

Colin Bundy, *The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry*: A Critique.

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DOI: 10.56201/ajha.v7.no2.2023.pg32.48

ABSTRACT

*The enormity of rural poverty in South Africa was ignored by government officials until academic works began to expose the extent of the problem in the latter part of the twentieth century. Colin Bundy's *Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry* catalyzed debates on rural poverty that pervaded the area populated by black South Africans. Bundy's work represents a significant advance in our understanding of the underdeveloped nature of African rural agriculture. It demystifies the myth of stagnant African agriculture alongside a dynamic commercial white agricultural sector. Through the Dualism Theory of Bundy, this paper seeks to understand which institution controlled the means of production and what form of domination or exploitation existed before the advent of colonialism. This paper further outlines Bundy's arguments, analyses his critiques, and draws inferences from the arguments provided by other scholars to submit that no form of exploitation existed in pre-colonial South Africa.*

Keywords: Rural Agriculture, Precolonial South Africa, Peasantry, Economy, British

Introduction

The history of the extreme underdevelopment and poverty that affect much of South Africa's Eastern and Southern Capes have given rise to numerous academic works.² Debates as to how this underdevelopment came to be is even more disturbing, with reference to which model could be best employed to explain the plethora of issues that surround these phenomena. Historians have continued to take sides in this regard, determine the evolutionary pattern of the poverty and offer solutions through historical reconstruction of the past.³ At the heart of this controversy lies colonialism, that has been argued to be the root cause of the problem. However, some studies have revealed that exploitation, which arguably had its roots in pre-colonial African states prepared the ground for industrial capitalism that later contributed to the

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² C, Crais, *Poverty, War, and Violence in South Africa* (New York: Cambridge, 2011), 1.

³ C, Bundy. *The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry*, Volume 28 (South Africa: Univ. of California Press, 1988), ix-xix.

underdevelopment in areas populated by the majority in South Africa (Lewis, 1984: 7).⁴ According to Rey, for instance:

The forms and effects of capitalist penetration are partly shaped by the differing openings available in the pre-existing forms of organization-leading to highly variable articulations of capitalist and non-capitalist relations, of old and new forms of exploitation.⁵

This paper looks at Colin Bundy's work: "The Rise and Fall" of the South African Peasantry and how its criticisms have contributed to scholarly understanding of poverty in rural South Africa. In his book, Colin Bundy, a professor and research fellow at Queen Elizabeth's House, Oxford, shows how South African prosperity was built on the impoverishment of the African producers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. From 1870 onwards, and even earlier in the Ciskei, a number of Africans adopted new crops and methods of production, notably the ox-plough, earned income and then re-invested money as transporters of goods. These occupations opened up production for the markets created by the white settlements.⁶ (William, 1979: 164).

Most 'Black Englishmen' in mission stations created by the colonialists became better farmers, challenging their white counterparts in the production and supply of maize to the market.⁷ However, this healthy competition between the black and white South African farmers was short-lived as a number of laws were passed to cut off Black African farmers from their means of production and reduced many to sharecroppers and tenants on white owned farms.⁸ The discovery of gold in South Africa proved disastrous for black Africans who had been successful as contributors to the growing agricultural industry as it reduced them to wage earners in the mining fields.⁹ An assessment of Bundy's work by academics will also be discussed. The situation in South Africa during this period was an environment of "subsistence economies" of various sorts, increasingly under pressure by the penetration of "market relations".¹⁰

This paper also analyses the responses of black South Africans to market opportunities that were associated with the early phases of capitalism that brought about a period of prosperity for some African agrarians. But how a tightening vice of administrative regulation that served the interests of both white "maize" and "gold" (European farming and mining capital) engineered the underdevelopment of those former thriving agrarians will be the core of the argument. A careful examination of pre-colonial modes of production in African states will be provided in order to understand what modes of production existed in these societies. This is important because the models of modes of production would serve as an analytical tool for understanding not just South Africa, but African societies in general and their differing

⁴ J, Lewis. 'The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry: A Critique and Reassessment', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 11, 1, (1984), 7.

⁵ Rey was quoted in P, Geschiere. 'Application of the Lineage Mode of Production in African Studies', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, / *Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines*, 19, 1, (1985), 80-90.

⁶ G, Williams. "'The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry'", *Review of African Political Economy*, 15, 16, (1979), 164.

⁷ Ibid. G, Williams 'The Rise and Fall', 164. Black Englishmen are regarded as black South Africans who converted to Christianity and embraced European life.

⁸ S, Meintjes. *Peasants and Christians in South Africa-The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry*. By Colin Bundy (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1979), 129.

⁹ C, Crais, *Poverty, War, and Violence*, 12.

¹⁰ J, Lewis. 'The Rise and Fall', 2-13.

transformations within the capitalist system. Through Dualism Theory of Bundy, this paper also seeks to understand which institution controlled the means of production and what form of domination or exploitation existed before the advent of colonialism. Colin Bundy argues that no form of exploitation existed in the pre-colonial South Africa using the Cape Nguni as his case study.

Colin Bundy's Arguments

The impoverishment of the rural reserve in South Africa has been a subject of long and active debate among historians. Colin Bundy tries to contextualize poverty by criticizing the view that African agriculture was inherently backward. He associates the rise of capitalism with the underdevelopment of the rural reserves in which most black farmers lived. Bundy stresses the effect of the change began with the rule of white "minority" in the region. Bundy; argues against the views of liberal historians like W.M. Macmillan, C.W. De Kiewet, D. Hobart and other writers of Oxford South African History when he claims, that colonial advance rather than crude technological know-how in agriculture was responsible for the breakdown of socio-economic life of the Bantus.¹¹ The devastating effects of land loss by the indigenous black South Africans for Bundy laid the foundation for the underdevelopment that was evident in the reserve areas. He demonstrates this had a severe impact on the tribal economy and that the Traditional modes of production could not survive without land. Bundy tries to explain peasant difficulty simply in terms of land shortage. Black South Africans were forced to find subsistence on a sharply reduced land surface. He also argues that the introduction of a cash economy undermined the old self-sufficient economic order, while the rising consumption needs outweighed the subsistence economy.¹² This means that the introduction of a cash-based economy led to the break- down of subsistence life, the creation of wealth accumulation and the sale of surplus production to meet the demand of rent and taxes levied by the colonists. The rising consumption demand of peasants and their families also accelerated the growth of this cash-based economy. Bundy points out the views of K.W. Hancock; he accuses "soil degradation and human wretchedness which sprang up from native congestion and the fact that neither labour nor squatting on white-owned land could stimulate change and progress in the economic methods of the Bantus".¹³

Dualism Theory and the Question of Peasantry

Colin Bundy explained the concept of 'dualism theory' which is adapted from the work of Palmer and Parsons. In his words, 'dualism theory' typifies an economy divided into two sharply distinguished and largely independent sectors, and predicts a number of specific economic phenomena that flows from the division. To him, the capitalist economy has the receptiveness to change, complex market systems settings prices and pursuing optimal gains. The pre-capitalist economy on the other hand is stationary and exhibits fleeting consciousness and the supremacy of 'tradition' or 'customs'.¹⁴

Bundy is much more concerned with the arguments and positions of historians as to what led to the decline of socio-economic lives of the black populations of South Africa. He

¹¹ S, Meintjes. *Peasants and Christians*, 127.

¹² Ibid. S, Meintjes. *Peasants and Christians*, 127.

¹³ Ibid. S, Meintjes. *Peasants and Christians*, 127-128.

¹⁴ Ibid.

raised the questions: what is a peasant; if there were actually peasants in South Africa; what analytical purpose these definitions would serve and under what terms can they be employed? Colin Bundy comments that research into peasantry slipped into obscurity as a result of the Great World Wars (1914-1918 and 1935-1939), while the limited number of studies that were put forward were rendered insignificant by the political and intellectual frame of the period. It was not until the mid-20th century, (the years of the Chinese Revolution, the Vietnam War and formal independence but continuing dependence in much of Africa and Asia) that Peasant Studies gained prominence as one of the structural determinants which make the developing countries what they are (Bundy, 1988: 4).¹⁵

Bundy reviews and assesses the definitions of Peasantry and its features with other scholars' analysis. For him, A. L. Kroeber depicts peasants as a class that forms a part segment of town-centred societies, adding dimensions to the socio-cultural lives of the people. Redfield elaborates this according to Bundy by categorizing features of Peasantry into four parts. First, they were involved in exchange and market; second, they were involved in a wider administrative and political hierarchy, "...beyond the village they live and labour; third, they therefore exist in a country-wide network and not merely in the immediate or 'closed' community; fourth, peasants exhibit 'folk' or 'little' forms of the 'great' cultural traditions embedded in the society" (Bundy, 1988: 4).¹⁶

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So, here Bundy thinks Redfield concludes that the values and structures of Peasantry are also evident in cities and that the 'primitive' African societies which were hitherto self-sufficient, kin-based communities were forced to be dependent on external structures and forces, that is- from 'primitive' society to Peasantry. Bundy also claims K. Post's arguments debunked the above analysis of Redfield by stating that it fails to look into how the immediate community or society came into being with its location in the political economy sphere. Colin Bundy writes that Post, Wolf and Shanin elaborate more on this discourse (The definition of Peasantry). Peasants, according to Wolf, are:

rural cultivators whose surpluses are transferred to a dominant group of rulers that uses the surpluses both to underwrite its own standard of living and to distribute the remainder to groups in society that do not farm but must be fed for their specific goods and services in turn.¹⁸

Colin Bundy argues that the relationship between the dominant group and the peasant is not identical and so the peasant pays some tax which Wolf describes as rent. He went further to argue in line with Wolf that "it is only when a cultivator is fully integrated into a society with a

¹⁵ C, Bundy. *The Rise and Fall*, 4.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ C, Bundy. *The Rise and Fall*, 4.

¹⁸ Ibid, 5.

state that is power holders outside his own social stratum that we can appropriately speak of a peasantry”.¹⁹

Bundy relies heavily on these scholars for his definition of the South African peasantry. He categorizes Africans in the Cape and South Africa generally in the nineteenth century as “rural cultivators, enjoying access to a portion of land; who use their own labor and that of members of their families in agricultural or pastoral pursuit and sought through this to satisfy directly consumption needs (clothing, books, education) of their family; in addition they look to the sale of a portion of what they raise to meet the demands (taxes, rent, and other fees) that arose from their involvement in an economic and political system beyond the bounds of their immediate community”.²⁰ With this definition, Bundy feels the peasants in South Africa are not different from the peasants all over the world, having undergone socio-cultural and economic domination, the peasant is totally different from his predecessors. Put differently, the capitalist peasants differ from the pre-capitalist peasants.

The situation and the extent to which laws were imposed on peasants changed over time and according to place. Bundy also views the emergence of a peasantry as a process quoting Shanin's phrase: that the pressure of other social classes' demand sparked off the ‘peasantry as a process’. For Bundy, Shanin argues that the “main factors abating structural change are the spread of market relations, monetization and technological change and the rise in the changes effected by (non-peasant) power holders” (Bundy, 1988: 5).²¹

He argues peasant society witnessed a sudden transition into the metropolitan capitalist economy and within this class several divisions cropped up. For instance, some agriculturalists moved out of the peasant category to become defined as capitalist farmers, while others turned into labourers. Different terms were used to explain the concept of peasantry and the classes that sprang up as a result. As Bundy puts it, some scholars prefer the term ‘peasantisation’ rather than ‘peasantry as a process’. He defines peasantisation as a process referring “essentially to the widening and depersonalization of market relations consequent to the introduction of a pervasive cash economy and a colonial state”.²² Here, Colin Bundy is concerned with the process of change of the African from communal cultivator to peasantry and the integration into capitalism that happened at the same time. Bundy further takes into consideration the division that is inherent in the peasant class. While some peasants actually became successful commercial farmers, some became poor peasants who often owned small farms and others became more or less working members. These rather poor peasants possessed insufficient means of production and therefore resorted to wage labour for survival. By contrast, the successful peasant had more land and the means to hire labour to produce surplus. Another distinction was evident between pastoral peasants and the agricultural peasants and this has to do with land allocation and its purpose for agriculture. Therefore, Colin Bundy argues his definitions of peasantisation and peasantry have specific meanings. These meanings differentiate peasants from primitive agriculturalists with the assimilation of the former into the capitalist economy. It also differentiates the peasants from the capitalist farmers who have the means to secure labour outside his kinship ties. Furthermore, there is also a distinction between peasants and rural laborers in the sense that the latter has the means to cater for his

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 10.

family while the former has to sell his labour to survive.

Pre-capitalist Nguni Society

To support his arguments Bundy uses the agricultural practices and socio-economic life of the pre-colonial Cape Nguni people for his assessments. In between his arguments, he raised the question of how good or bad these Africans were as food raisers. The Cape Nguni were organized politically into lineages, clans, and chiefdoms with significant cultural homogeneity and their economic life was regulated by the chief through family and lineage ties. This means that the modes of production were narrowed down to the family by determining the labour supply and the acres of land to farm. Colin Bundy highlights the features of this economy which include: First, the system of production was decentralized and there was neither exploitation nor coercion present in the system of production. This issue will be taken up in the latter part of this essay to determine how valid this statement is. Second, no amounts of labour or land were sold or hired and there was the assurance of subsistence livelihood through resource allocation. Also, there was a form of redistribution that allowed the ‘have-nots’ of the society to have a share of the resources and a space for trade. Sometimes this involved long distance exchange between neighbouring societies; for example, the Nguni traded with the Tswana who were craftsmen.

Colin Bundy notes that scholars including Maurice Evans and C. T. Lorams have heavily critiqued the traditional agricultural methods of the Africans. The basic arguments of these people were that Bantus were bad cultivators and they had wasteful agricultural practices. Bundy’s reaction to this is that scholars “failed to appreciate the limits imposed by the prevailing mode of production and social relations and technological levels that characterized it”.²³ Bundy also claims their argument was ‘unscientific’ and not deep-rooted. He argued that “the relevant question in viewing an agricultural economy is the measure of its proficiency within a particular mode of production, and whether resources were efficiently deployed within the constraints of the physical and social environment”.²⁴ Bundy supports the pre-capitalist economy of South Africa in the face of criticisms that this society survived without the modern agricultural techniques, resistance to diseases, transport facilities, good water supply and so on. Despite all these factors, Africans still practiced a form of shifting cultivation and soil rejuvenation, leaving the soil fallow until its fertility returned. He is also of the opinion that the Africans had their own agricultural techniques using cycle systems to decide which land was to be used for cultivation or grazing. Colin Bundy’s conclusion is that the Africans had put in place a complex pastoral and agricultural system before the advent of the Europeans. Trade was common and wealth was adequately redistributed through kinship, but this system was undermined by the might of capitalism that swept through the economies of South African societies.

The Importance of Maize and Environment

Why was maize and its cultivation in the Eastern Cape so important? Rural historians have pointed to the importance of the crop despite its unsuitability for cultivation in Southern

²³ C, Bundy. *The Rise and Fall*, 22.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 23.

Africa. Maize as noted by Clifton Crais was a quintessential ‘peasant’ crop.²⁵ It was also a basis for Bundy’s assessment of the nineteenth century South Africa. Jack Lewis and Clifton Crais do not agree on the price of maize in the market. While Lewis’ maintains that there is evidence that many Mfengu were forced into selling at a high price in the market. Crais argues otherwise, that poor farmers were forced to sell their grains at low prices.²⁶ While it has already been mentioned above that some Africans with the collaboration of the colonial government were able to respond well to market situation. They acquired large acres of land, ploughs and labour, but the vast majority of black South Africans lived in abject poverty which Helen Bradford terms ‘pauperism’ (Bradford, 2000: 88).

For Bradford, the prosperity Bundy talks about was a mirage as much in the Hershel district as in the Eastern Cape and much of South Africa suffered drought starting from the 1870s (Bradford, 2000: 88). In fact, maize was indisputably important but historians debate its influence during this period. Bradford maintains her arguments that prosperity cannot be talked about when much of the region was engulfed by drought. Maize as critically analyzed by Crais is vulnerable to drought, molds and requires 47-60 inches or 1,200-1,500 millimeters of rainfall before maturation.²⁷ He further points out why maize was unsuccessful in South Africa due to its propensity to much irrigation and that today the name is associated with poverty when many centuries ago, it was worshipped by the Americans as the Sun God.²⁸ (Crais, 2011: 87). Not only was drought responsible for widespread famine in South Africa in the Nineteenth century but the rhinderpest pandemic of the 1890s also decimated herds.²⁹ (Crais, 2011: 77, 117 and 120). Most people had no means of paying taxes after their crops and cattle had been wiped out and resorted to migrant labour to be able to pay their taxes.

Colin Bundy is simply content with the success of a very few peasants who came to occupy the fertile land near Peddie called the crown reserve. His focus is on the ability of a few people who responded to the opportunity created by the colonial economy and not on the entire reserve that was characterized by poverty. Sprinkles of prosperity in the reserves have been harshly criticized by academics like Crais (on violence), Lewis (on economic modes of production), Bradford (on drought) and many more. Crais acknowledged that the Crown reserve was clear evidence of peasant prosperity, but evidence he and others presented revealed that poverty was deeply rooted in the area. An example of this was the anthropological work of Monica Wilson in 1958, in which she brought forward evidence of landlessness, poverty and reliance on long distance labour.³⁰

To a very large extent many historians have misconstrued Bundy’s arguments. He remarks that some black South Africans departed from pre-colonial agriculture using technology such as ploughs and wagons to compete in a commercial economy. They used new forms of storage to control their entrance and exit to the market. Colin Bundy may have exaggerated how prosperous the peasantry was, but this prosperity was only overshadowed by the explosion of inequality and poverty. The number of prosperous peasants could not have likely exceeded two thousand households.³¹ (Crais, 2011: 120-121).

²⁵ C, Crais, *Poverty, War, and Violence*, 78.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 67-93.

²⁷ C, Crais, *Poverty, War, and Violence*, 84.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 87.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 77, 117, and 120.

³⁰ H. Bradford. ‘Peasants, Historians, and Gender: A South African Case Study Revisited, 1850-1886’, *History and Theory*, 39, 4 (2000), 86-110 and C, Crais, *Poverty, War, and Violence*, 99.

³¹ C, Crais, *Poverty, War, and Violence*, 120-121.

Clifton Crais provides a more plausible explanation to why some Africans became better farmers and others remained impoverished. He argues that both groups took part in the colonial market economy in different ways. While the former group had access to information, colonial officials and access to land and most importantly participated in colonial conquest. This group exploited labour through kin networks, tenancy arrangements, and wage labour.³² (Crais, 2011: 120-121). The latter faced a reverse situation, wallowing in extreme poverty, landlessness and hunger.

Without a critical examination of the pre-colonial period in South Africa (the relationship between the rural household in the reserve), Clifton Crais criticizes Helen Bradford and especially Jack Lewis' response to Colin Bundy. While he considers Bradford to be focused on the gendered nature of the agrarian change and considerable poverty in an era typically represented as prosperous, he also criticized Lewis' for using a materialist approach focused on pre-capitalist modes of production and class struggle at a time when these approaches had begun to lose their appeal.³³ This means that other models have been developed to explain the cause of migrant labour and poverty. Also, in response to Lewis, Crais argues that "Economic change can only be understood by placing it in a fuller context that is not reducible to abstract concepts such as the 'market' or the 'economy'".³⁴ (Crais, 2011: 25). Crais further explains that "people in South Africa planted and sold crops, or engaged in wage labour in conditions not of their own choosing, conditions shaped by violence" (Crais, 2011: 25). Crais' argument here could be likened to the guidelines in Karl Marx's book: *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* as spelt out by David Harvey. He writes that, "In order to guarantee the survival of society, men are forced, "independent of their will", to enter into social relationship with each other".³⁵ (Harvey, 2009: 197). Therefore, Crais who criticizes Lewis for using Marx's analysis to reassess Colin Bundy's *Rise and Fall* could not move away from a Marxist approach that saw violence as motor of change in South Africa.

The inferences drawn in this paper from Bundy, Lewis, Clifton Crais, Helen Bradford, and some other scholars' analysis on this topic reveal that there were some successful Africans who rose to become wealthy. This is contrary to some harsh criticisms from leading liberal historians such as C.W. de Kiewet, W.M. Macmillan, and K. W. Hancock. But the number of these successful men in relation to the widespread poverty that pervaded South Africa puts a question mark on the so called 'rise' asserted by Bundy. Therefore, the political conjecture which led to the emergence of the peasantry was not simply market forces, but also the combination of missionary, trading and administrative interests in alliance with one another which fostered the rise of the peasantry. Their (Mfengu and other tribal ally of the British) support was especially important in the defense of the colony against neighboring chiefdoms. But as these chiefdoms came under colonial rule, the need for peasant allies diminished.³⁶

Critique of the Book: The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry.

³² Ibid.

³³ C, Crais, *Poverty, War, and Violence*, 23.

³⁴ Ibid, 25.

³⁵ D, Harvey. *Social Justice and the City*, Volume 1 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 197.

³⁶ S, Meintjes. *Peasants and Christians in South Africa-The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry*. By Colin Bundy (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1979), 127.

Colin Bundy's arguments on the dynamics of rural agrarian economy of South Africa especially between the years 1840-1913 have "exposed the myth of an unchanging, subsistence-oriented backward and stagnant agricultural sector existing alongside a dynamic, commercial White agricultural sector".³⁷ Even though *Rise and Fall* has received acclaims within the academic community, it has also been subjected to criticisms. This has led to a crucial question in this paper which will have a bearing on the interpretation of economic conditions of Africans in the Eastern and Southern Capes during these periods. Bundy in one of his remarks argues that:

There was a substantially more positive response by African agriculturalists to market opportunities than has usually been indicated... A smaller group of African farmers made considerable adaptations, departing entirely from the traditional agricultural economy, and competed most effectively with the white farmers.³⁸

In light of the debates that surround Bundy's positions came the question(s), which this paper seeks to answer: what was the proportion of the farmers that rose to the effects of growing capitalist mode of production. In addition, what motivated this rise if there was any? The analysis in this paper reveals the extent to which this question could enable one to understand the major problem (poverty) that is addressed in the book.

While a mono-causal historical approach would be insufficient to explain rural poverty in South Africa, Bundy's focus was more on the Cape with less analytical depth for the political and economic conjecture of emergence of market production that had different characteristics in other areas like the Transvaal and Natal.³⁹ Clifton Crais in his own analysis argues that the competition between the African peasant farmers and their white counterparts revolved around a specific period (1860-1890s) and cause.⁴⁰ Therefore, my analysis will be concerned with the political and economic changes that characterized the period under review. The rise of the peasantry was encouraged by violence, loyalty and a combination of social and political factors. In assessing the consequences of violence as a catalyst of change, Crais accuses Bundy of not paying attention to the influence it has on the economy of South Africa. Violence for Jack Lewis "unleashed the struggle already inherent within African society".⁴¹ The pre-capitalist modes of production in South Africa supported a distinct polarization of the production units-households, clans, lineage and kinship. In this system, there existed a hierarchical political system in which the domination of resources by a restricted group played an important role.⁴² In examining the contradictions in the pre-colonial modes of production that became acute with colonial conquest, there is no attempt in the *rise and fall* to address the effect of these contradictions in shaping the economic and political response to colonial domination.⁴³ The contradictions that were mentioned above are the residual effects of class structure of the pre-capitalist modes of production which will be discussed in the next section.

³⁷ S, Meintjes. *Peasants and Christians*, 128.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ C, Crais, *Poverty, War, and Violence*, 13.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid, 37 and J, Lewis. 'The Rise and Fall', 9.

⁴² C, Crais, *Poverty, War, and Violence*, 37.

⁴³ J, Lewis. 'The Rise and Fall', 3.

The British Politics of Divide and Rule

In this analysis, I will explain how the British used the combination of political, economic, military and even religious tactics to break up existing powerful societies like the Xhosa and make other tribes (Mfengu) strong politically and economically. The consequences of this overhauled the African societies and led to wide spread starvation, diseases, death, but also the rise of a new class of Africans. The formation of a peasant class was set in motion by a set of events precipitated by violence, dispossession and missionary activities that became the bearer of commercial economy and western manners.⁴⁴ (Bundy, 1988: 32).

During the second half of the nineteenth century, British expansionist expeditions clashed on different occasions with the local Xhosa people who inhabited the Eastern Cape. The conflicting interests between both parties led to the eight-frontier war, which was regarded as one of the bitterest conflagrations of the century. British troops under General Harry Smith launched a deadly counter attack after the Xhosa had recorded initial success at Waterkloof.⁴⁵ The ensuing war between the Xhosa and British created an opportunity for the Mfengu people to ally with the colonial government. The Mfengu who, (dispersed by the scourge of the Mfecane,) had settled quickly amongst the Xhosa were regarded as dogs and despised by their host. "The British pushed defeated (Xhosa) peoples into new or more allocated areas, whereas those who had fought alongside the colonial troops were "assigned land. This collaboration would have implications. In addition to receiving cash wages and gaining access to land, the Mfengu took part in looting of African communities".⁴⁶ Victory for the British led to fatal mistake from the Xhosa by slaughtering their cattle in 1856, out of the belief that their dead warriors would rise again.⁴⁷ The violence and hunger associated with the events in the nineteenth century prompted refugees to flee from their lands.⁴⁸ The cattle killing mark the end of the beginning of South African history. For the first time, an African society (other than the Khoekhoe) had been broken. Much land had already gone, but now Africans began moving out of villages as migrant labourers, while paying heed to the message of the missionaries as never before.⁴⁹ The figure that arose as a result of the fall of the Xhosa society, Crais argues launched an unrelenting horror that was similar to mortality rates in the horrific Chinese famines at the end of the nineteenth century. He concludes that at least 40,000 people starved to death or perished from disease in the region west of Mbashe River in the period 1865-1858.⁵⁰ but he did not provide specific figures on death toll. Lewis on the other hand questions why some people became prosperous and some poor.⁵¹

The Mfengu who had strong ties to the British took the advantage of their enemy's situation, buying much of the Xhosa cattle cheaply and also obtained more loot, namely, ploughs, corn, poultry, etc.⁵² The colonial Cape government used the argument of depopulation which arose from the same situation to confiscate the greater part of the Ndlambe branch of the

⁴⁴ C, Bundy. *The Rise and Fall*, 32.

⁴⁵ C, Crais, *Poverty, War, and Violence*, 42 and 43.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 64.

⁴⁷ J, Lewis. 'The Rise and Fall', 9.

⁴⁸ C, Crais, *Poverty, War, and Violence*, 49.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 10.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 48-49.

⁵¹ J, Lewis. 'The Rise and Fall', 27.

⁵² C, Crais, *Poverty, War, and Violence*, 64-69 and 99.

Xhosa land.⁵³ With the Xhosa on their knees, patterns of early collaboration and resistance had important implications for differential class formation in the colonial world that emerged. It created a base for commerce, capitalism and Christianity in which progressive peasantry could constitute itself. In the 1860s for instance, many Mfengu were given a large part of the land formerly under Gcaleka control, which became the four districts of Fingoland.⁵⁴ “The government specifically favoured conditions under which the needs of the starving Xhosa could be met. This was the most efficient way of preventing the government itself having to foot the bill of relief supplies”.⁵⁵ Helen Bradford notes that turning African men into agriculturalist was an imperial project. This was alien in South Africa as the men were pastoralists and the women were the agriculturalist.⁵⁶ The loyal of the colonial government (including the Fingo), some of whom had established themselves in the mission stations sold grain at a very high price in the market. The statistics Lewis presented from July 1857 through March 1858 showed that over 352,430 lbs of grains were sold for £2, 894, 12s.3d.⁵⁷ Also, the highest sale in grain was recorded in August 1857 when sorghum fetched £2 1bs per muid at King William’s Town. These high prices make Lewis skeptical and he argues that the Mfengu and Nguni could have acted on the recommendations of the government to take advantage of the situation.⁵⁸ The point is quite clear, as the conclusion could be drawn from this that the rise of the peasantry was partly aided by the political situation and it was the colonial government that set the perimeter for their eventual fall.⁵⁹

Jack Lewis is particularly interested in understanding the conditions under which maize was produced, what sort of political circumstance surrounded the African peasantry when the aforementioned data was provided, what effects the drought had on price and most importantly what was the market proportion to the total product if its statistics were to be useful in analyzing the rise of the peasantry after the Xhosa cattle killing in 1857.⁶⁰ Crais shows it was conquest that primarily influenced decisions at the level of household: which crops to grow, how food production was managed and how people would participate in the emerging colonial economy by selling their labor, crops, and animals.⁶¹

To move slightly away from violence, between the 1880s and early 1930s, the Transkeian region was affected profoundly and irreversibly by political and economic pressures within the territory. Colin Bundy’s yardstick for measuring the *peasant’s prosperity* during this time is their ability to dispose of agricultural surpluses on the market. He shows how this surplus was produced for the colonial market by using as an example the Herschel district, which developed into a thriving agricultural community in the Eastern Cape before its decline from 1860s onwards.⁶² (Meintjes, 1982: 128). Between 1830 and 1875, considerable crop diversification took place in the district. Many people including the Mfengu, and Sotho peasants were active in transport riding: they own wagons and spans of oxen. These made them

⁵³ J, Lewis. ‘The Rise and Fall’, 8-10.

⁵⁴ W. Beinart and C. Bundy, *Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa: Politics and Popular Movements in the Transkei and Eastern Cape, 1890-1930* (London: Univ. of California Press, 1987), 9.

⁵⁵ J, Lewis. ‘The Rise and Fall’, 9-11.

⁵⁶ H. Bradford. ‘Peasants, Historians, and Gender’, 84.

⁵⁷ J, Lewis. ‘The Rise and Fall’, 10.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ C, Crais, *Poverty, War, and Violence*, 66.

⁶² S, Meintjes. *Peasants and Christians*, 128.

to gain some degree of respectability. During these flourishing years, Africans in the Hershel district in fact offered to build a school worth £2000, but by the close of 1870s, Hershel witnessed the high influx of immigrants from other areas which put pressure on the availability of land.⁶³ (Bundy, 1988: 150).

Debate on Surplus Produce and Market analysis

Historians' analysis of 'surplus products' brought to the market by household unit questions the response of the peasantry that Bundy calls a 'rise'. "The peasants agricultural and pastoral pursuits sought to satisfy consumption needs of their family; ...they looked to the sale of a portion of what they raised to meet the demands (taxes, rents and other fees) that arouse from his involvements in an economic and political system beyond the bounds of his immediate community".⁶⁴ Surplus as it is meant in *Rise and Fall* are products not needed for consumption, but rather are the ones exchanged for cash functions in a market economy.⁶⁵

Historians like Bundy have often argued that the sale of crops is a sign of wealth because it enables the farmer to sell his surplus and not his labor. This opinion received a blow in Crais's critique, in which he notes that, "the selling of crops is, therefore no indication of the well-being of the rural economy generally or of individual households".⁶⁶ Although, he agrees that there was the rise of a small prosperous class of rural producers, he argues that many people were unable to meet basic food entitlements. He points out again to a number of areas where famine hit: British Kaffiria, Gelekaland, Thembuland, and concluded that people in these areas were only bound up in the colonial economy to reproduce production and exchange. The better-off as he categorizes the few prosperous, created a new socio-economic and cultural practices in which new tastes and new patterns of dress were adopted.⁶⁷

While Crais's critique is plausible, would the farmer not eat before considering selling his surplus or his farm produce? As he argues that the peasants adopted white cultural practices, did they not pay for the goods they consumed? Crais admits while analyzing the mechanism of adoption of maize that: "maize went from the farmer's hands to the trader and then further into the economy where it was turned into meal or flour and then consumed. Farmers received in exchange for their grains, money or consumer goods, but retained a portion of their harvest for domestic consumption".⁶⁸ Jack Lewis also points out that the amount of produce retained for households fluctuated. This led sometimes to fewer produce being retained, and the overall result of this was starvation and hunger.⁶⁹ Lewis provides further practical examples in the figures of grains that were sold to prove that much of the sale went to taxes. His analysis of the 1855 Mfengu census reveals that each household produced 79 lbs of marketable produce at the average of 29 shillings per muid or approximately 2 pence per 1b which worth 14 or 15 shillings depending on when it was sold. However, 10 shillings per hut went for 'hut tax' and 2 shillings went to 'horse tax', leaving just a few shillings left. The grains that were put on the market were merely economic surplus and not the one above subsistence needs.⁷⁰

Nevertheless, it should be noted that there were few households that owned a plough,

⁶³ C, Bundy. *The Rise and Fall*, 150.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 9.

⁶⁶ C, Crais, *Poverty, War, and Violence*, 19.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 122.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 90.

⁶⁹ J, Lewis. 'The Rise and Fall', 9-11.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 12.

sufficient labor, land, expand the size of their total product and increase the portion given over to commodity product without infringing on their normal requirements.⁷¹ From here, it is quite clear that much of the success of the peasantry was taken back in the form of taxes and many actually remained in poverty. Some of the households that managed to have a little leftover were also motivated indirectly by this political reason. Therefore, when laws began to change, it affected some of these peasants. And this is what Bundy refers to as the “fall of the peasantry”.

The imposition of taxes on Africans which intensified the need to make money was to allow the Transkeian territories to be administered separately. These taxes especially the ‘hut taxes’ were meant to substitute for the services provided by the homestead to the Zulu kingdom through military system. The imposition of ‘hut tax’ would substitute the civilizing influence of wage labor for barbaric demands of the Zulu military service and would have the added advantage of covering the Cape colony.⁷² The ‘hut tax’ supported the currency, and broadened the cash economy, further aiding exploitation. Households which had survived on, and stored their wealth in cattle ranching now sent their members to work for the whites South Africans in order to raise cash for tax payment. At this juncture, it is important to examine the crops that were associated with market relations and the extent to which it affected colonial South Africa. The crops that were cultivated in the nineteenth century South Africa included: sorghum, wool, beans, melons, wild vegetables, millet and especially maize. On the question of what commodity became the most important in measuring market relations, Lewis’s analysis was not based on a single crop but rather on a group of crops, “grains”. Crais sequel to that mentions that rural poverty cannot be explained by pointing to the adoption of a particular crop. Instead, he states, “a bad season for the Kaffraria (kaffir is an Arabic word used to describe infidels, but adopted in South Africa to describe the Black South Africa) meant that they had no maize to sell at the market”.⁷³

Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production

Exploitation is not a new phenomenon; it was well rooted in the socio-economic and political order in Africa.⁷⁴ This chapter tries to show how successful the pre-capitalist African societies were before the intrusion of capitalism using the pre-colonial modes of production to elucidate what existed in the African past. Here, this paper tries to explain how the means of production were organized, for the successful distribution, production, and survival of these societies. In order to dissect the way wealth was distributed and consumed, it is necessary to understand the conditions under which it was produced. Many theoretical approaches have been advanced to explain the consequences of capitalist domination of pre-capitalist agrarian African societies and these have resulted in unending debates among historians, political economists and anthropologists.⁷⁵ My aim is not to be caught up in these debates, but to use a simple analysis of a lineage/ kinship mode of production as mirror of the pre-colonial times.

Bill Freund notes that Samir Amir, while trying to explain the relevance of modes of production, perceives a strong common element in virtually all class societies apart from

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² F, Cooper. ‘Africa and the World Economy’, *African Studies Review*, 4, 2-3, (1981), 8.

⁷³ J, Lewis. ‘The Rise and Fall’, 3-6.

⁷⁴ C, Crais, *Poverty, War, and Violence*, 100.

⁷⁵ J, Lewis. ‘The Rise and Fall’, 3 and 6, and P, Harries. ‘Mode of Production: The South African Case’, *Canadian Journal of African Studies, / Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines*, 19, 1, (1985), 30.

capitalism⁷⁶ (Freund, 1985: 4). Therefore, it is important to understand the term “mode of production” refers to. “The concept of a mode of production is not easy to grasp, it is complicated and seemingly somewhat ambiguous”⁷⁷. David Harvey describes it as the condition of self-sufficiency. Hence, a mode of production is a specific combination of productive forces which includes labor, land and resources.⁷⁸ The development of capitalism always leads to the destruction or deterioration of the pre-capitalist relation of production in every society in which it prevails. For example, Mafaje quoted Wolpe that: “the South African capitalist agriculture triumphed precisely by transforming the pre-capitalist forms”.⁷⁹

In his book, “The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry”, Colin Bundy uses the Cape Nguni (the Xhosa, Thembu and Mbo) in the late eighteenth century to demonstrate how African societies subsisted in pre-colonial times. He recognizes a cultural homogeneity among the various groups of the Cape that permits a fairly general description of their agricultural and economic organization, which includes crops and herds, agricultural techniques and resources, division of labor and the extent and nature of extra agricultural practices. The Cape Nguni belonged to a clan comprising lineages whose members claimed a descent from a common ancestor and did not intermarry. New clans were formed as a result of disputes between brothers and members of the clan were fused under a chief.⁸⁰ Could pre-colonial South Africa have operated on a domestic (kinship or household) mode of production?

Among the Nguni, socio-political and economic tribal life revolved around kinship, family ties and chieftainship. It was these institutions that regulated economic functions such as accumulation and distribution of goods.⁸¹ (Bundy, 1988: 16). Bundy points to Salhins’ description of pre-colonial life in South Africa, that most of the production was geared towards the use of producers or discharge kinship obligations rather than exchange and gains. This means that “economic relations, coercion and exploitation and the corresponding social relations of dependence and mastery are not created in the system of production”.⁸² The absence of exploitation which Bundy refers to here will be taken up later in this chapter. In her analysis of mode of production, Janet Siskind explains that the most obvious similarity anthropologists have described in societies structured by kinship is a splitting of labor processes into two halves of male and female.⁸³ A division of labor existed where men were in charge of cattle and women were the agriculturalists.⁸⁴ The family was the nucleus of the production units. It organized the growing, processing, storage and sharing of food. Because the right to land was controlled by a chief who was also part of the kin, family members determined how much land to cultivate. Put simply, the division of labor was not *between* families, but was

⁷⁶ B, Freund. ‘The Modes of Production Debates in African Studies’, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, / *Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines*, 19, 1, (1985), 4.

⁷⁷ D, Harvey. *Social Justice and the City*, 197

⁷⁸ B, Hindess and P. Q, Hirst. *Pre-capitalist modes of production* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), 23.

⁷⁹ A, Mafeje. ‘On the Articulation of Modes of Production’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 8, 1, (1981), 123-138.

⁸⁰ C, Bundy. *The Rise and Fall*, 16.

⁸¹ C, Bundy. *The Rise and Fall*, 16.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ J, Siskind. “Kinship and mode of production” *American Anthropologist*, 80, 4, (1978): 860-872.

⁸⁴ H. Bradford. ‘Peasants, Historians, and Gender’, 84 and C, Bundy. *The Rise and Fall*, 14.

amongst families.⁸⁵

Although they practiced various forms of farming, cattle ownership played an important part in the life of the Nguni. Bundy argues that they relied more on the milk-based foodstuff of their cattle rather than crops which were difficult to store.⁸⁶ He remarks that “cattle comprised of the tribesman’s wealth; they were the medium of exchange particularly in the form of marriage prestation; the number held affected the individual’s social standing”.⁸⁷ This does not mean that agriculture was at its crudest form because the Pedi, Sotho, as well as the Nguni developed a scientific method for identifying fertile land and choice of sowing period, what Bundy called “field magic”. Bundy agrees with Leggasick’s conclusion that the pre-colonial economy of South Africa as “*redistributive modes of production*”. If this is so, were cattle also redistributed through the chief to the poor? Bundy writes that cattle were loosely regulated and at the death of a particular well-to-do head, his herds were redistributed to all his matrilineal relatives. This prevents ostentatious accumulation of wealth guide against political ambition that accompanies such resources.⁸⁸

In trying to conceptualize modes of production in third world countries while explaining kin-based modes of production further, Patrick Harries draws examples from Meillassoux’s work. He agrees with anthropological arguments that it was kinship that structured and defined pre-capitalist modes of production in Africa.⁸⁹ Harries draws further with Meillassoux and writes that inequality and exploitation could be traced to the relations of kinship and marriage, contrary to what Bundy opines. For Harries, man power was important in an economy where there was abundant land but no labor market, because a man could only have labor supply through the number of wives and followers he had.⁹⁰ “In pre-capitalist African societies kinship not only structured a man’s access to labour and land, it also established his position in the redistributive economy and determined his political and material inheritance”.⁹¹ As agricultural surplus could not be retained, he distributed it to amass followership (juniors).

Importantly, when talking about issues such as stratification and exploitation, slavery remained a factor determining productive base for pre-capitalist Africa.⁹² Slaves sometimes became part of the kinship group after serving his master for two or more generations; he became a junior and most cases never became an elder. Harries’ contribution to Meillassoux’s argument is that although they lost their status as slaves, they remained an exploited class. Be that as it may, even among the actual members of the kin, it was not guaranteed that everyone got the same treatment. Harries notes also in Meillassoux’s work that the number of wives a man marries determined his social status; it is not clear that all were able to marry many wives, have many children and slaves to till the soil and consequently become rich. Janet Siskind again brings up some assumptions implicitly or explicitly held; division of labor cements marriage ties. She explains that the assumption is derived from the fact that in the life of an individual, kinship and marriage usually precede the responsibility to produce and thereby fully participate in the division of labor. A further explanation she provides is that marriage was held high in the

⁸⁵ C, Bundy. *The Rise and Fall*, 16.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 17.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 21.

⁸⁹ P, Harries. ‘Mode of Production’, 33.

⁹⁰ P, Harries. ‘Mode of Production’, 32.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 33.

⁹² *Ibid*, 34.

society, a view that leads to an economic analysis that the household is treated as the object of the productive and consumptive unit, where men and women exchange or put the resources of their labor together.⁹³ These assumptions brought forward by Siskind buttresses Bundy's analysis that a division of labor existed amongst the Nguni of the Cape.

The examples I have discussed here shows a form of social organization that Africans employed in order to subsist in the pre-colonial times. The intrusion of capitalism simply overhauled all this through conquest and thereby set the pace for inequality and unequal exchange in the market economy of the 20th century onwards. Sara Berry points out that some scholars like Rey, Bradby and Dupre try to excuse painless articulation of pre-capitalist lineage mode of production to capitalist mode of production. These scholars argue that the pre-colonial mode of production was not destroyed by capitalism, it only engaged it. Berry remarks further that "it is pointless to debate the possibility of a painless transition, because the transition from one socio-economic to another precedes at least in part through the efforts of the various groups people to use power to gain control of productive resources".⁹⁴

Conclusion

The might of capitalism that swept through South Africa in the nineteenth century ushered in a new era in the history of the country. The notion that poverty and underdevelopment in the reserve areas are a legacy of the traditional agricultural economy was refuted by Colin Bundy. Instead, he associated colonial advance as a major factor responsible for the problem in today's South Africa.

This paper introduces the general idea of writing this essay and the particular questions that shaped the course of the discourse. It outlines Colin Bundy's argument which illustrates how indigenous cultivators and pastoralists responded positively to the pressures of conquest and the intrusion of new economic relations. In essence, their responses lead to the rise of a peasantry class before the turn of the nineteenth century. The paper also illustrates and emphasises why maize is important for the economy of South Africa and the impact that drought had on agricultural production in the nineteenth century.

It is interesting to observe the dynamics in the debates among scholars which centre on the impact of maize in South Africa and how well the peasants participated in the market as a result. The latter analysis explains how violence led to several political alliances between the indigenous black and the British people. This violence created an economic vacuum which was seized by some Africans and that signalled the beginning of an ingenious African class whose prosperity was built on the political situation during the period under review. These responses were not just in the agricultural sector, but also in the transportation sector as well. Africans challenged their white counterparts through the possession of wagons for the supply of maize into the market. However, by the late nineteenth century, the growth of capitalism became hostile to a vibrant African class. Historians like Lewis, Crais, and Bradford refuse to admit the successes of the few Africans as a 'rise' amidst the vast majority who remained in poverty. As I pointed out in the paper, it was the change in government's policy to the favour of the white farmers that signalled the end of the peasantry's competition in the market economy.

⁹³ J, Siskind. "Kinship and mode of production", 3.

⁹⁴ C, Crais, *Poverty, War, and Violence*, 109 and S. Berry. 'Peasants in Africa: Articulation of Modes of Production', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 14, 2 (1981), 334-370.

It was not only government's policy that affected the peasants, over population and natural disasters also contributed to the decline of a viable peasantry class. Consequently, many were condemned into relationships as migrant labourers on white-owned farms or wage labourers in the mines. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the lives of black South Africans had been greatly shaped by the type of socio-political and economic policies of successive white governments. Racial laws were meted out on the reserves of South Africa as attempts were made to separate these areas from white dominated towns and cities.

Finally, my observation in the course of the critique reveals that scholars to some extent misconstrued Colin Bundy by asserting that one could not speak of a rise amidst of perpetual poverty. Bundy, may have exaggerated how prosperous the peasantry was as I argued in this essay, but the prosperity he mentions was overshadowed by the explosion of inequality and poverty that pervaded the vast majority of South Africa.

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