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COPING WITH THE CONTRADICTIONS: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE COLONIAL STATE IN KENYA, 1895–1914

BY JOHN LONSDALE AND BRUCE BERMAN

THIS is a preliminary sketch, a contribution towards the new study of the Colonial State in Africa.¹ Our analysis is informed by the material experience of a particular colony, but among the thirty-odd dependencies of tropical Africa Kenya has a better claim than most to be considered a representative type. In the period between the wars, up until 1953 indeed, British imperial designs towards Kenya appear to have been paralysed between the opposing demands of a 'West Coast' and a 'South African' policy – or, as we would prefer, between the conflicting requirements of peasant and settler political economy. Meanwhile, peasant and settler society were themselves continually in formation, each building up its own constraints upon the actions of the colonial state, and from within the state's institutions. We make two initial points therefore. Our focus is on the state as a complex historical process, not on governments – which are variously misconceived as sovereign actors, pliant instruments of economic interests, or mere reflexions of civil society. Secondly, we believe that an analysis of early colonial Kenya, a political economy mid-way between the colonies of peasant export production and the colonies of white settlement, has much to contribute to the more general discussion of the colonial and post-colonial state which is now in train.²

I. THE COLONIAL STATE AND THE ARTICULATION OF MODES OF PRODUCTION IN THE WORLD SYSTEM

We start by outlining, rather baldly, our three underlying premises. If we begin with some of the consequences of capital, we go on to argue that the character of the capitalist state, and more particularly that of the colonial state, cannot be reduced simply to that of a loyal minister to capital's needs.

Late-nineteenth-century imperialism in Africa was the final sortie by which the world capitalist system captured the last continent to remain partially beyond its pale. The system was comprised, then as now, of a hierarchy of many differing modes of production linked at the level of exchange and all under the domination of the most advanced forms of capital, whether that was based in the formally responsible imperial power or in one of its industrial rivals. The violence involved

¹ Transatlantic collaboration has not proved to be easy. This final draft represents merely an arbitrary caesura in a continuing dialogue of exchanged ideas which we hope to pursue at more illuminating length elsewhere.

² One of the earliest essays in this enterprise is the Introduction to G. B. Kay, *The Political Economy of Colonialism in Ghana* (Cambridge, 1972). The project has been carried furthest with regard to South Africa. For an instructive guide to the current state of the argument see Simon Clarke, 'Capital, fractions of capital and the State: "Neo-Marxist" analysis of the South African state', *Capital and Class*, v (1978), 32–77. Kenneth Good, 'Settler colonialism: economic development and Class Formation', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, xiv, 4 (1976), 597–620, emphasizes, as we do, the interventionist nature of the colonial state but without noting the constraints on its action with which we deal below.

in the imperial seizure was occasioned by such varied contingencies that it can legitimately be seen as 'necessary'; certainly the men on the spot thought it to be so. Africa's precapitalist forms of production were subjected to a historic break in their autonomous development; in the terminology of the time they were literally 'opened up'. They became part-economies, externally orientated to suit the dynamic of a capitalism which had been imposed upon them from outside.³ East Africa's productive forms were subjected to a particularly sharp ordeal of restructuring. By contrast with West Africa there was little continuity in the relations of exchange to bridge the transition from informal to formal empire; East Africa's pre-colonial relations with the global economy had been based too exclusively on the production of two rapidly wasting assets, slaves and ivory.⁴ In the inland area which became the hub of Kenya there had barely been an exportable surplus at all when, suddenly, in the first decade of the twentieth century, production was intensified beyond all previous experience by the demands of colonial rule and, concurrently, by the opportunities of the commodity boom, itself in part created by the political and capital investments with which the imperial powers competed for preferential access to markets and resources.⁵

The 'articulation' of differing modes of production, pre-capitalist and capitalist, which was thus achieved, entailed for participants in the former a bewildering compound of change and continuity.⁶ Elders who had organized the local circuits of reciprocity could convert them into funds of accumulation; services once rewarded with the means of production – women, livestock or land – might now be paid off with the means of subsistence only, food or cash, and thus become a source of surplus value.⁷ The potential for distortions of property rights, marital rights, parental or filial obligations, were endless, as indigenous modes of production yielded up produce or labour to merchant or landed capital. Yet, at an early stage in the process and for many perhaps even now, it was easy for those involved to interpret this restructuring in the idiom of continuity, as lineage or domestic growth, as the reconstitution of livestock herds after the visitation of epizootic disease in the late nineteenth century.⁸ This combination of dissolution and preservation of forms of production in the service of the

³ Aidan Foster-Carter, 'The modes of production controversy', *New Left Review*, 107 (1978), 47–77.

⁴ Andrew Roberts, 'Nyamwezi trade', in R. Gray and D. Birmingham, eds., *Pre-Colonial African Trade* (London, 1970), 39–74.

⁵ A. G. Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa* (London, 1973), chs. 4 and 5; I. Wallerstein, 'The three stages of African involvement in the world economy', in P. Gutkind and I. Wallerstein, eds., *The Political Economy of Contemporary Africa* (Beverly Hills & London, 1976); J. Forbes Munro, *Africa and the International Economy, 1800–1960* (London, 1976), ch. 4; C. C. Wrigley, 'Neo-mercantile policies and the new imperialism', in C. Dewey and A. G. Hopkins, eds., *The Imperial Impact* (London, 1978), 20–34.

⁶ J. Iliffe, *Agricultural Change in Modern Tanganyika* (Nairobi, 1971); L. Cliffe, 'Rural class formation in East Africa', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, iv, ii (1977), 195–224; D. Parkin, *Palms, Wine and Witnesses* (London, 1972).

⁷ M. P. Cowen, 'Capital and peasant households' (mimeo., University of Nairobi, 1976), 21.

⁸ Richard Waller, 'The Maasai and the British 1895–1905: the origins of an alliance', *J. Afr. Hist.* xvii, iv (1976), 529–53; D. M. Feldman, 'Christians and politics: the origins of the Kikuyu Central Association in northern Murang'a 1890–1930' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 1979), ch. 2; P. Spencer, 'Drought and the commitment to growth', *African Affairs*, 293 (1974), 419–27; J. M. Lonsdale, 'How the people of Kenya spoke for themselves, 1895–1923' (mimeo., Proceedings of the African Studies Association (U.S.A.), 1976), extensively available in Terence Ranger, 'Growing from the roots: reflections on peasant research in Central and Southern Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, v, i (1978), 128–31.

dominant dynamic of external capital was not the only complexity of ‘articulation’. We have also to see ‘articulation’ as a political relationship in which the dominant groups in the mode of production thus joined to capital had the possibility of allying with capitalist classes to suppress those whom both exploited, whether peasants in the sphere of household production or labourers extruded from it.⁹ Our initial premise, then, is that the ‘articulation of modes of production’ must form the basis for any theoretical analysis of the colonial state.

The colonial state is a variant of the capitalist state; we must first, therefore, consider more generally the role of the state in class societies. This is an enormously contentious issue within the Marxist tradition of scholarship, which is currently making the most interesting contributions to the subject.¹⁰ The state, as we understand it ourselves, is the historically conditioned set of institutions in any class society which, more or less adequately, secures the social conditions for the reproduction of the dominant mode of production, in this case capitalism. That is easy to say but difficult to perform, since the state’s role is necessarily contradictory. Capitalism depends on the accumulation of surplus values from labour power or, in other words, on its continuing domination of an ever-changing process of class struggle. Capitalism cannot secure this dominant position for itself; individual capitalists are too competitive with each other and, moreover, if coercion were to be seated overtly within the relations of production the intensity of class conflict would rise to intolerable levels. The history of capitalist states has therefore been a process of abstraction. By this we mean that the twin functions of guaranteeing the technical and legal conditions of capital which competition cannot provide – monetary and tariff rules, property laws and so on – and of maintaining the hierarchy of class domination have both been abstracted from the economic to the political level within each national social order.¹¹ The state has become the ultimate unit both of economic reproduction, or accumulation, and of political reproduction, or social control. But these essential roles are mutually contradictory, at two levels. The state’s regulation of competition between individual capitalists invites dispute within the dominant classes, whose cohesion is a condition of their domination. And the legitimation of the class order has entailed the protection of labouring conditions, the provision of welfare services, the enfranchisement of the working classes: all of which may have tempered the self-destructiveness of capital, but all of which nonetheless constitute brakes fitted by the state on to the process of accumulation. The contradictions of its role have thus become embedded within the state’s institutions in the metaphor of political conflict, but in reality as class struggle.

The state must therefore be construed as ‘relatively autonomous’ with regard to the dominant class forces, at least at the level of political practice.¹² In order

⁹ This insight is the particular contribution of P.-P. Rey, *Les Alliances de classes* (Paris, 1973), as presented in Foster-Carter, ‘Modes of production controversy’.

¹⁰ For helpful guides to the main arguments see Bob Jessop, ‘Recent theories of the capitalist state’, *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 1 (1977), 353–73, and the editors’ Introduction, ‘Towards a materialist theory of the State’, in John Holloway and Sol Picciotto, eds., *State and Capital, a Marxist Debate* (London, 1978), 1–31.

¹¹ See in particular J. Hirsch, ‘The State apparatus and social reproduction: elements of a theory of the bourgeois State’, in Holloway and Picciotto, *State and Capital*, 57–107.

¹² For discussions of this relative autonomy of the state, implicit and explicit, see R. Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (London, 1973); and N. Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes* (London, 1973). For an instance in the early development of relative autonomy see D. Hay, ‘Property, authority and the criminal law’, in D. Hay *et al.*, *Albion’s Fatal Tree* (London, 1975).

to maintain its own legitimacy through the morality of class domination, the state must be seen to act on behalf of the social order as a whole; indeed it may have to act, as we have just suggested, against the perceived interests of particular segments of the dominant class in order to renovate the structures and ideology of domination and accumulation. Given the contradictory nature of the state, the content of 'relative autonomy' is therefore subject to continual dissension and redefinition in response to crises within the dominant mode of production. The need for the state to sanction an intensification of the work process or to reallocate public resources, in order to rescue the rate of profit from the claims of labour power, may well result in a crisis of state authority. Its relative autonomy may become eroded to the point where it acts, and is seen to act, as the direct instrument of the dominant class or of some of its fractions. The resolution of such a crisis, if it is not to be by violence, must, then, entail the restoration of relative autonomy within the changed context. Our second premise, therefore, is that the state cannot be the obedient servant of capital, only the protector of capitalist social relations – and these are relations of conflict.

The colonial state, finally, must be expected to face a still more complex task as the 'factor of cohesion' in a peripheral economy based on articulated modes of production.¹³ It had to organize the reproductive conditions not of one dominant mode of production, but of a capitalist mode not yet dominant whose social integument included the other modes to which capital was articulated and whose own social relations and ideological charters it therefore threatened. As the guarantor of social order, the colonial state was obliged to cope with these 'dislocative consequences of the expansion of the capitalist mode'.¹⁴ The colonial state indeed straddled not one but two levels of articulation: between the metropole and the colony as a whole as well as within the colony itself. It therefore bore a dual character: it was at once a subordinate agent in its restructuring of local production to meet metropolitan demand, yet also the local factor of cohesion over the heterogeneous, fragmented and contradictory social forces jostling within. This very material Dual Mandate defined the dilemmas of the colonial state.

In grappling with these dilemmas – and this is our third premise – the colonial state was obliged to intervene more directly in economic life than was characteristic of contemporary capitalist states. Conversely, lacking any very elaborate representative institutions, the early colonial state had to absorb the contradictions of the economic level more directly into the bureaucratic sphere. Disagreements were not between parties but between officials. The imperial insistence on financial self-sufficiency gave to each colony a sovereign self-interest in the orderly expansion of its forces of production. Kenya's colonial state therefore, as in all other colonies, had to perform two major functions, in both of which it faced the ambiguous project of promoting change while supervising continuity.¹⁵ First, the state had to convert its superior coercive force over Africans into a legitimate authority accepted by Africans and therefore mediated through their own pre-existing or emergent relations of power.¹⁶ Secondly, in a process

¹³ But the complexity is a matter of degree; as Perry Anderson reminds us in *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* (London, 1974), 22, this combination of different modes of production is to be found within all social formations.

¹⁴ Geoff Lamb, 'Marxism, access and the State', *Development and Change*, vi, ii (1975), especially pp. 131–2.

¹⁵ This schematic presentation is elaborated in later sections of the article.

¹⁶ For the distinction between force and power see E. M. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire* (Baltimore, 1976), 195–200.

strikingly similar to but in essential contradiction with the first, imported capital had to be converted from a lifeless factor of production into an active social relation.¹⁷ Capitalist social relations might be created through intervention either at the level of exchange or at the level of production. In Kenya the state actively assisted merchant capital (generally Indian) to stimulate a surplus production by household labour, often through the brokerage of tribal notables who may have been allies in the process of conquest and who were now official chiefs. This appeared to be the most obvious way of coping with the contradictions between accumulation and control, but it was challenged by a second branch of imported capital. For white settlers on the land a wage labour force had to be created. The degree of coercion which this entailed was contingent on the number of workers required, the price the capitalist was prepared to pay and the division of labour within the indigenous modes of production. Kenya's colonial state certainly practised primitive accumulation on the settlers' behalf in appropriating African land, confiscating livestock, taxing households and forcing out labour, but the early colonial workforce was nevertheless composed largely of young men not yet in command of the means of production at home.

The early Kenyan state thus laboured under a palimpsest of contradictions of accumulation and control. At the local level the conflict between peasant and settler accumulation was expressed as a competition, made vicious by racial antagonism, between landed and merchant capital over the surplus product of African labour power. This local competition was itself subsumed, at a higher level of articulation, into a contradiction between the claims of metropolitan accumulation, represented by the banks and large trading houses, and those of local producers, of whom the settlers were the most conscious of being exploited.¹⁸ Metropolitan accumulation could thus very directly threaten the legitimacy of colonial domination. Nor did metropolitan interests resolve the question of priorities between the settler and peasant sectors. The product of settler farms and plantations was minuscule in the imperial scale,¹⁹ and by the inter-war period Kenya's neighbours, Uganda and Tanganyika, not to mention British West Africa, showed the viability of the peasant alternative.

In any case the expansion of either sector posed problems of social control. Primitive accumulation on behalf of the settlers might provoke violent African resistance in defence of their land; the extraction of African labour might foster the cohesive consciousness of class over the fragmented consciousness of tribe. The combination of accumulation and political control in one agency, as in the concessionary company era in the Congo, had also shown that coercive exploitation might destroy the base of labour's reproduction; 'the productivity of terror', it has been remarked, 'was evidently low'.²⁰ The partial separation of the political and economic spheres in the colonial state may be seen as a response to precisely this dilemma. Yet peasant expansion might also, from initially strengthening the

¹⁷ Cf. Shula Marks with Stanley Trapido, 'Lord Milner and the South African State' (mimeo., Cambridge Commonwealth and Overseas History Seminar, 1979), 15.

¹⁸ R. van Zwanenberg, 'Primitive colonial accumulation in Kenya, 1919-1939: a study in the processes and determinants in the development of a Wage Labour force' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Sussex, 1971), chs. 1 and 2; for a fictional portrayal of antagonism between settler and banker, see Robert Ruark, *Something of Value* (London, 1955), 25.

¹⁹ Max Salvadori, *La Colonisation européenne au Kenya* (Paris, 1938); F. V. Meyer, *Britain's Colonies in World Trade* (London, 1948); Colonial Office minute by E. Melville, 10 June 1940, on Report of Delegation from the East African Territories: CO.533/518/38103/2B.

²⁰ By Douglas Rimmer, in his review article on L. H. Gann and P. Duignan, eds., *The Economics of Colonialism*, in *J. Afr. Hist.*, XIX, ii (1978), 269.

patronage relations by which chiefs and others made their contribution to the politics of collaboration,²¹ go on to transform these props of colonial authority into exploitative employers or landlords through the discontinuities of class formation. Ever since the Indian Mutiny, British colonial officials had nervously suspected that social change, however inevitable in the cause of accumulation, was nevertheless subversive of social order and colonial control.²²

2. OUR FOUNDATIONS IN KENYA'S HISTORIOGRAPHY

Kenya's sulphurous history, rich in political conflict and colourful personality, has evoked a fertile historiography. One must therefore ask what is to be gained in re-working old themes, especially in a summary essay such as this, necessarily indebted to the labours of other scholars. All the themes we have just sketched in have been tackled: the foundations of government; the origins of white settlement and its effect on government's land and labour policies; the response of particular African peoples to colonial domination, the development of their peasant commodity production and the rise of their collaborating elites. Yet all these various dimensions have been treated largely in isolation from each other; too little attention has been paid to their interconnexions and their contradictions, and the way in which these latter were incorporated into the structures of the state.

Three broad approaches have emerged to meet the problem of how to organize the totality of Kenya's historical experience. It is not possible to do more than touch on them here. One has been to regard the level of the state as a political arena for competing interests, with the settlers and the 'administration' as the chief protagonists; a second has portrayed the state as an independent actor; the third has taken the state to be the instrument of others, whether of Great Britain or of local white settlement. All three approaches (sometimes found within the covers of one book) have taken their point of departure from the first liberal-humanitarian critics of colonial Kenya, Norman Leys and McGregor Ross, both of them colonial officials,²³ perhaps especially from Leys' observation in 1924 that, to Africans, 'the Government is not *their* government. In their view, everything it does, the tax, labour regulations and all else, is done for the benefit of Europeans.'²⁴

For Mungeam and Sorrenson, the contradictions of accumulation and control were posed largely in personal terms, as the administrator's dilemma, caught between the policy objectives of economy and morality;²⁵ it took an ex-official to argue that the morality of the Imperial trust towards Africans was firmly rooted in the material necessities of the politics of collaboration.²⁶ This last perspective

²¹ Ronald Robinson, 'Non-European foundations of European imperialism: sketch for a theory of collaboration', in R. Owen and B. Sutcliffe, eds., *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism* (London, 1972), 117-40; M. Semakula Kiwanuka, 'Colonial policies and administrations in Africa: the myths of the contrasts', *African Historical Studies*, III, ii (1970).

²² D. A. Low, 'Empire and social engineering', in his *Lion Rampant: Essays in the Study of British Imperialism* (London, 1973), 53-70.

²³ Norman Leys, *Kenya* (London, 1924); W. McGregor Ross, *Kenya from Within* (London, 1927). For discussion of their role see Diana Wylie, 'Confrontation over Kenya: the Colonial Office and its critics, 1918-1940', *J. Afr. Hist.*, XVIII, iii (1977), 427-48.

²⁴ Leys, *Kenya*, 318 (emphasis in original).

²⁵ G. H. Mungeam, *British Rule in Kenya, 1895-1912* (Oxford, 1966), 281; M. P. K. Sorrenson, *Origins of European Settlement in Kenya* (Nairobi, 1968), 241.

²⁶ T. H. R. Cashmore, 'Studies in District Administration in the East Africa Protectorate, 1895-1918' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 1965), 83-7, 118-19.

is strikingly absent from the other treatments of the early history of the colony as a whole. In many ways the best synoptic treatments are to be found in the second volume of the Oxford *History of East Africa*, but it is characteristic of the historiography of the time that economic and political history are presented in separate chapters. The former, by Wrigley, shows how the economy was moulded by government but not how government policy was formulated. Low's chapter on politics before 1912 is a subtle analysis of the way in which district administrations took up the threads of indigenous legitimacy and fostered peasant expansion, but he reaches the abrupt conclusion, not adequately explained, that by 1914 the African population had been relegated to the status of 'the labouring proletariat'.²⁷ Clayton's and Savage's great work on labour history has much the same perspective as Mungeam and Sorrenson, with white official and white employer united in their world view but bitterly divided over its ambiguous implications, the official back being strengthened not so much by the local realities of maintaining social order, as by occasional stern reminders from the Colonial Office as to where the path of duty lay.²⁸

Ghai and McAuslan paint the most straightforward portrait of the government as actor, changing its character with the growth of representative institutions, which in our view is to burke the issue of why earlier forms of representation were found to be inadequate for organizing social control. It is moreover symptomatic of all this past historiography that these authors have almost nothing to say on the evolving content of African customary law – though much on its administration.²⁹ Until this vast area has been researched into (and we have not done so ourselves) we are really in the dark as to the full meaning for Africans of the incorporation of their societies into the colonial state.³⁰ Studies of the regional impact of colonialism have so far been just that. Munro's and Tignor's admirable studies of the emergence of collaborative and dissident factions against the background of economic change have failed to articulate their several African societies into the institutions of the state, stopping short at their interface, no doubt faithful to the views of the men whose experience they enter into.³¹

The opposite criticism must be made of two works which understand the state as the instrument of capital, and which articulate Kenya to the global structures of imperialism or the capitalist world system, a dimension missing from the works mentioned so far. Wolff's uncomplicated perspective has a pliant Kenya being shaped to fit metropolitan needs. Brett's study, founded upon a real awareness of the complexities of articulation between metropole and colony, as well as the contradictions of accumulation and control, nonetheless focusses on the salient half-truth of Kenya's history, the way in which state institutions and policies were shaped to serve the settlers.³²

²⁷ C. C. Wrigley, 'Kenya: the patterns of economic life, 1902-1945', and D. A. Low, 'British East Africa: the establishment of British rule', in V. Harlow and E. M. Chilver, with A. Smith, eds., *History of East Africa*, II (Oxford, 1965), 209-64 and 1-56 respectively.

²⁸ A. Clayton and D. C. Savage, *Government and Labour in Kenya, 1895-1963* (London, 1974).

²⁹ Y. P. Ghai and J. P. W. B. McAuslan, *Public Law and Political Change in Kenya* (Nairobi, 1970).

³⁰ A start has been made in H. F. Morris and J. S. Read, *Indirect Rule and the Search for Justice* (Oxford, 1972).

³¹ J. Forbes Munro, *Colonial Rule and the Kamba* (Oxford, 1975); R. L. Tignor, *The Colonial Transformation of Kenya* (Princeton, 1976).

³² R. D. Wolff, *The Economics of Colonialism* (New Haven and London, 1974); E. A. Brett, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment in East Africa* (London, 1973).

None of these studies therefore provides us with a systematic understanding of the development of the colonial state in Kenya confronted with the complexities of its two levels of articulation. In particular, they cannot explain the two crucial paradoxes of colonial Kenya. The first is this, that peasant commodity production, far from being 'destroyed',³³ continually expanded despite the imposed dominance of settler production. The peasant economy did not merely nourish the expanded reproduction of a wage-labour force outside capitalist relations of production. In sharp contrast to the South African experience it also dominated the domestic cereals market as a whole between the wars and earned export incomes which normally increased from year to year, apart from a severe slump in 1929–31.³⁴ Unlike, or so it appears, other colonies in settler Africa, there were no real labour reserves in Kenya; the main sources of labour-supply were also the centres of marketed African production. The second paradox consists in the obvious but hitherto not sufficiently investigated fact that the increasing scope and intensity of state intervention against the African population, in order to establish the viability of the settler sector, coincided with a rising level of conflict between the settlers and officials who were determined to defend African interests. Using the theoretical approach outlined earlier we turn now to attempt to reach a more synoptic understanding of the emergence of the colonial state in Kenya, within all the contradictions of the social forces which governed its subsequent development.

3. PEASANT PRODUCTION AND THE FOUNDATIONS OF POLITICAL CONTROL

In the 1880s the inland areas of 'Kenya' comprised a web of subsistence economies which exploited complementary ecological niches suited either to predominantly pastoral or predominantly agricultural forms of production. Between cattlemen and cultivators there was a symbiotic exchange of commodities and intermittent adjustment of populations. Drought and pestilence brought famine; survival was achieved through intensified exchange, raiding, and the acceptance in more fortunate economies of neighbours made destitute through dearth. Ethnic boundaries were porous, with strangers securing entry by means of adoption, debt bondage, or by clientship, notably within the large *mbari* groups which advanced the frontier of Kikuyu colonization. Social boundaries themselves often enclosed complementary economies in a circuit of accumulation, both farmers in the hills and herders on the plains. During much of the nineteenth century the pastoral Maasai controlled the centre of this arena; to agricultural

³³ R. Palmer's conclusion with regard to Shona, Ndebele and Kikuyu agriculture in the 1930s, in R. Palmer and N. Parsons, eds., *The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa* (London, 1977), 243.

³⁴ At current prices African export earnings tripled from 1922 to 1929, from £180,000 to £543,000; and, after a slump to £214,000 in 1931, again more than doubled, to £488,000, by 1940. See tables in Salvadori, *Colonisation européenne*, 129; I. R. G. Spencer, 'The development of production and trade in the reserve areas of Kenya, 1895–1929' (Ph.D. thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1975), 367; P. Mosley, 'Agricultural development and government policy in settler economies: the case of Kenya and Southern Rhodesia 1900–1960' (forthcoming article, cited with permission). That peasant export values could have increased still more rapidly without settler dominance is clear, especially if the prohibition on African coffee had been lifted before 1933; but the existing literature concentrates too gloomily on the *relative* decline in African exports compared with settler export production.

accumulators on their hilly peripheries their herds represented a vast savings bank to be drawn on either by trade or, at times of pastoral disaster, by the offer of succour. This arena was penetrated from the coast by the caravans of Arabs and Swahili and, from 1888, the Imperial British East Africa Company. These caravans, interested mainly in ivory exports, reinforced the position of accumulating notables in the agrarian economies, extending their markets and range of allies.³⁵

Three decades later the economic and political structures of the region had been subjected to profound transformation, under the sway of a state apparatus linking them to the capitalist world economy. Maasailand was now the core of the White Highlands, which also overlapped the northern and southern marches of Kikuyu expansion. But the transformation was incomplete and contradictory, not least because of the haphazard manner in which the East African Protectorate (not to become Kenya until 1920) had been cobbled together.

Metropolitan interests in the formation of the East African Protectorate were extraordinarily confused; the process provides a classic illustration of the contortions forced upon the capitalist state in general, vitally concerned with allocating the fruits of accumulation but remaining outside the directly productive process. The Foreign Office, obliged to assume responsibility by the collapse of the Company in 1895, was without experience of African administration, particularly land administration, and was, moreover, preoccupied with Imperial strategy and thus with Uganda. The men on the spot within the Protectorate were generally old Company hands, of whom the Foreign Office thought little. The Treasury, by contrast, was concerned with recovery of the £5½ millions sunk in the railway, the essential prop of 'effective occupation',³⁶ and together with the Colonial Office pressed that the infant colonial state be assured a position as rentier of the landed assets which the railway alone had created. These two departments feared, rightly, that private land grants would alienate from the colonial state the returns on this speculative investment of metropolitan resources. But their reservations were a positive hindrance to solving the immediate problem of how to develop a local export production which would generate freight revenues for the railway and dutiable imports to sustain the new state. The Foreign Office, goaded by Parliamentary criticism of the growing Treasury grant-in-aid, could only compromise with an Order-in-Council in 1901 which left the conditions of land disposal to a wide local discretion. The uncertainties which continued to befog the terms on which private capital was granted land would force the resignation of two Governors in less than a decade.³⁷ Stabilization of the relations between metropolitan and colonial authorities and between them

³⁵ From a large literature see R. D. Waller, 'The Lords of East Africa: the Maasai in the mid-nineteenth century, c. 1840-1885' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 1979); G. Muriuki, *A History of the Kikuyu, 1500-1900* (Nairobi, 1974); M. Hay, 'Local trade and ethnicity in western Kenya', *African Economic History Review*, 11, 1 (1975), 7-12; J. Lonsdale, 'When did the Gusii (or any other group) become a tribe?', *Kenya Hist. Rev.*, v, 1 (1977), 123-33; Cowen, 'Capital and peasant households', 17-20; Munro, *Kamba*, 7-30; P. Marris and A. Somerset, *African Businessmen* (London, 1971), 25-47.

³⁶ For the lack of Foreign Office policy see Mungeam, *British Rule*, 33, 43, 68-72; and for the poor quality of many early officials, R. Meinertzhagen, *Kenya Diary, 1902-1906* (London, 1957), 132; Clayton and Savage, *Government and Labour*, 27. For the railway, see G. N. Uzoigwe, 'The Mombasa-Victoria railway, 1890-1902: imperial necessity, humanitarian venture, or economic imperialism?', *Kenya Hist. Rev.*, IV (1976), 11-34.

³⁷ Eliot (in fact Commissioner) in 1904, Girouard in 1912.

and private capital was thus bedevilled by administrative anomaly. As a factor of cohesion, then, the state could be described only at the parochial level, within African society. It was engine, first, of imperial conquest and only secondly of white colonization.

The necessary precondition for establishing any form of export production and of self-financing administration was effective authority over the African population. While London and Nairobi bickered over the larger dimensions of the colonial state and the conditions of capital investment, the extension of British control proceeded on local initiatives. But conquest was expensive. In its first nine years military costs swallowed nearly one-third of the Protectorate's budget; they exceeded local revenue, and were chiefly to blame for the tripling of the annual Imperial subsidy in the five years from 1896. It was essential that spasmodic displays of force be converted into the steady exercise of civil power; that coercion be replaced by consent.³⁸ Meanwhile, the transfer of metropolitan responsibility from the Foreign to the Colonial Office in 1905 brought the Protectorate under the control of a department actively concerned with tropical development for metropolitan needs.³⁹ The key prefectural structure of district administration was consolidated, to be staffed increasingly, in replication of the Home civil service, with the products of the public schools and Oxbridge, the cultivated guardians of social order in a competitive capitalist world.⁴⁰

The process of converting military force into civil power had already begun in the populated areas strung out along the line of rail. It involved a dual process, the appropriation and then redistribution of African resources, as punitive expeditions transferred livestock, the circulating capital of household production, from recalcitrants to 'friendlies'.⁴¹ Collaborative access to British resources was the more attractive for coinciding with the ecological crisis of the 1890s, when cattle plagues, smallpox and drought wiped out up to a quarter of the human population of some areas in central Kenya and set the survivors squabbling over the means of subsistence.⁴² Disaster and dearth enhanced the value of patrons who could organize the means of survival and reproduction or, more concretely, defence, raids and exchange. In the devastated areas of Kenya the British happened to be the best patrons available; it was more apparent to them than it was to Africans that they had also come as conquerors.

The British accumulated power as they multiplied their allies and forced down the supply-price of African assistance, retaining for government purposes an ever larger percentage of looted stock. They then bureaucratized the means of coercion, coming to rely on uniformed police rather than on African military

³⁸ Sorrenson, *Origins*, 29–30; Mungeam, *British Rule*, 132; Wolff, *Economics of Colonialism*, 50.

³⁹ R. Hyam, *Elgin and Churchill at the Colonial Office, 1905–1908* (London, 1968), ch. 12.

⁴⁰ For the changing patterns of recruitment to the administration, see B. J. Berman, 'Administration and Politics in Colonial Kenya' (Ph.D. thesis, Yale University, 1974), ch. 2.

⁴¹ For the connexions between the politics of conquest and early district administration, see Waller, 'Maasai and British'; J. M. Lonsdale, 'The politics of conquest: the British in Western Kenya, 1894–1908', *Historical Journal*, xx, iv (1977), 841–70; Low, 'British East Africa'; Munro, *Kamba*, parts 1 and 2; Tignor, *Colonial Transformation*, chs. 1–6; Cashmore, 'District administration'; P. Rogers, 'The British and the Kikuyu, 1890–1905: a re-assessment', *J. Afr. Hist.*, 20 (1979), 255–69; M. A. Thomason, 'Little Tin Gods: the District Officer in British East Africa', *Albion*, vii, ii (1975), 145–60; Spencer, 'Production and trade'; Lonsdale, 'People of Kenya'; Feldman, 'Christians and politics', ch. 1.

⁴² It was in the 1890s, according to missionary recollection, that the term Mau Mau was first coined to describe a gang of bandits in southern Kikuyu; see Church of Scotland Foreign Missions Committee, *Mau Mau and the Church* (mimeo., Edinburgh, Feb. 1953), 5.

contractors. This changing balance of power, which shifted from coexistence to British control, meant that collaboration had now to be rewarded not by loot but with markets, to satisfy both the British and their African allies in the changed context. For Africans had to be given the means to pay a Hut Tax, at once the sacrament of submission, ‘an outward and visible sign that the [African population] had definitely accepted Government control’, and very soon the single largest component of the Protectorate’s domestic revenues, rising from 4½ per cent in 1901–2 to nearly 29 per cent in 1904–5.⁴³

While some of the earliest ‘chiefs and headmen’ were appointed from among the African military auxiliaries and camp-followers of conquest, perhaps marginal men in their own communities, they were soon replaced – just as the old Africa hands were supplanted by Oxbridge men – by appointments from among individuals or lineages which had already come to the fore as accumulators of wealth and power. In the creation of a taxable base of marketed production, chiefs had to construct roads with gangs of unpaid labour (often they did so on their own account); the administration opened markets for Indian traders whose wares were extolled by officials on tour; improved seed was issued for marketable crops, paid for generally out of chiefs’ tax commissions, sometimes out of officials’ pockets. The expansion of commodity production (for which the best index is perhaps the huge increase in the internal stock trade) thus provided not only a material base for colonial domination but also, specifically, the funds of patronage for chiefs who with derisory official salaries nonetheless maintained a growing clientele, including the tribal retainers, the bully-boys of colonial control. In Nyanza and Kikuyu, the years before 1914 were the first heyday of the progressive chief, both agent for the diffusion of the readily divisible benefits of peace and markets and the appropriator of his people’s labour on his own fields, his self-interest backed by British power.⁴⁴ With conquest recent and consent fragile the joint interest of commissioner and chief in funding their personal authority was the fulcrum of expanded household production. The legitimacy of the colonial state was hitched to the ox-cart of African accumulation.

In a very concrete fashion, therefore, the legitimation of conquest and the poverty of the state articulated African household production to the capitalist world system, in the sense both of joining it to overseas markets through Indian merchant capital and of giving it political expression through the interests of the chiefs and district administrations. In 1910 Governor Girouard reckoned that Africans paid up to 40 per cent of total revenues in tax and import duties, the settlers only 20 per cent. By 1913 products of African origin furnished perhaps three-quarters of export earnings. Primitive accumulation on behalf of settler farming was thus subject to clear limits; the state simply could not afford to let white mate black ‘in a very few moves’.⁴⁵

⁴³ C. W. Hobley, *Kenya from Chartered Company to Crown Colony* (London, 1929), 124; hut tax proportions of revenue calculated from figures given in Mungeam, *British Rule*.

⁴⁴ For these early chiefs see B. A. Ogot, ‘British administration in the Central Nyanza District of Kenya, 1900–60’, *J. Afr. Hist.*, iv, ii (1963), 249–73; E. Atieno-Odhiambo, ‘Some reflections on African initiative in early colonial Kenya’, *East Africa J.*, viii, vi (1971), 30–6; W. R. Ochieng, ‘Colonial African chiefs: were they primarily self-seeking scoundrels?’, in B. A. Ogot, ed., *Politics and Nationalism in Colonial Kenya* (Nairobi, 1972), 46–70.

⁴⁵ Mungeam, *British Rule*, 220–1; for Commissioner Eliot’s unguarded comment, see Sorrenson, *Origins*, 76.

4. PRIVATE CAPITAL, SETTLERS AND THE STATE

The importance of the African peasant economy was less clear to higher officials and to the settlers who entered the colony in increasing numbers after 1903, however obvious it may have been to district officials. While settlers had manifest ideological reasons for their myopia, there were concrete reasons too. The produce of Nyanza Province, by far the railway's best customer, may well have been almost entirely African in origin, but as late as 1910–11 nearly 70 per cent of its exports was derived from ivory hunting or cattle hides, not agriculture. British experience in tropical agriculture had been with plantation tree crops; it was not yet clear that peasant long-fallow cultivation could lead to export growth. The one determined experiment in this, the cotton-growing scheme in Nyanza introduced in 1907, was a crashing failure against the competing labour demands of household food production.⁴⁶ This missed chance of articulating a direct link between the peasant sector and a politically influential metropolitan industry was an incalculable loss to the cause of peasant expansion. Moreover, the more senior of the Protectorate's officials doubted whether African peasants could always be relied upon to feed themselves; they had died by their thousands in the 1890s.

Protectorate officials had already searched with some urgency for an alternative means to develop production from 1902, only a year after the first Hut Tax had been collected and before anybody could guess at its later fiscal importance. The state's early essays in immigration had an air of desperation about them: Punjabi peasants, Finnish homesteaders, persecuted Jews from Eastern and Central Europe, all had their passing attractions.⁴⁷ Even when settlers of British stock – if initially from South Africa – were attracted, the question remained whether the Protectorate was to be regarded as primarily a colonist's or a planter's country, an equatorial New Zealand or a mainland Ceylon. Each had its disadvantages. The Colonial Office feared the unproductive, land-locking evils of speculation by big capital; but its Australasian experience taught that pioneer colonists in an unproven environment required – if they were to play their Imperial role in export production and not simply live off the land – much more official assistance than the infant Protectorate could provide. So a strict line of policy was adopted towards both 'big' and 'small' men. Their land titles 'bristled with servitudes'⁴⁸ designed to secure active development by owner-occupiers, and to inhibit speculation on the unearned increments from state expenditure.

These public constraints on capital were all undone in the eight years of acrimonious negotiation which preceded the amendment of the Crown Lands Ordinance of 1915. This created a virtually free market in land in the White Highlands, subject only to the governor's veto on transfers to non-whites. The

⁴⁶ Nyanza's export figures from the Provincial Annual Report, 1910–11; H. Reed, 'Cotton growing in Central Nyanza, Kenya, 1901–1939' (Ph.D. thesis, Michigan State University, 1975), 23–6; John Tosh, 'Lango agriculture during the early colonial period', *J. Afr. Hist.*, xix, iii (1978), 426–8, analyses an early failure with cotton almost exactly parallel to Nyanza's, not least in the African preference for surplus productions of sesame, an oil-seed for which there was a world market (if not with British industry) as well as a domestic use in food preparation.

⁴⁷ For land policies see Sorrenson, *Origins*; Ghai and McAuslan, *Public Law*, 25–30, 79–83; M. G. Redley, 'The politics of a predicament: the white community in Kenya, 1918–1932' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 1976), ch. 2; R. G. Weisbord, *African Zion* (Philadelphia, 1968), chs. 4–6.

⁴⁸ To quote a local bank manager in 1914: see Redley, 'Predicament', 83.

conditional clauses in land titles which were designed to secure minimum levels of production, never effectively enforced in any case, were more or less abandoned. Big capital was allowed to amass land unhindered; by 1912 some 20 per cent of the alienated area was held by just five individuals and consortia.

This reluctant official acceptance that the Protectorate was, at least in its formative years, a 'big man's country', was governed by four considerations, and had enormous consequences for the articulation of estate and household production. First, the state needed some form of accommodation with the private capital on which it relied for export growth, and land conditions were one of the causes of periodic settler uproar. Next, conditional land titles frightened off the banks' finance capital, without which expansion was stunted. Thirdly, by 1912 it was clear that such growth of estate production as was beginning to occur was largely the work of the 'big men', often aristocrats, while smaller settlers more commonly lived off their African tenants by 'Kaffir farming'; it appeared that speculation and production were not so contradictory as the Colonial Office had feared. For rising land values – they shot up by some 4,000 per cent between 1908 and 1914, from 6*d.* to £1 per acre – were due as much to the expensive proving of new crops and appropriate forms of animal husbandry by big men as to the services provided by the state.⁴⁹ Subdivision of holdings and sale on a rising market certainly gave the big concessionaries a handsome return on their experimental investments, but the small men shared their speculative interest. Generally located close to the line of rail, they too could hope to finance improvements from subdivision, and rising land values gave them the collateral needed to secure mortgage capital, as much from the private capital market as from the banks. There was thus, finally, never any sustained opposition from the small men to make the Colonial Office hesitate in its increasing accommodation with large capital.

In the decade before the Great War the state's fumbling after the goal of concessionaire development paralleled its construction of the politics of collaboration with African chiefs. Relied on to provide the returns on the initial imperial investment, the concessionaires had become part of that investment themselves.⁵⁰ There was, however, a vital difference between the two categories of collaborator in their relationship to the state. The basis of the district-level politics of collaboration with Africans was the antecedent accumulation of British power over them. The state's collaboration with land concessionaires, by contrast, required the loosening of control, both at the Protectorate level, since too stern a control over land tenure closed up the capital market, and at the district level in the Highlands where white landowners would not tolerate the form of autocratic paternalism wielded by district officials over the African population.⁵¹ This was the first of the consequences of concessionaire development. The state was obliged to stand increasingly outside the immediate relations of capitalist production, while co-opting the leading concessionaires on to its one representative institution, the Legislative Council, set up in 1907. The Protectorate was too late and unproven a segment of the capitalist world's farming frontier for the state to dictate terms to capital. Not until after the war, when the state's revenues provided security for development loans raised in London, and when the pressing

⁴⁹ For Lord Delamere's expensive pioneering, see Elspeth Huxley, *White Man's Country*, 1 (second edition, London, 1953), chs. 7 and 8; and for the state's assistance to agriculture, Wolff, *Economics of Colonialism*, ch. 4.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 55.

⁵¹ Berman, 'Administration and politics', ch. 4.

claims of social order demanded fresh administrative controls over labour relations and the farm work process, could the state be said to have begun to establish any real authority over the settlers. And it was not until the crisis of the Depression and the exigencies of wartime production in the 1940s that, in return for protected markets and public crop-financing, white farming accepted a position of state clientage.⁵²

Meanwhile, the long-term position of white farming was fatally undermined by three further consequences of concessionaire development. The rise in land values before 1914 was based as much on anticipated potential as on demonstrated performance. In 1913 the two major settler crops, coffee and maize, accounted for only 16 per cent of domestic export values.⁵³ The concessionaires' interest in high land prices was constantly to foil government-sponsored schemes of closer white settlement between the wars.⁵⁴ Further, these unrealistically high land values forced up capital costs and concentrated the settler mind on the reduction of labour costs, by the use of extra-economic means to coerce a labour supply,⁵⁵ the single largest cause of friction between their needs for accumulation and the state's concern for social order. And, finally, the thousands of unexploited acres under speculative ownership provided, as elsewhere in settler Africa,⁵⁶ the means to attract a permanent labour force on to the settler manor by letting land to Africans under various forms of tenancy. In at least one White Highland district, it was officially reported in 1917 that agricultural progress was due almost entirely to the work of these African squatters.⁵⁷ Maasailand was being turned inside out, as African cultivators, the majority of them Kikuyu, now invaded the choicest areas of the pastoral plain, under the protection of its new overlords.⁵⁸ To these contradictions at the base of settler agriculture we now turn.

5. AFRICAN LABOUR AND THE CONTRADICTION BETWEEN ESTATE AND PEASANT PRODUCTION

The burden of our argument so far is that the authority of the young colonial state came to rest upon a compatibility of interest between the big men of both peasant and capitalist production. We conclude now by examining the nature of that compatibility, which has received scant attention in the literature.⁵⁹ This tacit alliance between chief and settler, which was the political form of the articulation of modes of production, was to come under increasing strain as settlers demanded more from the state. The tensions were engraved upon the institutions of the state, which was the alliance's broker.

The establishment of capitalist estate production depended upon the appropriation of African land. But this partial separation of Africans from their means

⁵² Redley, 'Predicament', *passim*; Clayton and Savage, *Government and Labour*, chs. 4-7.

⁵³ Wolff, *Economics of Colonialism*, 74.

⁵⁴ Redley, 'Predicament', *passim*.

⁵⁵ R. van Zwanenberg, *Colonialism and Labour in Kenya, 1919-1939* (Nairobi, 1975).

⁵⁶ S. Trapido, 'Landlord and Tenant in a Colonial Economy: the Transvaal 1880-1910', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, v, i (1978), 26-58; J. K. Rennie, 'White farmers, Black tenants and Landlord legislation: Southern Rhodesia 1890-1930', *ibid.* 86-98; M. L. Morris, 'The development of capitalism in South African agriculture', *Economy & Society*, v (1976), 292-343.

⁵⁷ F. Furedi, 'The social composition of the Mau Mau movement in the White Highlands', *J. Peasant Studies*, i, iv (1974), 490.

⁵⁸ Wrigley, 'Patterns of economic life', 229.

⁵⁹ But see Mungeam, *British Rule*, 283-5, for the first inklings.

of production did not have an immediately adverse effect upon their well-being save in the case of the pastoralists, who suffered immeasurably larger losses than the cultivators. On the contrary, African farmers enjoyed an enormous access of exploitable land, as both the British *pax* enabled them to use areas previously left empty for reasons of defence, and as white landownership made available to their tenants' hoes the acres which settlers could not yet afford to plough.⁶⁰

The most concrete expression of the contradiction between estate and household production was over the African labour supply.⁶¹ But it was not, as we hope to show, quite the contradiction it has seemed. The state, anxious to complete public works as cheaply as possible under the home Treasury's scrutiny, shared with the settlers their interest in keeping labour costs down. While the technical rate of labour exploitation remained low, with inexperienced labour gangs working under inefficient managements whose language they did not understand, the conditions of exploitation were arbitrary and harsh. The expedients to which the state was driven in its desire to extract an African labour force below the value of its labour power were also testimony to the buoyancy of the peasant agriculture which the state had earlier been obliged to assist. The evidence before the Labour Commission of 1912-13 bore ample witness to the ease with which Africans could earn a cash income from household production, free from all the terrors of unknown disease and irascible employers which disfigured the labour market. Moreover, the state's own desire for cheap wage-goods forced its Public Works Department to buy from African rather than white maize producers 'if works [were] to be completed without excesses on the votes'.⁶² By 1912 African domination of the domestic cereals market had obliged the settlers to organize themselves for marketing overseas.⁶³

This competitiveness of peasant agriculture calls for an analysis of the early effects of labour policy more subtle than one which assumes peasant production to have been strangled to export its labour for settler estates.⁶⁴ The reverse was the case. The articulation of capitalist agriculture to the lineage mode of production through the extraction of labour was in fact facilitated by the very differentiations in African society which were inevitably increased by expanded commodity production. In obedience to settler demands the rate of Hut Tax was raised and a Poll Tax imposed 'to increase the native's cost of living';⁶⁵ but

⁶⁰ Low, 'British East Africa', 33-4; Wrigley, 'Patterns of economic life', 229; Feldman, 'Christians and Politics', 53-5; V. Uchendu and K. Anthony, *Field Study of Agricultural Change: Kisii District, Kenya* (Stanford, 1969), 47.

⁶¹ The fullest account of the Protectorate's labour policies is in A. H. le Q. Clayton, 'Labour in the East Africa Protectorate, 1895-1918' (Ph.D. thesis, University of St Andrews, 1971), now summarized in Clayton and Savage, *Government and Labour*, chs. 1-3; see also Leys, *Kenya*, ch. 8; Ross, *Kenya from Within*, ch. 6; Huxley, *White Man's Country*, 1, 214-36, 274-6, for a settler view; M. R. Dille, *British Policy in Kenya Colony* (second edition, London, 1966), part IV, ch. I; R. van Zwanenberg, *Colonialism and Labour*, ch. VII. The indispensable primary source for the views of officials, Africans and settlers is *Native Labour Commission, 1912-13: Evidence and Report*, (Govt. printer, Nairobi, n.d.), usefully summarized in Clayton & Savage, *Government and Labour*, 55-62.

⁶² W. McGregor Ross to Commissioner for Public Works, 15 Oct. 1908: Ross papers, privately held.

⁶³ E. Huxley, *No Easy Way: a History of the Kenya Farmers' Association and Unga Ltd.* (Nairobi, 1957), 4.

⁶⁴ As in Wolff, *Economics of Colonialism*, ch. 5.

⁶⁵ In the words of Governor Belfield, 1913, quoted in Clayton and Savage, *Government and Labour*, 41.

taxation encouraged domestic production as much as wage employment. Where it was not neutral was in its differentiation between individual African men. Some had land on which to expand production, close enough to Asian markets to head-load the produce,⁶⁶ fertile and well-watered enough for a secure subsistence; some had a wife or wives to perform most of the routine drudgery, or the cattle whose hides could now be marketed. Chiefs in particular could displace the costs of experimentation on to the labour of others. Others, the unmarried, propertyless young men in particular, enjoyed none of these conditions for domestic production. On the evidence of the Labour Commission it was these who went out to work, many of them voluntarily, to acquire the stock needed to start the domestic cycle of family formation, in much the same way as they had previously embarked on cattle raids.⁶⁷ Where chiefs' retainers, not only the bully-boys of control but also the press-gangs of accumulation, forced men out to work, they selected their victims from among the 'weaker and poorer class such as could not make trouble'.⁶⁸ In summary, the needs of estate production differentiated Africans between those who could produce, those whom the labour market pulled, and those who could be pushed.

The hidden pillar of the early labour supply was therefore the contradiction within the peasant sector between those who were able to maintain by domestic production their status in the inflationary spiral of communal obligation, especially in bridewealth payments, which resulted from monetization and the intensification of the market, and those who could only attempt to do so by wage-labour.⁶⁹ It rested on the ambivalent position of the appointed chiefs.⁷⁰ It could stand only so long as the collaborative relationship between peasant economy and district administration retained enough autonomy to allow household production to continue its expansion, so giving the chiefs the resources with which to reward their own followings while picking on their opponents. The oppression of primitive accumulation on behalf of estate production was thus factionalized within the peasant periphery. Both settler and peasant production were able to expand before 1914, with their major contradiction raging half-hidden within the African labyrinths of lineage and clientage.

The contradiction was only half-hidden however. It began to obtrude into the relations between settlers and state from around 1908, as the influx of settlers coincided with the final fling of the Edwardian boom. The increasing outflow of African labour in both its forms, short-term migrancy and labour-tenancy or 'squatting' on settler farms, began to undermine the authority of chiefs and district officials and so to threaten the shaky young framework of control. Two successive methods of recruiting migrant contract labour were tried; both had

⁶⁶ In 1912 John Ainsworth calculated that Nyanza's agricultural exports represented 1½ million headload-days per annum, Nyanza Province Annual Report (1911-12), 55.

⁶⁷ The Kipsigis indeed used the same term to describe both cattle raids and wage-labour: I. Q. Orchardson, 'Some traits of the Kipsigis in relation to their contacts with Europeans', *Africa*, IV, 4 (1931), 468.

⁶⁸ *Native Labour Commission 1912-13*, 135, evidence of Provincial Commissioner Ainsworth.

⁶⁹ For the inflationary tendencies of monetization see P. Bohannan, 'The impact of money on an African subsistence economy', *Journal of Economic History*, XIX, iv (1959), 491-503; Wrigley, 'Patterns of economic life', 226.

⁷⁰ Cf. Foster-Carter, 'Modes of production controversy'. For case studies, see R. L. Tignor, 'Colonial chiefs in chiefless societies', *J. Modern African Studies*, IX, iii (1971), 339-59; J. Tosh, 'Colonial chiefs in a stateless society: a case-study from northern Uganda', *J. Afr. Hist.*, XIV, iii (1973), 473-90.

a subversive effect. Initially district officers were themselves recruiters – and government was the largest and often the worst employer. This administrative ‘encouragement’ of labour led to openly coercive round-ups by the chiefs, anxious to ingratiate themselves by filling their quotas. From 1908, acting on the concern of administrative officials, the state withdrew from its exposed position in the creation of capitalist relations of production and farmed out labour recruitment to professional recruiters and those settlers whose land bordered on the African areas. But this was to make bad matters worse. For recruiters and employers established direct personal ties with the chiefs which bypassed the ties between chiefs and officials; they therefore challenged the monopoly over external resources which was the basis of the district commissioners’ local control. Direct relations between settlers and chiefs were being created, outside the mediation of the state, and yet potentially destructive of the very mechanisms of state authority which made those relations possible.

The squatter solution to the labour supply was no better. It did not initially involve coercion; command over cheap land resources was a sufficient attraction in the hands of the employer, particularly for the Kikuyu who experienced in its sharpest form the growing social differentiation of peasant production. Kikuyu peasant families were literally seeking ‘Land and Freedom’ on the Highlands, glad to exchange the initially light demands of settler overlords for the increasing oppressions of land concentration and labour recruitment at home.⁷¹ But herein lay the threat to political order; the extraction of peasant resources could not tolerate political emigration from the jurisdictions of the chiefs.⁷²

These manifold contradictions in the labour supply were played out at the political level in the growing ambivalence of officials towards the settler sector in their midst, support for which looked increasingly likely to undercut their politics of collaboration with Africans. Officials became more and more concerned about the corrosive effects of the individualism of wage-labour on what was variously called ‘tribal discipline’ or, more quaintly, ‘African nationalism’.⁷³ They were periodically alarmed by the tendency of exasperated settler employers to take the law into their own hands – a more immediate threat to political order than African resistance and perhaps a deliberate one, in that settlers were suspected of half-hoping for African rebellion, as a charter for fresh land grabs.⁷⁴

The officials’ solution to this self-destructive tendency of capital, its habit of promoting outright conflict with Africans while dissolving the communities of African society, was sought in an increasing administrative segregation between white and black, so unlike the confident hopes which their ‘interpenetration’ had held for Commissioner Eliot at the turn of the century.⁷⁵ With Colonial Office

⁷¹ For squatter motives see *Land Settlement Commission, British East Africa* (Nairobi, 1919), 15, 17, 25; G. Kershaw, ‘The land is the people: a study of social organization in historical perspective’ (Ph.D. thesis, University of Chicago, 1972), 100–1; F. Furedi, ‘The Kikuyu squatters in the rift valley, 1918–1929’, in B. A. Ogot, ed., *Hadith 5: Economic and Social History of East Africa* (Nairobi, 1975), 177–94; R. M. Wambaa and K. King, ‘The political economy of the Rift Valley: a squatter perspective’, *ibid.* 195–217. By the 1940s the squatters would seek ‘Land and freedom’ by other means, in the Mau Mau movement, when the increased capitalization of settler farming required that they be transformed from tenants to labourers.

⁷² For officials’ cries of alarm see Cashmore, ‘District Administration’, 97; G. W. T. Hodges, ‘African responses to European rule in Kenya to 1914’, in B. A. Ogot, ed., *Hadith 3* (Nairobi, 1971), 95; Tignor, *Colonial Transformation*, 106; Munro, *Kamba*, 92–3.

⁷³ Governor E. P. C. Girouard, *Memoranda for Provincial and District Commissioners* (Nairobi, 1910), 6.

⁷⁴ Hyam, *Elgin and Churchill*, 411.

⁷⁵ Sorrenson, *Origins*, chs. 13 and 15.

approval, Governor Belfield began to plan the division of the colony into settled districts under magistrates responsible to the Chief Secretary, and African areas under commissioners responsible to the new office of Chief Native Commissioner. The articulation of the economy was dividing the state. In May 1914 the Secretary of State forbade further thought of labour compulsion, on the grounds that it had contributed to the Ndebele rising.⁷⁶ Three months later, as if to confirm official fears, the Giriama rebelled against administrative measures to limit their peasant expansion and to move them within easier reach of tax collection and labour recruitment.⁷⁷ But the irony of the Great War which trod on the rising's heels was that it forced the colonial state, for all its sovereign concern for social order, to destroy the roots of Africans' collaboration by demanding their untold sacrifice in blood and livestock in the service of a metropolitan power under which, after all, the Kenyan state was merely a subordinate agent.

6. CONCLUSIONS: THE CENTRALITY OF THE STATE IN THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF COLONIALISM

The complex experience of early colonial Kenya does, we believe, illuminate four points of more general importance in understanding the role of the colonial state in Africa. First, the state acted as the factor of cohesion, the focus of the contradictions in capitalism's articulation with indigenous modes of production, for both of which the state itself had provided the conditions for expansion. The contradictions which had emerged by 1914 were to provide the internal dynamic of economic growth and political conflict over the next half-century.⁷⁸ They subsequently found expression at the level of the state both in constant rows between Secretaries of State and Kenya's Governors and, locally, in the growing tension between the Provincial Administration based on the African areas, and the central Secretariat with its technical departments which were preoccupied with servicing settler accumulation.⁷⁹ But, secondly, these internal contradictions did not mean that the state was a disinterested if bewildered arbiter between the conflicting interests of civil society. The state never ceased to try to provide the conditions for the reproduction of settler capitalism, and to justify it through the myth of the indispensability of the large farm sector to the colony's exports.⁸⁰ What was at issue was the lengths to which the state could go before it was seen to be the settlers' instrument, at the risk of its legitimacy with Africans. The role of even-handed arbiter, of defender of the weaker, African, interest was an ideological position adopted by colonial officials, to make their own position tolerable while also maintaining the relative autonomy of the state. In practice they abstracted into the state, or bureaucratized, the coerced appropriation of African resources, and so pre-empted the sort of destructive settler resort to self-help which would have threatened the apparatus of control in the African areas. That the state also actively assisted the expansion of peasant production in the early 1920s and again in the 1930s was as much a reflexion of the weaknesses of the settler export sector as of the disinterestedness of the state.

⁷⁶ Clayton and Savage, *Government and Labour*, 63.

⁷⁷ Cynthia Brantley, *The Giriama and British Colonialism in Kenya: a Study in Resiliency and Rebellion, 1800-1920* (forthcoming).

⁷⁸ We hope to follow up this point at greater length elsewhere.

⁷⁹ These internal conflicts in the state are discussed in B. J. Berman, *Control and Crisis in the Colonial State* (Philadelphia, forthcoming).

⁸⁰ Colin Leys, *Underdevelopment in Kenya* (London, 1975), 28-40.

Thirdly, the growth of segregationist ideas among officials before the Great War illustrates the degree to which the state's ability to cope politically with the contradictions of the economy depended on the fragmented local containment of African political and economic forces, and their representation in state institutions according to ethnic categories.⁸¹ The suppression of class formation outside these categories, which would have made the expansion of capital a still more explosive issue, was a constant theme of policy until the 1950s.⁸² This colonial preoccupation with 'tribal cohesion' also tended to reinforce the early bias towards peasant commodity production, since this represented a 'dispersal of economic power and hence minimized the growth of economic entities within the colony that could put forward political demands upon the administration.'⁸³

Finally, the steady expansion of the powers of the colonial state simply reflected its growing difficulties in managing the crises of its articulated economy. The concept of the colonial state as the 'over-developed' instrument of the metropolitan bourgeoisie – which might be abbreviated to the 'metrobogey', to catch the tone of some of the recent literature – ignores these local stimuli to the bureaucratization of the process of articulation. Nor was the paternalist interventionism of the colonial state, so much weightier than its metropolitan contemporaries, merely an archaic and irrational reaction, inhibiting more rapid development;⁸⁴ it was a response to very real dilemmas in fulfilling a colony's dual mandate, coping with the socially disruptive articulation of capitalist and indigenous modes of production which lay at the heart of the colonial situation.

SUMMARY

By drawing on the current Marxist debate about the nature of the capitalist state, this article argues that the colonial state was obliged to be more interventionist than the mature capitalist state in its attempts to manage the economy, since colonies were distinguished by the way in which they articulated capitalism to local modes of production. This posed severe problems of social control, since the capitalist sector required the preservation of indigenous social institutions while also extracting resources from them. In early colonial Kenya this problem was mitigated by a rough compatibility between the needs of settler capital and the patronage exercised by African chiefs within a peasant sector which was expanded to solve the colonial administration's initial need for peace and revenue. The peasant sector was not destroyed, rather it was represented in the state, which never ceased thereafter to be plagued by the conflicts between the two modes of production over which it presided.

⁸¹ Cf. M. von Freyhold, 'The post-colonial state and its Tanzanian version', *Review of African Political Economy*, VIII (1977), 79. See also J. Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika* (London, 1979), ch. 10; for the Kenya government's fear of pan-tribal consciousness in 1917, see J. M. Lonsdale, 'Some origins of nationalism in East Africa', *J. Afr. Hist.*, IX, 1 (1968), 132 n.

⁸² The exercise of social control in early Nairobi is a subject on which we await the findings of Frederick Cooper, Carla Glassman, B. A. Ogot and Luise White.

⁸³ Wallerstein, 'Stages of African involvement', 41.

⁸⁴ Cf. C. Ehrlich, 'Some social and economic implications of paternalism in Uganda', *J. Afr. Hist.*, IV, II (1963), 275-85, and as implied in P. T. Bauer and B. S. Yamey, 'The economics of marketing reform', *Journal of Political Economy*, LXII, III (1954), 210-35.