared to the benefit of the peasantry in general. Mechanisms should be instituted for the expansion of the manufacturing and other industrial sectors to relieve peasant communities of their burden of the surplus population.

FOOTNOTESChapter VI

1. A. Foster-Carter's article, "Can We Articulate Articulation", in J. Clammer, op. cit., pp.210-249 has a lot of bearing on our position as it specifically discusses among others, Maillasseux, Godelier, Terray and Rey, whose works we have also referred to in this study.
2. D. McEachern, "The Mode of Production", Journal of Contemporary Asia. Vol.6 (1976).
3. H. Bernstein, "African Peasantries; A Theoretical Framework", Journal of Peasant Studies. 6, 4 (July, 1979).
4. H. Alavi, (a) "India and the Colonial Mode of Production", in Milliband and Saville (Eds.), Socialist Register (London: 1975); (b) "The Structure of Colonial Social Formations", paper for the Conference on Underdevelopment - An International Comparison, University of Bielefeld (July 1979); (c) "The Structure of Peripheral Capitalism in H. Alavi and T. Shanin (Eds.), Introduction to the Sociology of Developing Societies (London: 1982).
5. K. Marx, Capital, Vol.I (Harmondsworth: 1976), p.473.
6. K. Banaji, "Modes of Production in a Materialist Conception of History", Capital and Class, Vol.3 (1977).
7. H. Bernstein, op. cit.
8. H. Alavi, op. cit. (1975).
9. H. Alavi, op. cit. (1979).
10. H. Alavi, "The Classical Marxist Conception of Capitalism and the Subsumption of Peasant Production under Capital", Notes for Discussion, Manchester Round Table (13 June 1981).
11. V.I. Lenin, The Development of Capitalism in Russia (Moscow: 1977).
12. V.I. Lenin, Ibid., Chapter 4.
13. K. Marx, op. cit., pp.284-7.

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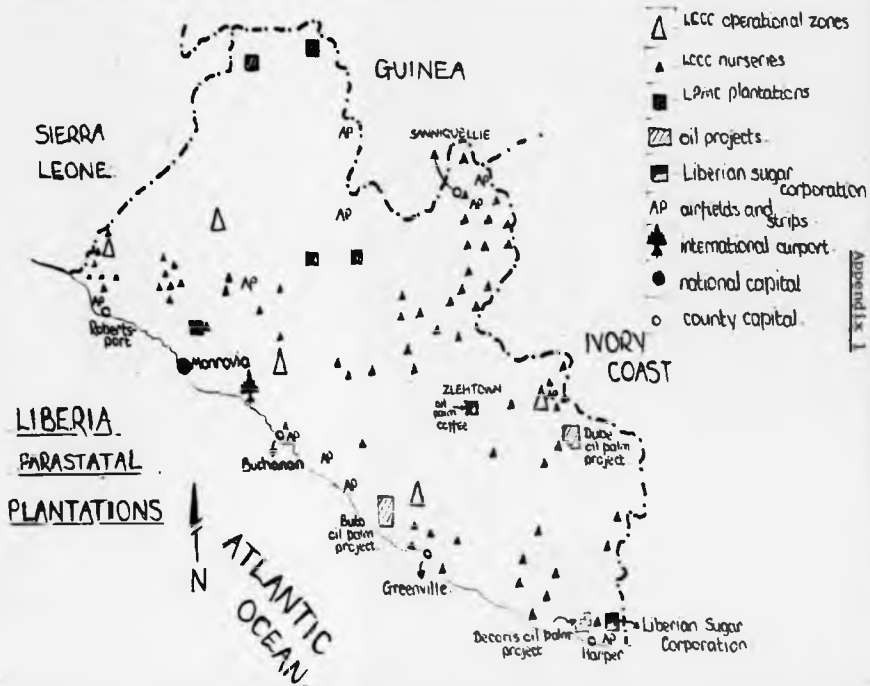
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Appendix 2

