Deconstructing the Peasantry: Class and Development in Rural Kenya

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Abstract

This essay illustrates the power and reach of the new Marxist class analysis when it is applied to the economic development of the third world. Economic development in third world countries has been analyzed, debated, and promoted but the implications of class analysis (in the surplus labor sense) have rarely been explored.

This essay will reexamine the concept of the peasantry that has played such an important theoretical role in Marxist theories of development. In contrast to the typical concept of the peasantry as a rather homogeneous group differentiated according to levels of income and/or property ownership, we develop a theory of the peasantry based on a surplus labor theory of class. A surplus labor theory of class will allow us to investigate in a systematic way how the multiple class structures of so-called less developed rural economies contributed to their “underdevelopment.”

This question derives in part from Kautsky’s parallel inquiry into the nature of the class structure in the rural economy of a country supposedly in transition from pre-capitalist to capitalist forms of production. We redirect this question to investigate empirically the complex class nature of rural Kenya by looking at data concerning household productive activities. Based on our findings we will explore the implications for political action and policy that promote various forms of non-exploitative class structures in rural Kenya.

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The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.

Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels (1998)

Those who assert – and in our view rightly – that the motive force of history is the class struggle, would certainly agree to re-examining this assertion to make it more precise and give it wider application, if they had a deeper knowledge of the essential characteristics of some of the colonized peoples(dominated by imperialism). In fact, the general evolution of mankind and each of the peoples in the human groups of which it is composed, classes appear neither as a generalized and simultaneous phenomenon through out all these groups, nor as a finished, perfect and spontaneous whole.

Amilcar Cabral (1979)

Introduction

Ever since Marx introduced into political economy the question of the transition from feudalism to capitalism in rural societies, there has been debate over the role that class plays in the theory of transition (Marx, 1990, pg. 876). Despite Marx’s qualification that his description applied only to England where transition found its “classic form” (Marx, 1990, pg. 876), and that transition may follow different patterns in other countries, students of rural society have spent enormous amounts of energy trying to describe agrarian transformation in different countries in a manner similar to Marx’s description of the change in England.

The belief that agrarian transformation operates in the classic manner described by Marx was confronted first by Karl Kautsky (1988) in his seminal work, The Agrarian Question. Kautsky introduced what was to become the basic question for later students of rural society in general and transition in particular. That is, does the spread of agricultural capitalism initially lead to the expropriation of land from the so called peasantry and the creation of masses of “free” labor or does it lead to the strengthening of the peasantry and peasant production? This question has been of greatest relevance to those (like Kautsky) who were interested in determining whether the emerging class structure in a transitional rural society is one that will be pre-disposed to supporting the progressive march of history (according to historical materialism) or stand in opposition.

In trying to establish the nature of class change in the rural countryside, the description and classification of the peasantry must inevitably be confronted. Partly because of the theoretical vagueness of the term peasantry in relation to class, a class analysis seeking to determine whether the peasantry is increasing or decreasing in strength has rarely, if ever, been adequately tackled. In this paper we suggest that the failure to specify rural classes has often been due to theorizations of class limited to categories based in the main on the relation of an individual to property ownership and wage labor. By contrast, we apply an alternative theorization of class - following Resnick and Wolff (1987) and the refinements of Chakabarti and Cullenberg (1998) - to the specific case of rural Kenya using survey data.
Our paper is divided into four sections. The first reviews the literature on transition and rural class change in general and in Kenya in particular. The second introduces our theoretical framework and adapts it to be consistent with the data we have available. The third presents and discusses the picture of rural Kenya that emerges from our categorization, with specific reference to questions of politics and economic policy. This is followed by our conclusions.

**Review of the Literature**

In his discussion of primitive accumulation, Marx laid out the parameters that were to guide many of the subsequent debates on transition (Marx 1990). Marx argued that by the fifteenth century most rural dwellers were in fact peasants who worked more or less on private property and the commons as well, and that the relation between them and the feudal lords were merely trappings of a by gone era. With the increase in value of wool, there was an impetus to formally privatize the land and consolidate it in the hands of lords who had become agricultural capitalists. This process led to the formation of the two great classes of capitalism the worker and the capitalist. While Marx’s two chapters on primitive accumulation and the expropriation of the agricultural population laid out a process that took two and a half centuries to complete, he often described the process in apocalyptic terms, as if it occurred overnight. Paraphrasing Thorton for example, Marx claimed that “The English working class was precipitated without any transition stages” (Marx 1990, 879), and that “great masses of men are suddenly and forcibly hurled onto the labor market as free, unprotected, and rightless proletarians” (Marx 1990, 876). This apocalyptic image of the creation of two great classes and the dominance of capitalist relations over feudal relations has captured the minds of students of transition ever since Marx and has been the starting point of most of the major inquiries into the subject.

Kautsky initially argued within the German Social Democratic Party that the party should focus on the rural proletariat as capitalism was sweeping away the small and reactionary peasantry (Steenson1978). His initial arguments on rural change were very much in the mode of the apocalyptic changes Marx described. However, in 1895 and just a few years after his initial intervention, there was an agricultural census that led to the suggestion that the peasantry was not disappearing but was in fact expanding. His book, *The Agrarian Question*, was an attempt to untangle this contradiction between his earlier beliefs and the census reports, and to also contribute a theoretical position on how German Social Democrats should formulate their “Agrarian Platform” (Kautsky, 1988). In *The Agrarian Question* one sees that Kautsky’s views changed from his earlier position, to the one in which he sees the peasantry as not being swept aside by capitalism but acting instead as a reservoir of labor for capitalist farms. Further, he even sees the peasantry and other artisinal production surviving in transition from capitalism to socialism (Kautsky 1988).
Almost coincident with Kautsky’s analysis, Lenin produced his influential, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* (1977). In this work, Lenin responded to a debate similar to the one occurring in Germany on the nature of agrarian change in the transition to capitalism. Specifically, he responded to the Narodniks who did not believe a “natural” differentiation of the rural population was occurring in the countryside as Russia underwent the transition from feudalism to capitalism and, therefore, rejected Marx’s historical trajectory of the transition from feudalism to capitalism and then to socialism (Lenin 1977, Oman and Wignaraya 1991). Lenin argued that in fact the transition in Russia was well underway. Further he developed different theoretical categories of the peasantry (based on the ownership of capital and animals and the ability to hire labor) to make his point that concentration of production in the hands of a few had begun. Finally, Lenin argued that the dissolution of the peasantry and the precipitation of the proletariat was well underway (Lenin 1977).

Mao (1965) followed Lenin’s theoretical framework but was even more overtly political in his reasons for examining the rural countryside. Unlike Lenin and Kautsky whose theoretical interventions were aimed to provide a background for their parties’ policies toward the agrarian sector, Mao straightforwardly asked the question “Who are our enemies?” (Mao 1965). He was more interested in the identification and categorization of the social groups he viewed as hostile to the revolution and the inevitable progressive march of history. For Mao, the rural population could be subdivided into 6 major categories. The first three were Landlords and Comprador, Middle Bourgeoisie, and Petty Bourgeoisie. All three owned land and capital, yet they differed in their respective relationships to imperialism and in the quantities of property and capital that they owned. In contrast, the semi-proletariat included three categories of peasants: semi-owner peasants (owned land but still had to sell some labor power) and two categories of landless poor peasants (one which owned tools and one which did not). These groups were forced by their circumstances to sell labor power (Mao, 1965).

In both Lenin’s and Mao’s analyses the difficulty of categorizing the peasantry became clear. The critical question concerned whether the peasantry was a nascent proletariat emerging from the womb of feudalism and increasingly performing surplus labor for capitalists. The critical alternative was that peasants might comprise a non-capitalist mode of production entrenching and reproducing itself as an appendage to capitalism. The debate was widely believed to be of paramount importance regarding the question of and strategy for transition.

A more recent incarnation of this debate occurred in the 1950’s as a number of scholars such as (Sweezy 1950, Takashi 1952, Lefebvre 1956, Hill 1955, Procaci 1956) responded to Dobb’s (1964) *Studies in the Development of Capitalism*. This debate revolved around definitions of feudalism as a mode of production and around determining how the contradictions of feudalism led to the

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1 Dobb’s work was originally published in 1946. The articles that respond to this work, and supplementary material have been collected in a volume edited by Rodney Hilton (1976) *Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism*; NLB, London

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transition to capitalism (Hilton, 1976). While this debate did not focus on the peasantry and their activities during the transition, it did highlight the general problem of identifying a mode of production and categorizing the key participants as classes.

Following the debate on Dobbs’s work, similar debates took place in various forms across the less industrialized countries. In Asia it took the form of the “Indian Modes of Production Debate” (Patanaik 1990, Chakrabarti & Cullenberg 1998). In Latin America it resulted in DeJanvry’s (1981) seminal work, The Agrarian Question in Latin America. While there have been a number of single studies of the “Agrarian Question” in different African countries what we would term the classic reincarnation of the debate was the “Kenyan debate” a.k.a. the “Nairobi debates”(Kitching 1985) a key portion of which was contained in Volume 20 of the Review of African Political Economy.

The Kenyan debates closely followed the two lines established in debates elsewhere. Leys (1975), Cowen (1981), Hunt (1984), and Leo (1989) saw the transition as one in which a “peasant mode of production” became articulated with the capitalist mode of production. The peasant mode of production then reproduced and entrenched itself as a reservoir of cheap labor for the capitalist mode of production. On the other hand, Njonjo (1981), Kitching (1985) and Chege (1987) saw the expansion of capitalist agriculture leading to a proletarianization of the peasantry.

The theoretical context of this debate in Kenya is an examination of the results of a series of land reform policies that took place in the waning years of colonialism and the early years of independence. These land reforms, coupled with the pro-capitalist economic policies of the Kenyan government after independence, made Kenya an ideal case for the study of rural change in a country transitioning to capitalism.

Like agrarian debates elsewhere, there was also a political context. The debate occurred at the University of Nairobi, the only university then in the country. After the proscription of the Kenya Peoples Union and the creation of a de jure one party state, the university became the only national venue for debate and dissent to the policies of the government. In this context the effect of the

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2 The “Kenyan debates” examined the question of transition broadly in the economy. For our purposes we are restricting ourselves to the portion that examined the Agrarian question.
3 See Wolff (1974) for an extended analysis of the role of British colonialism on the reorganization of Kenyan labor, the creation of a wage-earning class, and the distribution of land in rural Kenya from 1870-1930.
4 The Kenya Peoples Union popularly known as KPU was a left opposition party that was created after independence. Immediately after independence the Nationalist and then moderately center left ruling party The Kenya African National Union (KANU) absorbed the right wing opposition party The Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU). In the new arrangement the left wing of the party was marginalized and finally forced out, resulting in the creation of KPU. KPU was proscribed in 1969 and its leaders including Jaramogi Oginga Odinga detained or placed under house arrest. The country become a de facto one party state until 1982 when Section 2(a) of the constitution was enacted transforming it into a de jure one party state until 1991 when this section was repealed and the country returned to a multi-party parliamentary system.
government’s economic policies on the population were of particular interests to social scientists across disciplines. Because the rural people accounted for over eighty per cent of Kenya’s population, rural development is a focus of concern.

The transition examined in the Kenyan debates began in the 1950s when the colonial government put in place the Swynnerton plan. This plan was both an economic and political instrument. Economically it was expected to yield two major changes on land that belonged to Africans. First, the property rights structure would shift from a regime based on African custom to an Anglo-Saxon regime based on the individual private ownership of land. Second, the scattered parcels of land held by Africans would be consolidated into single contiguous holdings. These two changes were expected to lead to improvements in land husbandry and agricultural productivity. The argument was that private individual ownership, which included the right to sell land, would increase the incentives for individuals to invest in their land. It was thought that African communal land did not offer the same incentives. Politically the colonial government and subsequently the independent Kenyan government saw the land reform as an opportunity to create African yeomen farmers whose prosperity would lead to allegiance and support for the status quo and who would also act as examples for other rural Africans. This was to counteract, first, the growing influence of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army and its insurgency before independence, and later, the radical wing of the ruling party that was calling for more revolutionary change in the relations of production.

The first government of independent Kenya under KANU continued these same policies. In addition, there was a limited attempt to redistribute land that was formerly held by European settlers to Africans. At the same time, the government continued a policy that was pro-capitalist and which in the agricultural sector encouraged the commercialization of smallholdings through

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footnote: The following section draws heavily on Githinji (2000).

footnote: In actuality there are many variations of African communal holdings. The important factor in creating incentives for increasing the investment in land is whether tenure on specific pieces of land is secure. African communal property regimes, which provide this, have results similar to what would be expected under an individual private property regime. See for example Tiffen et al (1995).

footnote: The Kenya Land and Freedom Army is popularly referred to as the “Mau Mau”. The origins of this moniker are unknown and it is not a word in any of the African languages of Kenya. The Freedom fighters who were referred to as “Mau Mau” always referred to themselves as the Kenya Land and Freedom Army.
the adoption of cash crops and production for the market. In the industrial sector a limited policy of import substitution led by state owned companies was followed, but ample opportunity was left for multi-national and private Kenyan companies to participate in the economy.

**Figure 1: Number of Large Estate and Smallholder Farms 1958-74**

![Graph showing Number of Large Estate and Smallholder Farms 1958-74](image)


At the macro level the results of these policies were positive. The country grew at over six per cent per annum between 1963 and 1973. The then president Mzee Jomo Kenyatta would often remark in public addresses during that period that his government had accomplished in ten years more than the colonialist had

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9 In order to sell its policy, and in recognition of the political currents of the time, the government named it’s policy “African Socialism”. African Nationalists had used the term across Africa to denote their concern (at least on paper) for equality and their opposition to Soviet notions of socialism, hence the use of African as a modifier of the term Socialism. Leopold Senghor in 1964 had published a book, *Nation et Voie Africaine du Socialisme* that examined the applicability of the term to Senegal. Sessional Paper number 10 of 1965 was the first attempt by a sitting African government to define and operationalize the concept. This paper was debated and accepted by the parliament as the official framework for economic policy. In this document the Government argued that the notions of class found in Marx’s work while appropriate for Europe had no place in Africa. According to the government a strong sense of fairness and mutual responsibility were hallmarks of a traditional African democracy and this prevented individuals from using economic power to their advantage. This prevented the emergence of antagonistic classes of the European form. In this paper the government basically called for a mixed economy with limited nationalization and guaranteed full compensation for any nationalized asset. An orthodox Marxist critique of African Socialism generally (and with particular reference to Tanzania) can be found in Babu (1981).
in seventy. From 1964 to 1972 agriculture grew at five per cent and market agricultural output and subsistence agriculture grew at 6.5 per cent and 3.7 per cent per annum respectively (Hunt 1985). The number of agricultural smallholders during this period also grew impressively (See figure 1) with the redistribution of over 400,000 hectares of land\footnote{There is debate as to whether the land was actually distributed to the most needy. It is clear that even if some land was distributed to the needy the political class rewarded itself with huge estates during this period. In many ways this part of the transition resembled the privatization of public lands during the enclosure movement in England.} (Kenya Government 1976). Some of the land that had been previously held by English settlers was transferred to African smallholders via government settlement and cooperative society schemes. The results, as seen in Figure 1, are a decrease in the number of large estates in the run up to independence and beyond and an increase in the number of smallholders. Despite these impressive results there were questions about the effect of this growth at the micro level on the poorest sections of Kenyans. For example from 1966 onward despite the growth of smallholders there is a resurgence in the growth of estates suggesting that there was some consolidation of land taking place. Josiah Mwangi Kariuki, a KANU parliamentarian, ignited this debate with a speech in parliament where he declared that the policies and practices of the political elite - such as “land grabbing”\footnote{Land grabbing referred to the practice of politicians and government officials allocating themselves large estates in the land reform process instead of allocating it to truly needy citizens. For his utterances and popularity J.M. Kariuki was brutally assassinated in March 1975 with the probable collusion of senior government officials and presidential aides.} - were leading to a country of “ten millionaires and ten million beggars”.

The question of what kind of class formations arose from this set of circumstances became the central preoccupation of the Kenyan debates. The debates were of particular importance in the African context because up to the early 1980s Kenya with its generally pro-western outlook was seen as one of the few African countries that was successfully following a capitalist path of development. Thus, it was perceived to be the perfect laboratory for students of Africa interested in the changes societies undergo as production is transformed from pre-capitalist to capitalist modes of production.

While these particular ways of examining rural change did shed new light on the development of class configurations, it has became clear that they are now more limiting than helpful. The “Kenyan debates” and, indeed, debates on the agrarian question worldwide had a number of shortcomings. Their most limiting aspect was their marriage to a teleological view of history and therefore development. Thus the kinds of social formations that could be conceived and analyzed were limited to those lying along the pre-determined trajectory of history. Further, in most of these debates and particularly in the Kenyan debates, the categories of class and the peasantry were based on the relationship of individuals to the ownership of property and in some instances to wage labor. There are two problems with this approach. First, from a Marxist perspective class refers to how individuals relate to surplus labor, which may, but need not be
coincident with how they relate to property. Second, the existing categorizations of the peasantry were too many, too complex, and too diverse – which led to reliance on arbitrary simplifications. For example, Githinji (2000) illustrates the possibility of categorizing rural household into 32 categories based on ownership of land, hiring of labor, and ownership of a non-farm enterprise, the standard variables that have been previously used in these debates. Lastly the politics that arises from these debates is limited to revolving around worker led or capitalist led issues. The “peasants” are more often than not an afterthought whose support must be bought in the short term before their eventual demise.

In order not to be constrained by these shortcomings we construct a new picture of rural Kenya that we argue is based on a more flexible and theoretically informative perspective of class and which allows us to have a more complex understanding of the Kenyan countryside.

A Disaggregated Marxian Class Analysis

In our attempt to paint a new picture of the Kenyan countryside we draw on the work of Charkrabarti and Cullenberg (1998) who introduce the notion of class sets as a way on analyzing relations of production and distribution in the transition of the Indian economy. Class sets are defined based on how surplus labor is appropriated, the manner in which labor is remunerated and the form of distribution of the output (Cullenberg 1992). This formulation of class sets itself derives from the earlier work done by Resnick and Wolf (1988) and their concept of fundamental class processes.

**Table 1: Definition of Class Sets**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Sets</th>
<th>Surplus Labor Appropriation</th>
<th>Labor Remuneration</th>
<th>Output Distribution</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Performer of surplus labor excludes all others from appropriation of surplus labor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Nc</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Nw</td>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Nw</td>
<td>Nc</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploitative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Performer of surplus labor is excluded from appropriation of surplus labor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Nc</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Nw</td>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Nw</td>
<td>Nc</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>All Performers of surplus labor share in appropriation of surplus labor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Nc</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Nw</td>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Nw</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Building upon Resnick and Wolff's class analytics we identify class sets in terms of a fundamental class process—the manner of appropriation of surplus labor, \(^{11}\) and two non-class conditions—the type of remuneration received by workers and the form of the distribution of the outputs of production. We consider three forms of appropriation of surplus labor: (1) the form of appropriation whereby the performer of surplus labor can exclude all others from appropriation and therefore appropriates the surplus labor completely and individually (as in the ancient or independent class process); (2) the form of appropriation whereby the performers of surplus labor are excluded from any appropriation of their surplus labor (as in the slave, feudal and capitalist class processes); and (3) the form of appropriation whereby all performers of surplus labor share in its appropriation and no one is either completely excluded from appropriation or can exclude others (as in the communal or collective class process). So as not to complicate our class taxonomy unduly we utilize a binary disaggregation of wage and non-wage forms of remuneration for workers, and commodity and non-commodity forms of distributing output. The combination of the different possibilities among these three forms of appropriation and the manner of labor remuneration and output distribution gives us the twelve different "class sets" illustrated in Table 1\(^{12}\).

At any point in time, all these distinct class sets could co-exist together within a society. Each of these class sets in turn depends upon other economic (including other class sets) and non-economic conditions of existence. Their articulated existence is what we refer to as the class structure of society.

This representation of a social formation made up of multiple class sets provides a direct contrast to the orthodox Marxian conception of a social totality structured by a dominant mode of production. Moreover, this disaggregated micro-class representation precludes any notion of a preconceived and necessary order, certainty or continuity in the transition between and within class structures. Unlike orthodox Marxism, structured by the progressive evolutionary order of society, in the micro approach to transition capitalist class structures can, for example, be transformed into feudal or independent class structures. From this perspective, such cases of transition would not be understood as historical aberrations, but rather as always-possible outcomes of society's multi-faceted and uneven developmental processes. The current transitions in the former Soviet Union and other East European countries suggest the importance of such unexpected and under theorized transitions.

What does this formulation of social structure give us? The major improvement in this formulation is that one is not wedded to a historical view of transition that depends on preconstituted categories. Using our scheme there is no

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\(^{11}\) In this analysis we focus upon fundamental class processes and will not attempt to delineate different forms of the distribution of appropriated surplus labor, i.e., subsumed class payments.

\(^{12}\) It should be noted that these class sets do not involve the specification of property ownership, power relationships or income distribution. Inclusion of these non-class processes would create a further differentiation of class structures. The exact number and way of delineating class sets depends on the purpose and context of a particular analysis. In this preliminary application we have pragmatically adopted a rather limited scope.
compulsion to look for workers or peasants and to struggle with how to deal with individuals who do not fit neatly into either category. We are also not constrained to view history as unfolding in a series of moments moving seamlessly from one mode of production to the next. After all one does not go to bed a peasant in a village of peasants and wake up in a society solely inhabited by capitalists and workers. History ceases to be a progressive teleological march through different modes of production, onward to communism, and instead becomes a wandering among different class sets and other non-class processes. At a deeper theoretical level this allows for groups that are outside the feudalism-capitalism circuit to become part of history, rather than be seen as prehistoric, or without history, as implied by an approach that takes all history to be the history of class struggle. This then allows us to focus on what we see as fundamentally the basis of a progressive politics, namely the elimination of all forms of exploitation. Because earlier studies examined the country-side using the preconstituted categories of peasant, worker, landlord etc, their politics was constructed around what was assumed were the pre-given characteristics and interests of individuals within a broadly defined class group in their relation to capitalism (see for example Mao, 1965). As we develop below, our approach to class politics allows for a wide variety of class alliances and groupings depending on the ever shifting configurations of the class structure of society.

**Sketching an Alternative Rural Kenya**

In order examine class structures empirically, we use the Kenyan Rural Labor Force Survey of 1988 (RLFS). The sample frame for the survey is the National Sample Survey Frame, which covers 95 per cent of the population and 46 per cent of the landmass. Not included is the sparsely populated North Eastern Province of the country. The sample contains over 44,000 individuals and is representative of the district level. (Kenya Government 1980, 1988).

The Kenyan countryside is one that is dominated by agricultural production, with nearly 90 per cent of the households report agriculture as their main source of income, with the trading and service sectors being a distant second and third (Githinji, 2000). Much of the agricultural production takes place on family farms which are categorized into three groups. The first two are subsistence and mixed farms that together make up close to 95 per cent of all farms. Subsistence farms are those where all production is produced for own consumption, while on the mixed farms output is split up approximately evenly between marketed output and output for own consumption. The third group is

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13 Spivak in *A Critique of Post Colonial Reason* argues that the Asiatic mode of Production and primitive communism, the “modes of production” that supposedly apply to Africa and Asia are outside the feudalism-capitalist circuit and thus described as prehistoric with its attendant prejudice. Further the real existence of these “modes of production” is itself questionable. Without them, in a historical materialist sense these cultures have no history. Amilcar Cabral makes a similar point in his essay “The Weapon of Theory” (1979).
composed of cash crop farms. While relatively few in number, these farms account for most of the employment of agricultural wage labor and marketed output. These farms also tend to produce mostly non-food cash crops such as coffee, tea, pyrethrum, and more recently cut flowers. Beyond the agricultural farm sector there is a cooperative sector that engages in basic processing and marketing of agricultural products. Small scale, often individual artisanal production, repair shops and trading stores make up the balance of production in the private sector, with government services providing much of the remaining employment.

Due to the limitations of the data we use, and in order to replicate the theoretical categories of Chakrabarti and Cullenberg (1998) we have to make a number of assumptions in our class categorizations. Our data set contains information on form of payment, i.e., wage versus non-wage, job classification including industrial sector of activity and whether one works on a family farm or not, and whether one heads an enterprise and employs people. In our first round of estimations we focus on individuals and their primary occupations.

We begin by establishing the form of payment that people receive. This is fairly simple as we have information on wage and non-wage income. All individuals reporting wage earning are classified as wage workers, whereas those receiving non-wage payments are classified as such. A large number of individuals however do not report earnings but report an industrial sector and the time spent working. Because in rural Kenya one would expect the vast majority of the population to work on family farms or enterprises, we classify individuals who report neither wages nor non-wage income and are family farm workers as recipients of non-wage income. We also assume that the form of output distribution for them is non-commodity as most of their output is in the form of produce from subsistence farms.

We assume the form of surplus labor appropriation for this group to be shared. For our purposes here household production is an example of a communal class set. For individuals who report activity in other sectors of production but no wage income we assume that since these are all commodity producing sectors that they are remunerated by non-wage earnings and the output is distributed as a commodity. Where these individuals do not employ any other labor we classify them as independent appropriators of the surplus labor performed. Where they do employ labor we classify them as participating in an exploitative process. We also classify all other individuals who receive a wage as a participant in the exploitative class process. These individuals are also classified as being in a process where the output is distributed as a commodity.

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14 While one can have exploitation within a family farm, we assume that it is shared because at this point we do not information on how the proceeds are actually divided. This assumption is consistent with most narrative descriptions of the Kenyan family farm.

15 We are well aware that household production may be exploitative, say in a patriarchal household. At this point we have no way of differentiating between household in which production is exploitative and those that are not and we assume for simplification that they are not.
Individuals who do not report any income we classify as being in one of the processes where the output is distributed as a non-commodity.

In the Kenyan case the following would be examples of processes to be found among the various class sets. Individual appropriation of all surplus would be composed of those engaged in artisanal production such as wood carving, charcoal production, and repair shops who distribute their output as a commodity. These would be classified in set 3. The other major Independent producers include individuals dependent on natural resource production such as honey collecting, hunting and the collection of other forest products who may exchange their production for other goods or use it to supplement farm production. The Exploitative group of class sets has the most varied forms of organization. Class set 5 or 7 for example could include the typical capitalist firm employing wage labor and selling output as a commodity, a government cooperative or farm, either a cash crop farm or cooperative that employs labor. In class set 8 one may find various forms of sharecropping arrangements. The Communal class sets in the Kenyan case would be dominated by household production and artisanal cooperatives.

The results from our estimates of individuals performing surplus labor in various class sets in their primary activity are reported in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Sets</th>
<th>Surplus Labor Appropriation</th>
<th>Labor Remuneration</th>
<th>Output Distribution</th>
<th>Per Cent of Labor Force</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Nc</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Nw</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>6.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Nw</td>
<td>Nc</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploitative</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>36.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Nc</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Nw</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>3.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Nw</td>
<td>Nc</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Nc</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Nw</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>17.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Nw</td>
<td>Nc</td>
<td>25.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the three broad categories of class sets, namely Independent, Exploitative and Communal we find that the Communal class set is the largest containing some 43 per cent of working individuals in rural Kenya. It is composed of individuals whose primary activities fall in class sets 11 and 12, with the largest group being in set 12. Individuals who work and live on subsistence family farms dominate this group. At 40 per cent, the Exploitative class set is not significantly smaller in size than the Communal class sets, and contains the single largest class set, namely class set five, which corresponds to capitalist wage labor. The Independent class set is the smallest at approximately 17 per cent.

Deconstructing the Peasantry: Class and Development in Rural Kenya 13
One strength of our methodology is that we look at the percentage of individuals involved in processes rather than categorize them into specific groups and therefore we can examine surplus labor performance beyond an individual’s primary site. In our case, we find that 11 per cent of the labor force engages in secondary laboring activities within class sets 3, 4, 5, 11, and 12. Class set 4 is the largest with 6.12 per cent followed by class set 12. Notably, despite being the equivalent of fundamental class processes, the performance of labor in these sets provides the conditions of existence for the performance of surplus labor in other sets. In other words, these class processes do stand in opposition to each other not waiting for the more “progressive” one to supercede the less developed one, but rather each mutually constitutes the other and contributes to the complex class mapping and transition of the rural Kenyan country-side.

A couple of key points are implied by our calculations. First, contrary to popular perception, the Kenyan country-side is not composed of peasants engaged in a homogeneous form of production. Rather, it is composed of a myriad of class sets and non class processes. Second, the number of individuals engaged in Exploitative class sets is approximately equal to those engaged in Communal class sets. In fact, if we were able to divide household own farm production into exploitative and non exploitative sets then the total of individuals in exploitative class sets would likely be larger. This illustrates how our analysis would lead to different findings and subsequent political actions from a more orthodox Marxian perspective. Within an orthodox Marxian perspective class sets 11 and 12 would be part of a peasant mode of production. In general these individuals would be seen as politically conservative in the sense of being against the inevitable historical changes that would occur. In particular, they would be expected to rebel against changes that would lead to the dissolution of private property. Further, they would be considered not to be exploited. With our disaggregation, however, were we able to show (true in all likelihood) that those who performed surplus labor did not appropriate it, the Exploitative class sets would be the largest. Further, policy would then be able to engage these individuals in a politics against exploitation. The third crucial finding of our estimates is the importance of the Independent class set, a class set that is completely ignored in “The Nairobi Debates.” These class sets (independent) are not only important because of the large number of individuals performing surplus labor within them but also because they count as an important site of secondary surplus labor performance.

Analysis in the tradition of the various modes of production debate has proceeded essentially from the household level and categorized households based on the major form of production undertaken. This approach often finds itself in a quandary when individuals in a household participate in different modes of production, a problem that Kitching (1980) points out for categorization of households in the Kenyan case. Our approach does not suffer from this problem because we begin with individuals’ participation in processes, and there is no
limit on the number of processes that an individual may engage in. Given this, we examine the class sets in which households participate (see Table 3).

Our results are telling. In most class sets there are a larger number of households participating than individuals. This means that households have within them individuals who are involved in different class sets, and who therefore have complex relations between them. For example, one may have a household that owns a mixed farm (a farm that produces for market and own consumption). As an example, suppose that this family has three adult individuals, a not uncommon situation in rural Kenya. One of these individuals may take a job in a non-agricultural capitalist firm as a wage worker. Because productivity is higher in the non-agricultural sector this individual may earn enough to support fully or partially the employment of a wage worker on the farm. The second individual may participate in one of the independent class sets earning income that gets put in the household pot, and also participate in work during busy seasons on the farm. The third individual may act as the farm manager, supervising and working alongside the hired labor. This kind of complex relationship cannot be easily categorized as a worker, capitalist, or peasant household. Our method recognizes this complexity rather than ignoring or terming it by ambiguous terms such as semi-proletarianization.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Sets</th>
<th>Surplus Labor Appropriation</th>
<th>Labor Remuneration</th>
<th>Output Distribution</th>
<th>Per Cent of Labor Force</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Nc</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Nw</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>21.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Nw</td>
<td>Nc</td>
<td>29.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploitative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>55.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Nc</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Nw</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>10.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Nw</td>
<td>Nc</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>4.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Nc</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Nw</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>55.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Nw</td>
<td>Nc</td>
<td>25.44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A second important finding is the relative stability between the number of individuals and households in set 12, which suggests this is the one set where households are fairly homogeneous.

The third key finding is the overall change in percentages for the three groups of class sets.
Table 4: Per Cent of Individuals and Households in Rural Kenya by Class Set Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Set</th>
<th>Per Cent of Individuals</th>
<th>Per Cent of Households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>17.58</td>
<td>43.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploitative</td>
<td>39.39</td>
<td>60.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communal</td>
<td>42.93</td>
<td>72.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We find that the percentages increase the most as you move from individuals to households for the independent class sets and much less so for the communal and exploitative class sets. This suggests that the individuals found in independent class sets tend to be more thinly spread, though fewer in number they are relatively more widely spread across households. To put it in another way, while households may have more than one individual engaged in the exploitative and communal class sets, they are likely to have only single individuals in the independent class sets. Overall, within our sample we find that 71 per cent of households have more than one class set represented in the household.

In what ways does the disaggregated class analysis illuminate politics or discussion of policy? In the case of politics we have already hinted at the strengths of our method. First and foremost, it allows for the creation of a left politics that is issue-oriented, and that is consistent with a fuller picture of the class characteristics of the society. In the past left politics in many developing countries have been driven by an orthodox Marxist view of history where history unfolds in a teleological manner, and the peasantry disappears as capitalists and workers are “precipitated” from the forward march of history. The political response has therefore been to create a worker’s platform, and often after using a variety of theoretical contortions to find a way to accommodate some of the peasantry in various political programs. Inevitably, this has let to pro-worker and pro-peasant tendencies and consequently tensions within parties. Our approach on the other hand which recognizes that individuals and subsequently households do not fall neatly into any one of these categories, allows for the creation of a party platform that attacks exploitation regardless of form or location and also allows for the inclusion of non-class forms of exploitation. Leftist parties that have emerged recently in this vein are the Partido Trabajo in Brazil and the Zapatistas in Mexico. These parties, for example, have adopted political platforms that while concerned with the plight of workers and their exploitation by capitalists are also centered on non-class processes such as the rights of the indigenous peoples, and the landless, the relationship between gender, poverty and the rights of women, and the question of race and exploitation. Secondly, our approach recognizes the complex nature of production relationships within households. This allows us to consider how party planks that appeal to one set of individuals may in fact lack support from the same set of individuals because the impact of the plank may be negative on other individuals within the household.
In present day Kenya our disaggregation is illustrative with regard to two sets of economic policies that are part of the package of pro-market reforms. The first is the increased liberalization of agricultural prices in an attempt to increase returns to agriculture, and with it the output of this sector. Part of the result is an increase in exploitative class sets due to the increase in wage labor and the privatization of formerly state and communal lands. Along with this liberalization is an explicit policy of privatizing natural resources to enhance efficiency and restricting access to what is left of the state owned natural resources to protect them against degradation. Our analysis suggests that not only will this lead to a higher proportion of individuals being engaged in exploitative class structures but it may also have a substantial impact on individuals involved in independent class structures based on natural resource extraction. For example, one may find that under the present policies some households may gain exclusive access to land from its privatization. However, if these households contain individuals that are dependent on natural resource extraction, such as wild honey collection, these individuals may oppose the privatization of communal lands. Depending on the individual’s contribution and power within the household, this person may be able to convince a household that would be categorized under orthodox classification as a peasant household and therefore a supporter of land privatization, to be against it.

Another way in which our approach illuminates the shortcomings of the homogeneity imposed by orthodox approaches is via its ability to allow for the consideration of variegated household formations in the rural areas. For example, policy makers and social scientists on both the left and the right claim that households that inhabit the Kenyan countryside are all commodity producers of some form, the commodity of choice for the poor in this group often being a food crop. Given this, a policy has been adopted as an anti-poverty strategy that raises farm gate prices for food crops, the assumption being that the poor will gain from this via increased income from their marketed output. Since our disaggregation allows for the existence of non-commodity producers, it would be immediately clear that such a policy would not improve the livelihoods of these producers, and in fact may injure them if they are net purchasers of food.

**Conclusion**

We have argued that the orthodox Marxian view of class as a pre-constituted group and the teleological march of history under girds the view of politics based on the existence of “two great antagonistic classes” (Marx 1990), the workers and capitalists. This perspective, however, is limited by its inability to explain the complex and various forms of performance of surplus labor in rural societies. Nor can it explain the wandering rather than progressive march of history so often experienced in developing countries like Kenya. Instead, we argue that a disaggregated class analysis based on the combination of different forms of appropriation of surplus labor, distributions of output, and remuneration
of labor, provide a more flexible and useful way of examining society. Using Kenyan data as an example, we have examined the size of the population involved in different class sets and shown the complexity of surplus labor performance at the individual and household level. We have then shown how this analysis could be used to inform a left based politics and analysis of economic policy, and how it allows us to begin to explore the relationships, between the different class sets at a household level.
References


