

Studies in Peasantry and Development Processes (Long Essay)

Anthony Rufus

*Department of Political Science, Niger Delta University
Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State*

Article DOI: 10.48028/iiprds/ijasepsm.v13.i2.15

Abstract

This paper examines the historical and contemporary dynamics that have shaped peasant societies and their enduring relevance to development processes. It argues that peasantries have been central actors in the evolution of global economic systems from ancient agrarian civilizations through feudal social formations, colonial restructuring and the rise of global capitalism. Drawing on classical and contemporary scholarship across anthropology, political economy and development studies, this work conceptualizes the peasant as a distinct social category defined by small-scale production, family-based labour, partial market integration and subordination to wider systems of extraction and authority. Through an analysis of African traditional institutions, colonial transformations, agrarian political economy, and debates on primitive accumulation, the chapter demonstrates how internal and external forces have continually reshaped peasant livelihoods. It highlights the resilience, agency, and adaptive capacity of peasant communities despite persistent pressures of dispossession, market volatility, state intervention, and global inequality. The chapter further argues that peasant studies remain essential for understanding contemporary challenges in the Global South, including land conflicts, food security, rural poverty, climate vulnerability and neoliberal agrarian reforms. The paper contends that any meaningful development strategy must recognise the structural significance of peasant economies and engage with their institutions, knowledge systems and struggles as central to equitable and sustainable societal transformation.

Keywords: *Peasants, Peasantry, Agrarian Economy, Marxist Political Theory, Development Processes.*

Corresponding Author: **Anthony Rufus**

Background to the Study

Understanding Peasants and Peasantry

The figure of the peasant has occupied a central yet often misunderstood position in the evolution of human societies. Across continents and historical epochs, peasants have constituted the backbone of agricultural production, the custodians of land-based knowledge, and the sustaining force of pre-industrial and transitional economies. Yet paradoxically they have also been subjected to marginalization, domination and persistent misrepresentation both in scholarly literature and in political discourse. The evolution of the term “peasant” itself reflects this tension: from early European usages that equated peasants with backwardness and ignorance to more sophisticated twentieth-century analyses recognizing their structural position within unequal economic systems (Edelman, 2013; Dalton, 1973).

The study of peasantry is therefore neither merely descriptive nor antiquarian. It provides a lens through which to understand how societies organise production, how surplus is generated and appropriated, how class structures evolve and also how states consolidate authority. In many regions of the world, especially in Africa, Asia and in Latin America, peasant communities continue to shape national development trajectories, even as they face pressures of market integration, agrarian capitalism, land dispossession and globalization. As such, an inquiry into the dynamics of peasantry is also an inquiry into the broader processes of development, underdevelopment, social transformation and political power.

Conceptualising Peasantry

Conceptualising the peasant is notoriously complex. Different disciplines; anthropology, sociology, political economy and agrarian studies approach the subject with distinct emphases. Early anthropologists such as Redfield (1956) and Foster (1965) emphasised the cultural and communal characteristics of agrarian communities. Political economists like Wolf (1966) and Shanin (1972) highlighted the structural relations that bind peasants to larger systems of power, extraction and market dependence. Contemporary scholarship has moved beyond rigid disciplinary boundaries by treating peasantry as a dynamic and historically contingent social formation rather than a fixed category. Peasant's today is commonly understood as small-scale agricultural producers whose livelihoods depend on access to land, family-based labour, and a complex combination of subsistence production and partial market participation. They remain distinct from both “primitive cultivators,” whose production is exclusively for survival and capitalist farmers, who rely on wage labour and profit maximization. This hybrid position, straddling subsistence and commodity relations explains why peasants are simultaneously vulnerable to exploitation and remarkably resilient amid economic and political turbulence. Recent works in agrarian studies, such as Bernstein (2010), Edelman and Borras (2016) and Scoones et al. (2022), have illustrated how peasant livelihoods are shaped by global value chains, land grabs, agro-industrial expansion and climate uncertainties, underscoring that peasantries persist not because they are unchanged remnants of the past but because they continually adapt to shifting structural pressures.

Within development studies, the concept of peasantry has regained analytical prominence as scholars seek to understand persistent rural poverty, slow structural transformation and the

inequitable distribution of land and resources in much of the global South. Peasants occupy a crucial position in national political economies: they produce the bulk of staple foods, supply labour to emerging industries and form significant voting blocs in democratizing states. Their livelihoods reveal how macroeconomic policies, state institutions and international markets penetrate everyday life. Development theorists such as Akram-Lodhi and Kay (2010), Harriss-White (2020), and Oya (2021) argue that peasant households must be seen as active agents navigating constraints rather than passive victims of global capitalism. Their choices around crop diversification, migration, cooperative organization, gendered labour allocation, and participation in markets are shaped by state policies, land regimes, credit systems and global commodity prices. These dynamics expose the tensions between survival imperatives and the pressures of incorporation into national and global economies.

Contemporary development thinking further recognises that peasants are central to major global debates on food security, climate adaptation and sustainable development. Scholars such as Patel (2012), Rosset and Martínez-Torres (2016), and Clapp (2021) highlight how smallholder farmers contribute to agroecological knowledge, biodiversity preservation and climate resilience, providing approaches that often contrast sharply with industrial agriculture. In this perspective, the peasant is not merely a marginal figure to be “modernized” but a critical actor in negotiating alternative futures for rural development. Their vulnerabilities; land dispossession, volatile commodity markets, environmental degradation and political marginalization operate alongside forms of agency expressed through resistance movements, rural cooperatives, land-rights mobilisations and adaptation strategies.

Characteristics of Peasant Societies

Peasant societies are generally located within rural settings where land constitutes the fundamental means of livelihood. Unlike capitalist farmers who operate primarily for profit, peasants combine subsistence production with limited market participation. Their labour process relies heavily on family labour and their patterns of exchange are shaped by personal relationships, communal norms and customary tenure systems (Kemp, 1993).

Several defining features recur across diverse contexts:

- i. Rurality:** Peasants are primarily situated in rural environments where land and labour remain closely intertwined.
- ii. Subsistence orientation:** Although surplus is produced, its purpose is often to meet social obligations or acquire goods not produced within the household.
- iii. Family labour:** The household functions as the basic unit of production and consumption.
- iv. Vulnerability to extraction:** Peasants are historically subjected to tribute, rent, taxation and unequal market relations, leading to persistent forms of exploitation (Wolf, 1966).
- v. Partial integration into markets:** Their economic life oscillates between autonomy and dependency, shaped by varying degrees of market penetration, state intervention and merchant activity.

Peasantry and the Historical Evolution of Development

The history of development whether conceived as economic transformation, social change or state formation cannot be meaningfully examined without placing the peasantry at its centre. Peasants have across civilizations constituted the primary producers of food, the backbone of taxation systems, and the main source of labour for ruling elites. In ancient agrarian empires from Mesopotamia to the Nile Valley, surplus extracted from the peasantry financed monumental architecture, administrative bureaucracies and expanding military campaigns. As Engels (1978) and later Ake (1981) observed, the structure of early states was built upon mechanisms for organizing, extracting and redistributing peasant labour, demonstrating that development even in its earliest forms was fundamentally tied to agrarian organization and rural production.

The feudal era further illustrates this centrality. Serfs and dependent peasants sustained manorial economies through labour obligations, rents and tributes. Their position in the social hierarchy both reflected and reinforced feudal power relations, shaping governance, authority and class stratification across Europe, parts of the Middle East and segments of Africa. Feudalism's eventual decline driven by demographic pressures, peasant revolts, climatic shocks like the Little Ice Age and growing commercialization revealed how transformations in peasant production directly influenced broader societal change. The transition to capitalism marked one of the most profound ruptures in peasant history. Processes of enclosure, commodification of land and the separation of producers from the means of production reconfigured peasant life and fuelled emergent capitalist economies. Land that was once held communally became privatized, dispossessing peasants and compelling many into wage labour. Markets expanded, merchant capital grew and rural societies became integrated into national and global circuits of production and consumption. These shifts did not unfold smoothly: they produced resistance, migration, class differentiation and new forms of rural inequality (Rufus, 2026 a).

In the global South, especially Africa the interruption of indigenous agrarian systems by colonial rule constituted another defining moment in the historical evolution of development. Colonial authorities reorganized land tenure, imposed cash-crop regimes, extracted labour through taxation and coercion and plugged peasant production into global commodity chains. These imposed systems reshaped rural economies, deepened dependency and entrenched power asymmetries that continue to structure contemporary development debates. The transformation of communal land systems, the weakening of subsistence farming and the creation of export enclaves reconstituted peasants as subjects of an external economic logic rather than autonomous producers.

Concepts and Definitions

Defining “Peasant” and “Peasantry”

The terms *peasant* and *peasantry* look simple on the surface, but once we enter the literature, they become highly contested. Historically the English “peasant” and the French *paysan* were not neutral descriptors. They were used by elites to label the rural poor as crude, ignorant, backward or even dangerous and in medieval Europe the term could carry connotations close

to criminality. These stereotypes helped to naturalise the subordination of rural producers and to blame them for wider social problems: laziness, supposed over-breeding, inefficient land use, resistance to “progress,” and political unreliability (Edelman, 2013; Kemp, 1993). In other words, the word “peasant” has always been entangled with relations of power.

In social science however, “peasant” is not simply an insult but an analytical category. Different disciplines emphasise different aspects of peasant life. Anthropologists such as Robert Redfield (1956) describe peasants as rural people embedded in old civilisations, cultivating their own land for subsistence within a traditional way of life, yet living in continuous interaction with towns and gentry. Eric Wolf (1966) defines peasants as rural cultivators whose surpluses are systematically transferred to a dominant stratum, which uses these surpluses to sustain itself and to feed other non-producing groups. Teodor Shanin (1968) highlights small producers using simple tools and family labour who produce mainly for their own consumption and for the fulfilment of obligations to those who hold political and economic power.

Because peasant life varies so much across regions and historical periods, no single definition commands universal agreement. Ken Post's influential contribution is to treat peasantry as a web of relationships: between peasants and the land they work, between peasants and the markets into which they are drawn and between peasants and the state that taxes, regulates and coerces them. What distinguishes peasants is not just that they are small farmers; it is that their control over land, labour and surplus is structurally constrained by landlords, merchants, chiefs, bureaucrats and other non-peasant actors (Post, 2010; Shanin, 1968; Rufus & Joseph, 2016). Therefore, *peasants* are understood as small-scale agricultural producers whose material security and social identity rest primarily on access to land and family labour, who produce mainly for household subsistence while generating some surplus for exchange and for obligatory payments, and who are located in relations of subordination to external centres of economic and political power. *Peasantry* refers to this group in the collective sense as a social category and in many contexts as a class situated within broader agrarian and development processes.

The Primitive Cultivator, the Peasant and the Farmer

Clarifying the concept of peasantry also requires distinguishing it from both the primitive cultivator and the capitalist farmer. Primitive cultivators are associated with what Marxist theory calls primitive communal society. Land is broadly held by the community, tools are rudimentary and production is oriented almost entirely towards direct use by the producers themselves. Exchange, where it occurs is usually through barter: produce-for-produce transactions without a generalised money form. Because the same people who produce are the ones who consume and because there is little systematic surplus, the scope for stable class formation, long-term surplus extraction and complex market structures remains limited.

With the emergence of peasant societies, the picture changes. Communal landholding may persist, but specific use rights over plots become more individualised or lineage-based. Peasant households begin to produce surplus beyond immediate subsistence needs, in part to gain

access to goods and services they cannot produce themselves, and in part to meet growing obligations in the form of rent, tribute and taxes. At the same time, money appears as a general medium of exchange; cowries, manillas, metal rods and later coins and with it the figure of the merchant, whose livelihood depends on buying cheaply in one place and selling dearly in another. Engels described money as the “commodity of commodities,” an instrument that can be converted into all others and that therefore concentrates enormous power in the hands of those who control it (Ake, 1981). In this context peasants become increasingly exposed to unequal exchange and external pressures to generate surplus (Rufus, 2026 b).

The peasant is therefore a transitional figure: no longer a purely communal cultivator, but not yet a fully capitalist entrepreneur. Peasant households remain strongly oriented to subsistence and reproduction, but they are also drawn into markets and subjected to systematic surplus extraction by landlords, traders and the state. In contrast, the farmer in capitalist agriculture is defined primarily by profit-seeking behaviour. In this setting, the basic unit is a farm owned or rented by an entrepreneur who produces mainly for the market, employs wage labour where necessary and treats land as alienable private property that can be sold, mortgaged or expanded purely on economic grounds (Kemp, 1993; Akram-Lodhi & Kay, 2010). Prices are determined by impersonal market forces and economic calculation centres on monetary return rather than household security. Put differently, the primitive cultivator is embedded in communal reciprocity, the capitalist farmer in profit-driven commodity production, while the peasant occupies an intermediate position: still committed to household reproduction and subsistence, yet increasingly compelled to respond to markets, merchants and state power.

Surplus, Exploitation and Alienation in Peasant Systems

The dynamics of peasant life cannot be understood without the concepts of surplus, exploitation and alienation. They capture how peasant labour is organised, how value is distributed and how power operates in agrarian settings. Drawing on Marxist political economy, Ake (1981) distinguishes between *necessary labour*, the labour required to produce goods sufficient for the worker's own subsistence and *surplus labour*, which produces goods over and above that subsistence. The part of output that corresponds to surplus labour is the *social surplus*. In primitive communal societies, limited surpluses and strong norms of reciprocity often prevented the consolidation of enduring exploiting classes. In peasant societies, however surplus production becomes more regular and more tightly linked to obligations imposed by others: rent for landlords, tribute and taxes for political rulers, interest for moneylenders and low-price sales to traders.

Exploitation in peasant systems refers precisely to the appropriation of this surplus by those who do not directly produce it. Surplus can be extracted through rent in kind or cash, through state taxation and forced labour, through usury and debt bondage and through adverse terms of trade in which merchants buy peasant produce at low prices and sell manufactured goods back at high prices. Studies of colonial and post-colonial Africa, Asia and Latin America show how peasants were routinely caught in cycles where their labour financed urban consumption, imperial projects and expanding bureaucracies, while their own communities remained structurally poor (Ake, 1981; Ogali, 2017; Wolf, 1966; Rufus & Joseph, 2016).

Alienation adds another layer. It does not simply refer to a psychological feeling of estrangement; it describes a structural loss of control by producers over their means of production; their products and the value derived from those products. Liberal property theory, associated with John Locke, famously argued that individuals acquire property rights by “mixing their labour” with nature, thereby making the product of that labour legitimately their own (Locke, 1980). In many peasant contexts, this connection is progressively undermined. Land that once appeared as a secure basis of livelihood becomes subject to state regulation, landlord domination or commodification. Marketing boards, traders or agribusiness firms determine what is bought, at what price and on what terms. Peasants may still work the land, but they do not control how their products are valued, circulated or taxed.

The rise and consolidation of the modern state from a Marxist perspective intensifies these processes. Engels argued that the state emerges to manage, rather than abolish, class antagonisms and that it tends to serve the interests of the economically dominant classes. In agrarian settings, this is visible in tax regimes that fall heavily on small producers, land policies that favour large owners or foreign investors, and development strategies that prioritise export crops over food security. The cumulative effect is that peasants lose effective control over land, over the disposition of their products and over the surplus they create; their labour sustains social orders in which they remain structurally marginal.

The Centrality of Land and Subsistence in Peasant Life

Virtually every serious account of peasantry treats land as the decisive element. Peasants are, at the most basic level, people whose material security, social identity and political standing are anchored in access to cultivable land. Land is not just an economic input; it is bound up with ancestry, belonging, spiritual life and local authority. In many African contexts, land has historically been owned at the level of the community or lineage but used by individual households. Rights of access are mediated by kinship, chieftaincy and customary law rather than by individual title deeds. On reaching adulthood, a person is typically allocated a portion of land to farm, which becomes the material basis of his or her status as a full community member. Berry's (1993) influential work on agrarian change in sub-Saharan Africa shows how such systems can be flexible and negotiable, yet also deeply insecure when confronted with state interventions, land reforms, commercialisation or capitalist land grabs.

Peasant production is normally oriented first and foremost to subsistence. The priority is to ensure the reproduction of the household: food, seed, basic clothing and the means to meet core social obligations. Even when peasants are tightly integrated into markets, their calculations are not identical to those of capitalist farmers. They seek to avoid falling below a certain minimum level of security, often preferring stability over risky opportunities for high profit. Surplus production is important, but its purpose is usually to obtain goods and services that cannot be produced at home, to pay debts, and to meet ritual, communal and political obligations such as bridewealth and taxes (Akram-Lodhi & Kay, 2009).

This close link between land, subsistence and identity explains why policies that alienate peasant land tend to provoke intense social and political reactions. Enclosure, forced

resettlement, large-scale concessions to agribusiness and poorly designed land titling programmes do not simply shift property registers; they threaten the very basis on which peasant households understand themselves and reproduce their lives. Land loss translates into loss of livelihood, loss of status and often, forced migration or proletarianization. It is therefore not surprising that struggles over land occupy a central place in peasant politics and in the wider dynamics of development and conflict.

Peasant Production and Social Relations

Peasant production is never a purely technical or economic process. It is deeply embedded in social relations that organise labour, distribute surplus and structure power at the local level.

One of the most consistent features is dependence on family labour. The peasant household is typically both a unit of production and a unit of consumption. Men, women and children share tasks according to age, gender and season; extended kin may join in, especially during labour-intensive periods such as planting and harvest. Chayanov's classic theory of the peasant household economy emphasized how decisions about work intensity and output are shaped more by the demographic balance between workers and dependants than by any abstract drive to maximise profit (Chayanov, 1986). Occasional hiring of outside labour does occur, but where the regular employment of wage labour and systematic pursuit of profit from others' work become central, we move closer to the world of capitalist farming than to that of the peasant.

At the same time, peasant communities are far from homogeneous. Differences in landholding, livestock, access to credit, education and political connections give rise to significant internal differentiation. Lenin's analysis of the Russian countryside famously distinguished poor, middle and rich peasants, while Shanin and others have extended this insight to diverse contexts, insisting that economic distinctions are intertwined with cultural capital and political authority (Shanin, 1968). Some households become local patrons, moneylenders or brokers between village and state; others sink into chronic indebtedness and semi-proletarian conditions.

Ken Post's triad of relations between peasant and land, peasant and market, peasant and state help to frame these dynamics. Through land, peasants experience varying degrees of tenure security or vulnerability. Through the market, they encounter fluctuating prices, exploitative trading networks and limited bargaining power. Through the state, they face taxation, regulations, promises of development and the threat or reality of coercion. None of these relationships is neutral. Each shape who gains and who loses from peasant labour and who is able to transform economic advantage into political influence (Post, 2010).

These social relations also condition peasant political behaviour. Because they occupy an intermediate position neither fully integrated into capitalist relations nor fully outside them, peasants have historically alternated between quiescence and explosive mobilisation: tax revolts, food riots, land occupations, and participation in broader revolutionary movements. Shanin (1968) thus speaks of the peasantry as a "political factor" whose actions can decisively

shape trajectories of social transformation, even if they rarely conform to the expectations of elites or revolutionary vanguards.

Peasants in Comparative Agrarian Systems

Situating peasants comparatively helps to clarify both their specificity and their changing roles in development processes. Historically peasant societies have existed in a wide variety of agrarian regimes. In feudal Europe, peasants were bound to lords through serfdom, rent and customary obligations, yet they often retained important use rights and communal institutions. In parts of Asia, similar arrangements tied cultivators to landlords and states, though institutional forms varied considerably. In much of colonial Africa, peasant production was reshaped or newly created under the pressure of taxation, cash-crop schemes and forced labour designed to funnel surpluses to metropolitan economies. In Latin America, peasant subordination took forms such as haciendas, debt peonage and various forms of semi-feudal tenancy (Wolf, 1966).

Comparatively peasants differ from landless agricultural labourers, who depend entirely on selling their labour power and have no independent access to land; from capitalist farmers, who operate primarily on the basis of private property, hired labour and profit-maximizing calculation; and from pastoralists or nomadic groups, whose livelihoods revolve around mobile livestock rather than settled cultivation. These are analytical distinctions, but they help to avoid flattening all rural people into a single category.

Eric Vanhaute's global history of peasants argues that over the last 10,000 years, peasant economies have been central to the making and remaking of agrarian "frontiers," feeding empires, supporting urbanisation and eventually, underpinning the rise of industrial capitalism (Vanhaute, 2021). While the proportion of peasants in the world's population has declined with urbanisation and de-agrarianisation, their absolute numbers remain very large, especially in the Global South. Contemporary scholarship therefore speaks of processes of *depeasantization*, in which households are expelled from the land or forced into wage labour and precarious urban livelihoods, and *repeasantization*, in which new forms of smallholder and family farming emerge as people seek to regain some control over land and labour within an unstable global economy (Akram-Lodhi & Kay, 2009; Edelman, 2013).

From a development perspective, peasants occupy a strategic but contested position. They remain crucial producers of food and caretakers of land and ecosystems. They stand at the centre of debates on poverty, land reform, social protection and rural transformation. They are also increasingly visible in struggles over food sovereignty, climate justice and the terms on which rural communities are incorporated into global value chains. Placing peasants within these wider comparative agrarian systems allows this book chapter to move, in subsequent sections, from conceptual clarification to a deeper analysis of how peasantry has been theorized in Marxist thought, how African traditional institutions have organised peasant life, and how colonialism, the post-colonial state and global capitalism have restructured peasant formations over time.

The Peasantry in Marxist Political Theory

Introduction to Marxist Agrarian Thought

Marxist political theory has long grappled with the place of the peasantry within historical development. Although Marx devoted most of his analytical energy to the capitalist mode of production and the revolutionary potential of the proletariat, his writings especially *The Class Struggles in France* and *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* contain important reflections on peasant social relations, forms of isolation and political behaviour. Marx understood peasants as part of pre-capitalist modes of production whose persistence complicates the advance of capitalist social relations (Marx & Engels, 1977). Later Marxists, including Lenin, Kautsky, Mao, Chayanov and contemporary agrarian political economists, extended these insights, generating a rich body of debate on whether the peasantry is declining, transforming or reproducing itself within global capitalism.

What makes Marxist agrarian thought distinctive is its insistence that peasant life cannot be analysed through cultural or moral categories alone. Instead peasantry must be situated within contradictions of class, property, surplus extraction, state power, and the articulation between capitalist and non-capitalist modes of production. These debates have shaped how scholars understand agrarian transitions worldwide from Europe's enclosures to African colonial economies and the contemporary restructuring of global food systems.

Essentialism vs Variability/Evolutionist Debate

One of the earliest interpretive debates concerns whether the peasantry possesses essential, unchanging characteristics or whether it evolves historically according to broader social transformations. The essentialist camp following Aristotelian logic but articulated within Marxist debate by scholars such as Kautsky treats peasants as a coherent category defined by small-scale production, family labour, subsistence orientation and limited technological change. From this perspective, peasant agriculture embodies an identifiable “essence” that persists despite external pressures (McLaughlin, 1998). This essentialist view influenced both Marx's and Kautsky's analyses of agriculture. For Marx, the “natural tendencies” of capitalism concentration and centralisation of capital would dissolve small-scale production and integrate rural people into wage labour. Kautsky (1988) extended this logic, arguing that the superior productive efficiency of capitalist agriculture would eventually overwhelm peasant farming, rendering the latter a transitional and ultimately disappearing form.

In contrast the variability or evolutionist perspective argues that peasant societies cannot be understood through fixed characteristics. Rather their organization, labour practices and social relations vary widely depending on historical context, state policy, market integration, and local institutions. This position was represented in the twentieth century by Chayanov and later by scholars such as Shanin, Wolf and Bernstein. Chayanov's (1986) work on the “peasant family economy” emphasizes endogenous factors like household size, demographic cycles and self-exploitation as core determinants of peasant behaviour, rejecting any universal blueprint. Variability theorists therefore argue that peasant formations adapt to capitalism in complex ways, often retaining coherence while transforming internally. Thus, whereas essentialists see the peasantry as a historically necessary but transitional form, evolutionists highlight its dynamism, resilience and capacity for reorganisation.

Is There a Peasant Mode of Production?

This question has generated some of the most spirited theoretical debates in Marxist agrarian studies. For Marx, a mode of production is defined by the unity of productive forces and relations of production, particularly the property relations that organise exploitation. In slave feudal and capitalist modes of production, the primary relation of exploitation is clear: slave and master, serf and lord, worker and capitalist. But the peasantry complicates this schema. Peasant households typically own or hold usufruct rights to land, work with family labour, and produce primarily for subsistence with limited surplus extraction. This makes it difficult to identify a polar class relation internal to the peasant economy. As a result, many Marxists conclude that the peasant economy does not constitute a distinct mode of production but is always subordinate or articulated to another mode; feudal, tributary or capitalist (Ake, 1981; Meillassoux, 1975).

Chayanov challenges this conclusion. He argues that the peasant family economy possesses its own logic, distinct from both feudal rent relations and capitalist wage relations. Its organizing principles include:

- i. The non-hiring of labour;
- ii. Demographic determinants of labour effort;
- iii. Simple reproduction; and
- iv. Production for use rather than for profit.

Shanin (1972) and others have extended this, proposing that the peasant economy may not be a mode of production in the strict Marxist sense but does constitute a coherent subsystem within wider social formations. It is capable of interacting with dominant modes while maintaining internal reproduction. African agrarian histories add further complexity. Pre-colonial polities such as Kanem-Bornu, Benin and Buganda exhibited mixtures of slave, feudal, tributary and peasant relations, making it difficult to draw firm distinctions (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1977). In many regions, peasant production sustained feudal or tributary elites but retained significant autonomy in production and household organization. These mixed forms challenge any rigid placement of peasantry within Marx's classic sequence of modes of production.

The Disappearance vs Permanence Debate

Few debates in Marxist agrarian theory have been as enduring as the question of whether peasantry will disappear or persist. The disappearance thesis advanced by Marx, Lenin and Kautsky predicts that capitalist development inevitably undermines peasant farming. Capitalism requires wage labour, large-scale production and commodified land; by contrast, peasant agriculture is based on family labour, simple tools and subsistence. As markets expand, peasants are expected to polarise into rural bourgeois farmers and rural proletarians (Kautsky, 1988).

Historical evidence partly supports this view. In Western Europe, peasant communities were gradually eroded by enclosures and capitalist farming. Hobsbawm (1973) observed substantial declines in peasant populations across Europe, North Africa and Latin America during the

twentieth century. However, the persistence thesis challenges this deterministic narrative. Chayanov, and later Wolf (1966), Shanin (1972) and Bernstein (2001), argue that peasants have shown remarkable capacity to survive capitalist pressures. Peasant farms often endure because:

- i. They can engage in self-exploitation to reduce costs;
- ii. Household consumption needs provide a flexible subsistence floor;
- iii. Cultural and emotional attachment to land strengthens resilience;
- iv. States frequently rely on peasants for food production and taxation;
- v. Capitalist firms sometimes prefer fragmented rural producers for contract farming.

Colonial attempts to proletarianized rural populations through taxation, export-crop schemes and forced labour in Africa produced uneven and often contradictory outcomes. Many communities incorporated market relations without fully abandoning peasant forms of production (Ake, 1981; Berry, 1993). Ogali (2021) similarly notes that Nigeria's agrarian system continues to sustain large peasant populations despite persistent capitalist penetration.

The contemporary situation is therefore hybrid: peasant lifeworlds are transformed but not extinguished. Rather than disappearing, peasantry is continually restructured.

Revolutionary Activism vs Conservatism Debate

Marx famously described French small-holding peasants as “potatoes in a sack” isolated, dispersed and lacking the dense social relations required for class consciousness (Marx & Engels, 1977, p. 479). For Marx, the fragmentation and parochialism of peasant life hinder political mobilisation; therefore, the peasantry is more likely to be conservative, supporting strong leaders who claim to represent their interests. Lenin accepted this critique but acknowledged peasants as essential allies of the proletariat in a democratic or socialist revolution though not its leaders.

Yet this view has been extensively challenged. Historical and contemporary evidence from Russia and China to Vietnam, Mexico and Zimbabwe demonstrates that peasants have often been central actors in revolutionary moments. Maoist theory in particular reframed the peasantry as a revolutionary force capable of confronting feudal landlords and imperial powers. Eric Wolf's *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* (1969) further documents how rural grievances, land hunger and exploitative state practices have ignited mass uprisings. Shanin (1972) argues that peasants oscillate between quiescence and rebellion depending on the nature of state extraction, land tenure insecurity and broader political opportunities. Bernstein (2001) adds that peasant politics cannot be reduced to revolutionary or conservative tendencies; they reflect the contradictory pressures of survival, resistance and adaptation within unequal agrarian structures. Thus, the revolutionary potential of peasants varies by context. While Marx emphasized their structural isolation, later scholarship shows that under certain conditions, peasants can become decisive agents of political transformation.

Concepts of Depeasantization and Repeasantization

As global capitalism has deepened, agrarian scholars have increasingly described rural change in terms of depeasantization and repeasantization. Depeasantization refers to processes

through which peasant households lose secure access to land and are forced into wage labour, migration or urban informal work. Drivers include land commodification, mechanisation, extractive agribusiness, climate change and neoliberal restructuring. Bernstein (2004) describes this as part of the wider “agrarian question of labour,” where rural people become semi-proletarianised and rely on multiple insecure livelihoods.

Repeasantization by contrast, describes situations in which households return to or strengthen small-scale farming, sometimes combining it with off-farm income. This can occur when global market volatility undermines wage labour, when land reforms redistribute land, or when rural social movements promote food sovereignty and agroecology. Edelman (2013) and Vanhaute (2021) both note a rise in new smallholder formations adapting peasant principles to modern conditions. These concepts highlight the fluidity of peasant identities. Peasantry is not a static category but one that expands, contracts or reshapes itself depending on economic pressures, state policies and global trends.

The Peasant Question in Socialist and Capitalist Transitions

The “peasant question” refers to how peasantry fits within broader transitions to capitalism or socialism. In classical Marxism, capitalist development requires the dissolution of peasant property and the creation of a wage-dependent working class. Socialist transitions, on the other hand, face the challenge of incorporating or transforming millions of small producers who own their land and organise production at the household level. Ogali (2021) argues that in countries like Nigeria, the articulation between capitalism and peasant production creates deep contradictions. Peasant households remain central to food production, yet they are subjected to exploitative market relations, unfavourable state policies and technological marginalisation. As a result, rural transformation remains incomplete: neither the disappearance of the peasantry nor its consolidation as a fully autonomous mode of production has occurred.

In socialist transitions, as seen in China, Vietnam and parts of Eastern Europe, the peasant question revolves around whether collectivization, cooperatives or market-oriented reforms best integrate peasants into socialist development. Historical experience shows mixed outcomes. Excessive coercion often backfires, while participatory reforms can enhance productivity and strengthen rural welfare. In capitalist transitions, common across Africa, Asia and Latin America the peasantry becomes a labour reserve, a food-producing class and a site of political contestation. States depend on peasants for rural stability and food security but also subject them to policies that deepen inequality. Ogali's analysis demonstrates that the peasant question remains unresolved because capitalist accumulation continues to rely on cheap rural labour and low-cost food produced under quasi-peasant conditions.

Marx, Agrarian Debate and the Revisionist Tradition

Marx on the Class Character of the Peasantry

Marx's writings on the peasantry reveal a complex, sometimes contradictory, but ultimately significant engagement with agrarian social relations. While Marx primarily analysed the capitalist mode of production and situated the proletariat as the revolutionary subject of

modern history, he nevertheless recognized peasants as a numerically dominant and structurally important group in countries such as France. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, he described small-holding peasants as living “in similar conditions” that differentiate them from other social groups; yet he argued that their fragmented mode of production prevents them from forming enduring political organisation (Marx & Engels, 1977, Rufus, 2026 c).

Marx therefore made a distinction between a class in itself a group sharing similar relations to the means of production and a class for itself, which possesses organisation, political cohesion and revolutionary consciousness. In this framework, peasants constitute a class in itself, rooted in their unique dependence on land, subsistence production, and exposure to surplus extraction. However, they often fall short of forming a class for itself due to isolation, localism and the absence of sustained political institutions capable of confronting the ruling class.

Yet Marx did not deny the class character of the peasantry. Rather, he insisted that class formation is a historical process, requiring conditions that peasants in nineteenth-century France had not yet met. His critique centred not on the absence of class position but on the limited political horizon of peasant struggles often framed around tax relief, local grievances, or land security rather than structural transformation of the state.

Marx's Predictions vs Empirical Realities

Marx expected capitalism to erode the peasantry by dissolving small-scale production and concentrating land ownership. His projection consistent with his theory of capitalist accumulation held that peasants would either become rural proletarians or capitalist farmers. Empirical developments, however have been more uneven. In Western Europe, especially England, enclosures and capitalist transformation did lead to a decline in peasant agriculture. But in Eastern Europe, Asia, Latin America and Africa, the peasantry persisted well into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Colonialism, tributary relations and state interventions created mixed agrarian systems in which peasants remained vital to food production, state revenue, and rural political life (Ake, 1981; Bernstein, 2001). The persistence of peasant economies suggests that capitalist development is neither uniform nor inevitable in its social outcomes. As later scholars argue, capitalist penetration often restructures rather than eliminates peasant production, producing hybrid social forms.

Depeasantization and Repeasantization Revisited

Processes of *depeasantization* and *repeasantization* help clarify why Marx's predictions have only partially materialized. Depeasantization describes the erosion of peasant livelihoods due to land dispossession, commodification, rural development schemes, mechanisation, environmental degradation, and state policies that undermine small-scale production. These dynamics push peasants toward wage labour, migration or precarious urban livelihoods. Ogali (2021) notes that in Nigeria such pressures arise from land laws, commercial agriculture and extractive state institutions that intensify rural marginalisation. Repeasantization represents the inverse tendency: households returning to or strengthening smallholder production in response to economic crises, unemployment, or struggles for food sovereignty. Global

movements such as *La Via Campesina* reflect an organised effort to defend peasant land rights and promote agroecological production systems. These dynamics underscore the fluidity of peasant identities and the adaptability of agrarian livelihoods under capitalist restructuring.

Liberal Theories of Stages of Human Development

Liberal evolutionary theorists from E. B. Tylor to L. H. Morgan constructed linear models of societal development that moved from *savagery* through *barbarism* to *civilisation*. These frameworks associated technological innovation, surplus production, and urbanisation with progress. Although non-Marxist, such theories influenced early social science interpretations of peasants as survivors of earlier historical stages. Engels critiqued aspects of this model but drew inspiration from Morgan's work on the social division of labour. For Engels, historical development was driven not by moral advancement but by transformations in productive forces and social relations (Engels, 1978). Liberal theories framed peasants as remnants of pre-modern societies, whereas Marxist analysis situated them within dynamic class and production systems.

Kautsky and the Concept of Peasant Disappearance

Karl Kautsky is the earliest major Marxist theorist to systematically examine agriculture. In *The Agrarian Question*, he argued that capitalism's tendency toward concentration of production would eventually dissolve the peasantry. For Kautsky, large-scale capitalist farming was inherently more efficient due to economies of scale, technological superiority, and the profit motive (Kautsky, 1988, Rufus, 2026 a). Kautsky maintained that peasants were destined either to become rural wage labourers or to survive at the margins as economically backward family farms. However empirical evidence compelled him to revise his position. He later acknowledged that peasant farms persist because:

- i. They rely on unpaid family labour;
- ii. They combine subsistence with market engagement;
- iii. They can continue operating with low monetary returns;
- iv. They possess cultural and emotional ties to land.

Kautsky ultimately concluded that peasant production could survive within capitalism, albeit in a subordinated and increasingly marginal position.

Lenin and the Strategic Role of the Peasantry

Lenin initially echoed Marx and Kautsky, predicting that capitalist development in Russia would produce rural differentiation creating a rural bourgeoisie, middle peasants, and a rural proletariat (Lenin, 1899). He viewed this differentiation as essential to capitalist transition. Yet the 1905 revolution and subsequent peasant uprisings forced him to reconsider their political potential. Lenin later recognized that peasants constituted an indispensable ally of the working class in a democratic revolution, though not its vanguard. During the Bolshevik Revolution, peasant support was critical for land redistribution, food supplies, and the consolidation of Soviet power. Nevertheless, Lenin maintained that peasant production was ultimately incompatible with socialism and would require transformation through cooperative and collective forms (Rufus, 2026 a).

Mao and the Political Significance of the Chinese Peasantry

Mao Zedong radically revised Marxist agrarian theory by positioning peasants not industrial workers as the primary revolutionary force in China. In contrast to Marx's scepticism, Mao recognized the depth of peasant grievances, their capacity for mobilisation, and their centrality to China's social structure. Through protracted rural organizing, land reform, and embedded party work, Mao succeeded in transforming fragmented rural populations into a revolutionary base. The Chinese revolution demonstrated, perhaps for the first time, the creation of a state in which peasants played the decisive political role (Bianco, 1975). Mao's strategy challenged the universalist assumptions of European Marxism and opened the door to diverse agrarian-based revolutionary paths in the global South.

Lessons for Contemporary Agrarian Development

Debates among Marx, Kautsky, Lenin, Mao and contemporary scholars offer several insights for today's agrarian development:

- i. Peasantry remains central, especially in Africa and Asia, where rural populations continue to sustain food systems and labour markets.
- ii. Capitalist transformation is uneven, producing hybrid social forms rather than universal dissolution of peasant agriculture.
- iii. State policies shape agrarian outcomes, particularly through land laws, taxation, subsidies and market regulation.
- iv. Peasant movements matter, as seen in global struggles for food sovereignty, land rights, and environmental justice.
- v. Agrarian transitions must be historically grounded, not presumed to follow universal paths derived from European experience.

Contemporary development strategies must therefore recognise peasant agency, structural constraints and the diversity of rural livelihoods, rather than assuming inevitable depeasantization.

African Traditional Institutions and the Peasantry Defining Africa and the African Agrarian Context

A meaningful understanding of African peasantry requires approaching Africa not simply as a geographic entity but as a historically constituted cultural, ecological and political world. The continent encompasses a wide range of ecological zones from the semi-arid Sahel, to the fertile savannahs, highland terraces, equatorial forests and riverine floodplains and each of these landscapes shaped distinct agricultural systems, settlement patterns and social institutions. Far from being technologically static or socially primitive, precolonial African societies developed sophisticated agrarian innovations: terraced agriculture in Ethiopia, raised-field systems in the Zambezi floodplains, intensive banana cultivation in the Great Lakes region and iron-smelting technologies in West and Central Africa (Ehret, 2002; Reid, 2012).

These ecological and technological achievements sustained large political formations such as the empires of Mali and Songhai, the Benin Kingdom, and Buganda each reliant on peasant

producers for food surplus, tribute, and labour mobilization. The peasantry was not marginal but central to economic and political life, contributing to trade networks that connected Africa internally and to the wider world long before European incursion. Colonial conquest, however, restructured these agrarian landscapes through forced cultivation systems, land appropriation, labour conscription and the imposition of cash-crop economies (Ake, 1981; Mamdani, 1996). Consequently, contemporary African peasantries exist at the intersection of indigenous agrarian traditions and enduring colonial legacies that continue to shape power, production, and land relations.

Basic Socio-Cultural Concepts in African Peasant Societies

African peasant societies are grounded in a dense web of socio-cultural norms and institutions that regulate behaviour, structure authority, and shape production. Culture, understood as shared meanings, values and practices, forms the basis of everyday life and determines how individuals relate to one another and to the environment. Unlike Western models that stress individual autonomy, African societies typically emphasise collective responsibility, reciprocity, and the interdependence of social units.

Several concepts are essential for understanding African peasant life:

- i. Custom:** enduring practices transmitted across generations that govern farming cycles, dispute resolution, marriage and religious activities.
- ii. Tradition:** symbolic connections to ancestors and historical memory, providing continuity in rapidly changing contexts.
- iii. Institutions:** the organizational frameworks, kinship systems, chieftaincy, age grades, initiation societies that stabilize social relations and coordinate communal activities.
- iv. Ethics and ethos:** moral expectations such as mutual aid, respect for elders, and taboos that regulate resource use and social interactions.

The Family as a Production and Reproduction Unit

The family constitutes the core of African peasant economies, functioning simultaneously as a productive, reproductive, social and educational institution. Its structure varies by ecological zone and cultural tradition, ranging from nuclear households in pastoral regions to extended families and large lineage-based compounds in farming areas (Fortes & Evans-Pritchard, 1940). Regardless of structure, the family performs several interrelated functions essential to agrarian life.

Economically the family mobilizes labour for farming, herding, gathering and processing. Men, women and children share differentiated but complementary responsibilities, with women often managing food crops and domestic labour while men handle cash crops, livestock or heavy tasks. Reproductively the family ensures lineage continuity, negotiates marriage alliances and sustains the demographic foundations of rural society. Socially families provide security in times of illness, labour shortage or crisis, serving as a buffer in the absence of state welfare systems. Educationally families transmit technical agricultural knowledge, indigenous environmental practices, cultural norms and ethical values through hands-on apprenticeship and oral traditions. These overlapping roles highlight why transformations in family structures through migration, land scarcity or market pressures directly reshape peasant production systems.

Marriage and Systems of Inheritance

Marriage in African peasant societies is a deeply social institution that extends beyond the union of individuals to encompass alliances between families, lineages and communities. It establishes rights over labour, sexuality and reproduction while reinforcing kinship networks essential for social cohesion and agricultural cooperation. The diversity of marriage forms monogamy, polygyny, levirate unions, sororal marriages and woman-to-woman marriages reflects local ecological needs and cultural logics, particularly the demand for labour in farming communities. Inheritance systems are closely tied to these marriage practices and play a critical role in structuring agrarian life:

- i. Patrilineal inheritance predominates in much of Africa, with land, livestock, and titles transferred through the male line.
- ii. Matrilineal inheritance, found among Akan societies and parts of Southern Africa, allocates political and economic rights through the mother's lineage.
- iii. Double descent systems allocate different property types through each parent, reflecting dynamic adaptations to ecological and social conditions.

These inheritance frameworks determine how land is redistributed, who controls productive assets and how power circulates within households. They also shape gender relations particularly women's access to land which remains one of the most significant fault lines in agrarian transformation.

Kinship and Descent in Peasant Organisation

Kinship systems provide the fundamental organizational structure of African peasant communities. They determine land rights, regulate marriage, structure political authority and coordinate collective labour. Descent groups whether patrilineal, matrilineal or cognatic act as corporate entities responsible for managing communal land, enforcing norms, organizing ceremonies and adjudicating conflicts. Kin-based governance operates through principles of moral legitimacy, ritual sanction and collective accountability rather than the bureaucratic procedures of modern states. Gerontocracy or elder-based authority, is a common feature of these systems. Elders function as custodians of tradition and mediators of conflict, guiding the allocation of land and resources. Even as modern states impose statutory laws and formal administrative units, kinship institutions continue to shape local governance, rural politics and community identity. Mamdani (1996) notes that colonial governments manipulated these systems by empowering chiefs as intermediaries a legacy that persists in many African countries, complicating postcolonial rural administration.

African Religious Institutions and Their Socio-Economic Roles

African religious institutions are integral to understanding peasant worldviews, social order, and ecological practices. These systems generally recognize a Supreme Being whether understood as Chukwu, Olodumare, Ngai, Oghene or other equivalents who presides over the moral and cosmological universe. Beneath the Supreme Being are ancestors, divinities and nature spirits who regulate daily life, protect communities and sanction moral behaviour.

Religious practices permeate economic and political life. Rituals determine agricultural cycles, mark the beginning of planting seasons and ensure communal harmony. Priests, diviners and healers mediate between the physical and spiritual worlds, diagnosing social crises and prescribing remedies. Taboos and sacred groves often serve ecological functions by protecting water sources, forests and wildlife. Through religion, peasants understand misfortune, negotiate risk and maintain social cohesion in ways that modern state institutions rarely replicate.

Land Tenure Systems in African Peasant Economies

Land as the primary means of production, is the cornerstone of African peasant livelihoods. Precolonial land tenure systems were largely communal, grounded in customary rights rather than individual ownership. Land belonged to the lineage or clan and was held in trust by chiefs or elders, who allocated plots based on family size, labour capacity, and community needs. This ensured equitable access, minimized landlessness and reinforced communal solidarity. Colonial rule disrupted this system by introducing statutory laws, private property regimes, and cash-crop cultivation. These changes concentrated land in the hands of the state or settlers, dispossessed many African communities, and weakened the authority of customary institutions. In the postcolonial era, the coexistence of customary and statutory systems continues to generate conflicts, gender inequities, and opportunities for elite capture. Land grabs by multinational corporations, political elites, and investors further threaten peasant security, especially in regions where land remains the most valuable asset (Peters, 2013).

Continuity and Change in African Traditional Institutions

African traditional institutions are dynamic, not static; they evolve in response to demographic changes, market integration, religious conversion, migration and state intervention. While core values such as communalism, reciprocity and respect for ancestry persist, many practices have been reshaped by new economic realities and social pressures. Collective labour groups still function, but their effectiveness may be undermined by rural–urban migration. Kinship authority remains influential, yet younger generations challenge gerontocratic power, especially where education and technology shift social expectations.

Tensions increasingly emerge around land rights, gender roles and generational authority. Women's struggles for land access intensify as customary norms intersect with statutory laws. Youth disengagement from agriculture raises concerns about continuity in agrarian knowledge. Conflicts between customary and formal legal systems complicate governance and resource allocation. Despite these challenges, the ability of African institutions to adapt underscores the resilience of peasant societies. Rather than relics of the past, these institutions continue to mediate social transformation bridging indigenous practices and contemporary development pressures.

External Dynamics of Peasant Transformation

While internal social relations provide the structural foundations of peasant life, the most far-reaching and disruptive agrarian transformations have historically been shaped by forces

external to the village economy. These external drivers originating from state interventions, urbanisation, capitalist markets, global commodity chains, changing technologies and foreign investment reshape agrarian systems in ways that internal processes alone could never generate. They alter land relations, redistribute power, intensify class differentiation and integrate rural households into broader national and global political economies. In Africa these forces became particularly pronounced during colonial rule, when extractive policies subordinated peasant production to metropolitan needs. Today similar pressures re-emerge under neoliberal reforms, large-scale land investments, climate change, and the volatility of global trade regimes. As Ogali (2021) notes, peasant transformation cannot be understood without analysing the structural weight of these external dynamics.

Urban Influence and Rural–Urban Linkages

Urbanisation has historically exerted both direct and indirect influence on agrarian societies. Cities expand markets for agricultural surplus, create new circuits of exchange and drive infrastructural development. Yet they simultaneously drain rural economies of labour, skills, and social capital. As urban centres develop industries, administrative bureaucracies, religious organizations, and educational institutions, they attract rural youth seeking opportunities unavailable in the countryside. This migration generates a labour vacuum in rural areas, particularly among the most productive demographic groups. Households left behind often struggle to maintain adequate labour for planting, weeding, and harvesting leading to declining yields and heightened food insecurity.

Urban culture also penetrates rural life, reshaping aspirations and consumption patterns. New desires for clothing, processed foods, appliances and urban lifestyles intensify the need for cash income, pushing peasants deeper into market dependency. The shift from subsistence to cash-crop production frequently follows, exposing households to market volatility and eroding traditional safety nets. Moreover, cities impose a contradictory burden: rural producers feed expanding urban populations even as their capacity to sustain agricultural output diminishes. As a result, rural–urban linkages become a key mechanism through which capitalist relations penetrate peasant economies, encouraging commodification, indebtedness, and class stratification.

The Peasant and the Modern State

The relationship between peasants and the modern state is one of structural subordination. Precolonial African political formations were embedded within kinship systems; authority was decentralized, and peasants possessed relative autonomy over land, production, and community life. Colonialism fundamentally altered these arrangements by relocating political authority to distant administrative centres, introducing new taxation systems, imposing commodity boards, and enforcing land registration schemes designed to favour settlers or urban elites (Mamdani, 1996).

Postcolonial governments inherited this centralized architecture but often deepened it. State policies have consistently prioritized urban development, export-oriented agriculture, and macroeconomic strategies that marginalise rural populations. Peasants are frequently

engaged only as taxpayers, voters during election seasons, or sources of surplus for national revenue.

The rural elite chiefs, lineage heads, and politically connected notables are often co-opted by the state to implement tax collection, mobilise votes, enforce land laws, or promote government schemes. This incorporation reshapes local power relations, creating new layers of inequality and weakening peasants' ability to resist exploitative policies. In many African countries, the absence of genuine participatory democracy perpetuates a political order in which peasants remain peripheral to national decision-making.

Land Acquisition, Dispossession and Agrarian Change

The modern state colonial and postcolonial has been one of the most decisive external forces shaping peasant transformation. Precolonial African governance systems relied on kinship structures, decentralized authority and communal land tenure, providing peasants substantial autonomy over production and local decision-making. Colonial regimes dismantled these arrangements by centralizing power, imposing uniform taxation, creating new administrative hierarchies and redefining land rights to facilitate extraction and labour control (Mamdani, 1996). Through mechanisms such as head taxes, forced labour, marketing boards and codified land laws, the colonial state inserted itself into the intimate fabric of village life.

Postcolonial governments inherited these centralized institutions but often intensified them. State-led development pursued urban industrialisation, macroeconomic management and export agriculture, with little attention to rural welfare. Peasants became politically relevant mainly during elections or as sources of public revenue. Rural elites such as chiefs, lineage heads or politically connected notables were frequently co-opted as intermediaries between the state and rural communities, facilitating tax mobilization, land registration, and political patronage. This reconfigured rural power structures, deepened inequalities, and constrained peasant agency.

A persistent feature of many African states remains the limited political voice of peasants within national decision-making arenas. Policies affecting land, credit, infrastructure and pricing are often crafted in cities by bureaucrats disconnected from rural realities. Consequently, the modern state acts as both regulator and extractor, structuring peasant livelihoods through policies that frequently exacerbate marginalization.

Market Integration and Changing Production Systems

Market integration reorients peasant economies from subsistence-driven logics to commercial imperatives. At first market access may provide income opportunities, diversification, and new consumer goods. However deeper integration exposes peasants to volatile price fluctuations, predatory merchant capital, and input-cost structures that favour larger and more mechanized producers. This reorientation frequently produces:

- i. Price instability in global and national commodity markets,
- ii. Dependence on external suppliers for seeds, fertilizers and agrochemicals,
- iii. Transportation bottlenecks that reduce farm-gate prices,

- iv. Exploitative purchasing practices by marketing boards and private traders, and
- v. Shifts from food crops to cash crops, undermining household food security.

These pressures alter labour organization, gender divisions of work and seasonal rhythms of production. Women often bear increased labour burdens as men seek off-farm income. Households become more sensitive to market shocks, making poverty more severe during price downturns. While some wealthier peasants adapt by scaling production or engaging in agribusiness, many smaller farmers are trapped in cycles of low productivity, debt and declining living standards. As globalization intensifies, market integration becomes a central mechanism through which capitalist relations penetrate and transform rural societies.

Rural–Urban Migration and Peasant Labour Dynamics

Market integration reorients peasant economies from subsistence-driven logics to commercial imperatives. At first market access may provide income opportunities, diversification and new consumer goods. However deeper integration exposes peasants to volatile price fluctuations, predatory merchant capital, and input-cost structures that favour larger and more mechanized producers. This reorientation frequently produces:

- I. Price instability in global and national commodity markets,
- ii. Dependence on external suppliers for seeds, fertilizers, and agrochemicals,
- iii. Transportation bottlenecks that reduce farm-gate prices,
- iv. Exploitative purchasing practices by marketing boards and private traders, and
- v. Shifts from food crops to cash crops, undermining household food security.

These pressures alter labour organization, gender divisions of work, and seasonal rhythms of production. Women often bear increased labour burdens as men seek off-farm income. Households become more sensitive to market shocks, making poverty more severe during price downturns. While some wealthier peasants adapt by scaling production or engaging in agribusiness, many smaller farmers are trapped in cycles of low productivity, debt, and declining living standards. As globalization intensifies, market integration becomes a central mechanism through which capitalist relations penetrate and transform rural societies.

The Peasantry and Social Transformation

Peasant societies have never existed in isolation from wider political, economic and ideological transformations. Across different epochs from slave-based economies to feudal orders, through capitalist transitions and colonial restructuring the peasantry has served as both a stabilizing agricultural foundation and a population subjected to profound structural change. Understanding how peasants have been positioned within evolving modes of production provides deep insight into the nature of social change, class formation and the historical forces that shape development trajectories.

Peasants in the Slave Social Formation

In ancient slave-based societies such as the classical Mediterranean world the dominant mode of production relied on slave labour, yet peasants continued to exist as a parallel and indispensable category. Their coexistence with slaves demonstrates the remarkable resilience

and adaptability of peasant forms of production. While slaves were the property of masters and therefore lacked autonomy, peasants retained limited control over land, tools and family labour. However, their relative freedom did not exempt them from exploitation. Peasants in slave formations produced food, craft goods and surplus that sustained urban elites engaged in warfare, administration, and intellectual pursuits. They often lived in rural settlements outside the city walls, yet their outputs were indispensable for maintaining urban life. Their surplus collected through rents, tributes, and levies financed public works, elite consumption, and military expenditures (Finley, 1998).

Thus, in the slave social formation, peasants constituted a structurally subordinate but economically crucial class. Their persistence highlights that even where slavery was dominant, no society relied solely on coerced labour. The peasant household remained an enduring unit of production, balancing subsistence with obligatory contributions to the ruling order.

Peasants and Serfs in Feudal Societies

Feudal societies placed peasants and serfs at the core of agrarian production even as they were subordinated within a rigid hierarchy of obligations and coercive authority. Unlike slaves, serfs were not personally owned, yet they were legally bound to the land and could not relocate without the permission of the feudal lord. Their economic lives were structured around compulsory labour services on the lord's demesne, rent in kind and a long list of customary dues that reinforced dependence and curtailed autonomy. Even “free peasants” those who held small plots through relatively favourable tenure were embedded in networks of obligation that limited their economic self-determination. The entire feudal structure rested on land as the principal means of production and on personalized ties between lord and vassal, through which military protection was exchanged for loyalty and labour. These ties were enforced by custom, law and the coercive power of the estate, which together maintained a social order centred on extraction. Institutions such as the Catholic Church further entrenched this structure by owning vast estates and imposing tithes on peasant households, thereby functioning as both spiritual authority and economic landlord (Bloch, 1962). In this context, peasants not only sustained the nobility but also fed emerging towns and urban centres, making them indispensable to medieval political economy. Yet the system carried inherent contradictions. Population pressures, climatic shocks such as the Little Ice Age, outbreaks of plague, and periodic peasant revolts increasingly strained the capacity of feudalism to reproduce itself. At the late medieval period, these pressures exposed the limits of surplus extraction, rendering feudal obligations economically untenable and paving the way for new relations of production to emerge. As Ogali (2021) observes in the African context, agrarian systems rooted in rigid hierarchies tend to collapse when demands on rural producers exceed their ability to sustain livelihoods a dynamic that equally characterised the twilight of European feudalism.

The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism

The transition from feudalism to capitalism represents one of the most transformative shifts in global history, and scholars continue to debate whether internal or external forces were most

decisive. Internalist scholars such as Dobb (1963) and Brenner (1977) argue that transformations within the agrarian structure especially peasant differentiation, technological innovations and new property regimes destabilised feudal relations from within. As some peasants accumulated land and tools while others fell into dependency, a process of class differentiation altered the logic of production itself. The commodification of land shifted tenure away from customary relations toward alienable, market-based property, weakening the legal and moral foundations of serfdom. Serfs fled into towns or negotiated improved conditions, while urban centres expanded as sites of trade, craft production and political centralisation. Absolutist monarchies further accelerated this shift as kings eroded the autonomy of feudal lords, reorganized taxation and built bureaucratic institutions that reshaped the political terrain.

Externalist perspectives emphasise broader structural forces: the rise of long-distance trade, the expansion of merchant capital, demographic disruptions and the incorporation of Europe into emerging world economic networks (Wallerstein, 1974; Sweezy, 1950). Trade created new wealth, altered consumption patterns and intensified competitive pressures that feudal relations could no longer accommodate. These internal and external developments undermined the foundations of feudalism and enabled capitalist social relations based on wage labour, competitive markets and private ownership to take root. Contemporary research reinforces the view that such transitions are never linear but emerge from layered crises in production, governance and demographic systems (Pomeranz, 2000; Van Bavel, 2016).

Primitive Accumulation and the Rise of Capitalism

Primitive accumulation describes the violent and coercive processes through which early capitalism separated producers from the means of production and concentrated wealth in the hands of an emerging capitalist class. Contrary to liberal narratives that portray capitalism as a natural outgrowth of trade and innovation, Marx (1990) emphasizes that land expropriation, legal manipulation, and state-sanctioned force were foundational. Across Europe, enclosure movements privatized common lands, displacing rural communities and compelling them into wage labour. Vagrancy laws criminalised the poor, creating a legal framework that disciplined labour while consolidating elite control. The rise of capitalist agriculture thus began not with efficiency but with dispossession.

This process was profoundly global. Wealth extracted from colonies through the Atlantic slave trade, plantation agriculture, mineral plunder and coerced labour supplied European states with capital crucial for industrial expansion (Williams, 1944; Blackburn, 1997). Merchant profits were reinvested in manufacturing, fusing commercial and industrial capital into a unified system. Recent scholarship continues to emphasise these global linkages, arguing that capitalism emerged through interconnected systems of extraction spanning Europe, Africa, the Americas, and Asia (Beckert, 2014; Mignolo, 2018). Primitive accumulation therefore created not only proletarianised workers in Europe but also underdeveloped economies in the Global South, establishing hierarchies that shape the contemporary world economy.

The Role of Peasants in Historical Transformations

Peasants have been central actors in every major epoch of social transformation not merely as victims of structural change but as agents who have shaped historical outcomes. Throughout history, peasants have engaged in everyday forms of resistance, from foot-dragging and sabotage to tax evasion and land occupation. In moments of acute crisis, these quiet forms of resistance have erupted into full-scale revolts, such as the English Peasants' Revolt of 1381, the German Peasants' War of 1525, and anticolonial uprisings across Africa and Asia. In many cases, such mobilizations forced concessions, altered property regimes or destabilised ruling classes.

At the same time, peasants have been among the primary victims of land dispossession, forced labour and state extraction, particularly during periods of capitalist expansion, colonial rule and modern development interventions. Yet their adaptive strategies migration, crop diversification, selective market participation, or the formation of cooperatives have allowed them to endure profound structural disruptions. In postcolonial states, peasants often constituted the foundation of nationalist movements and remained essential to food security, labour supply and rural social cohesion. Contemporary scholarship continues to emphasise their political significance, noting that peasant movements such as La Vía Campesina have reasserted global debates on food sovereignty, climate justice, and agrarian rights (Borras, Edelman & Kay, 2008; Patel, 2009).

Lessons from Global Comparative Agrarian Change

Comparative agrarian studies illuminate the diverse and uneven trajectories of peasant transformation across regions. Europe's feudal-to-capitalist transition cannot be generalised to Asia, Latin America or Africa, where colonial domination, plantation economies and varying land-tenure systems produced distinct agrarian outcomes. A key lesson is that peasantries persist and adapt even under conditions of advanced capitalism. Rather than disappearing, they often evolve into hybrid forms combining subsistence agriculture, wage labour, migration, and small-scale market production (Shanin, 1973; Bernstein, 2010). Another insight is that external pressures, global markets, state policies, technological interventions tend to amplify internal contradictions within rural societies. They accelerate class differentiation and encourage commercialisation, but they rarely eliminate peasant forms of production. Development, moreover is consistently uneven: periods of economic expansion often coincide with heightened dispossession, rural impoverishment, and environmental degradation. Yet peasant agency remains a critical variable shaping agrarian outcomes. Through collective action, local innovation, and political mobilisation, peasants have influenced land reforms, challenged extractive institutions, and contributed to broader democratic struggles. As Ogali (2021) emphasises, understanding peasantries requires appreciating both their vulnerability to structural forces and their capacity for historical agency.

Peasants, Colonialism, and Integration into the Global Economy

The incorporation of African peasantries into the global capitalist economy was neither natural nor voluntary; it was engineered through processes of conquest, coercion, and

structural reorganization. Colonialism fundamentally altered the economic and social foundations of African rural life by subordinating peasant production to the needs of European industry and commerce. Through land alienation, taxation, labour extraction and market manipulation, colonial regimes repositioned peasants from autonomous producers into peripheral suppliers of raw materials for global capitalism. The long-term implications of this transformation continue to define development challenges in many African countries today.

The Peasantry under Colonial Economic Structures

Before the advent of colonial rule, African peasantries were embedded in complex, vibrant economic systems that connected local producers to extensive regional and long-distance trade networks. From the Hausa emirates and Yoruba markets of West Africa to the Indian Ocean commercial circuits of the Swahili Coast, peasants actively exchanged agricultural surplus, artisanal goods, and specialized commodities through well-developed institutions of trade, taxation, and statecraft. Colonialism did not introduce commerce to Africa; rather, it disrupted and restructured these systems to serve the priorities of European industrial expansion. Once territorial conquest had been formalized through treaties, coercion and the Berlin Conference partition colonial administrations reorganised agrarian economies around the extraction of primary commodities, administrative centralisation and the subordination of African economic life to metropolitan interests. Under this new structure, decisions regarding what peasants produced, the prices they received, and the conditions under which they laboured were no longer determined internally but dictated by distant imperial markets and bureaucracies. As Ake (1981) and Ogali (2021) both argue, peasants were recast not as partners in development but as instruments of resource extraction whose labour underwrote imperial accumulation while offering little prospect for local advancement.

Colonial Policies and Peasant Production

Colonial governments deployed an array of coercive and economic policies designed to reshape African peasant production in line with imperial needs. Taxation particularly poll taxes, hut taxes and head taxes compelled rural households to earn cash, often forcing them into wage labour or into the cultivation of export crops regardless of their benefits or risks. Forced labour and compulsory cultivation schemes were also widespread, requiring peasants to work on colonial plantations, build roads and railways or grow designated cash crops such as cotton, tea or coffee under threat of punishment. Land alienation was perhaps the most destructive of these policies: in settler colonies including Kenya, Zimbabwe and South Africa, fertile lands were seized for European settlers, pushing Africans into overcrowded reserves or transforming them into migrant labourers dependent on wages. Colonial economies also reoriented cropping systems by prioritizing export commodities like cocoa, cotton, groundnuts, and rubber over food crops. This disrupted household labour patterns, altered diets, expanded gendered divisions of labour, and weakened communal systems of subsistence. These policies entrenched structural dependency by reorganizing rural life around the needs of the empire while eroding the indigenous mechanisms that had sustained African societies for centuries.

Integration into the Global Market

African integration into the global capitalist economy was neither voluntary nor mutually beneficial; it was enforced through the colonial restructuring of production and trade. As peasants became suppliers of raw materials essential for European industrialisation, they were simultaneously exposed to the volatility and inequalities of global commodity markets. Structural price asymmetries meant that while African primary products were purchased cheaply, imported manufactured goods textiles, machinery, processed foods were sold at far higher prices, creating a persistent deficit in the terms of trade. Dependency deepened as African economies specialized in exporting unprocessed goods while relying on Europe for industrial outputs. International price fluctuations further destabilized peasant livelihoods, making rural incomes vulnerable to distant market shocks. Scholars such as Amin (1976) and Adebayo (2020) highlight that this coerced integration entrenched a pattern of unequal exchange that continues to shape African economic relations today. Thus, although peasants generated substantial wealth for global markets, they retained only a marginal share of the value, reinforcing a structural imbalance that persists well into the postcolonial era.

Peasant Economy and the Growth of Capitalism

Colonialism played a pivotal role in consolidating global capitalism by supplying metropolitan economies with raw materials, expanding overseas markets and producing vast pools of cheap labour. Peasants were central to this process in at least three major respects. First, they produced the agricultural commodities such as Ghanaian cocoa, Nigerian palm oil, Congolese rubber, Senegalese groundnuts and East African coffee that fed European manufacturing industries. Second through taxation, land dispossession and the collapse of independent rural economies, colonial regimes generated large reserves of migrant labour for mines, plantations and public works. Third is colonial governments extracted surplus directly from peasant production through low producer prices, export duties, compulsory contributions and discriminatory marketing systems. These extraction mechanisms transferred enormous resources to metropolitan economies while inhibiting structural transformation at home. As Rodney (1972) and more recent analyses such as Beckert (2014) demonstrate, the rise of industrial capitalism cannot be understood without acknowledging the foundational contributions of colonised peoples particularly peasants whose labour and land were appropriated to fuel economic growth elsewhere. In this sense, African peasantries were integral to global capitalist development even as colonial policies foreclosed similar opportunities for local industrialisation and social advancement.

The Political Economy of Marketing Boards

Marketing boards, introduced from the 1930s onward, were ostensibly established to stabilise producer incomes and protect peasants from the volatility of global commodity prices. In practice, however, they became powerful tools of state-led extraction. In monopolizing purchasing and export functions, marketing boards routinely paid peasants artificially low prices while accumulating vast surpluses for colonial administrations and later for postcolonial governments. These funds were often channelled into urban infrastructure, political patronage networks and bureaucratic expansion rather than rural development. Intermediaries, produce inspectors and political elites exploited the system further, capturing

additional margins between the farm-gate and export prices. This institutionalized exploitation provoked significant rural resistance, most notably the Agbekoya uprising in Western Nigeria in 1968, where peasants revolted against oppressive pricing, arbitrary taxation and abuses by marketing board officials. As contemporary studies such as Watts and Bassett (2017) show, the legacy of marketing boards continues to influence agricultural policy debates today, particularly concerning state control, price stabilisation and producer autonomy.

Mechanisms of Peasant Exploitation

Across colonial and postcolonial contexts, peasant exploitation has manifested through a range of structural mechanisms that systematically transfer surplus from rural producers to states, elites and global markets. Unequal exchange ensures that primary commodities remain undervalued while manufactured goods remain prohibitively expensive, locking peasants into disadvantageous market positions. Land dispossession whether through settler colonialism, infrastructure development or contemporary land grabs removes peasants from their means of production, often without adequate compensation. Labour extraction persists not only in overt forms such as forced labour during colonial rule but also through migrant labour systems that fracture households and intensify women's labour burdens. Financial manipulation through exploitative credit schemes, politicized cooperatives and biased input distribution traps peasants in cycles of indebtedness. Price manipulation by state agencies and multinational firms depresses farm-gate prices to secure surpluses for political or commercial gain. Finally, bureaucratic and professional exploitation from high fees for legal and medical services to administrative bottlenecks adds further burdens on already precarious rural livelihoods. As Ogali (2021) notes, these mechanisms reflect a broader structural logic in which rural producers remain the most expendable yet essential contributors to national and global economies.

Post-Colonial Legacies and Contemporary Development Challenges

Post-independence African states inherited colonial economic structures oriented toward extraction, urban bias and export dependency. Despite political liberation, many early nationalist governments-maintained marketing boards, tax regimes and urban-centred development strategies that limited the autonomy and welfare of the peasantry. Rural areas continued to receive disproportionately low public investment relative to their economic contributions, perpetuating uneven development and reinforcing spatial inequalities. This structural continuity left peasant communities vulnerable to global commodity price fluctuations, food insecurity and environmental degradation. Contemporary challenges such as climate change, demographic pressures, land grabs by multinational corporations and volatile global markets are compounded by these colonial legacies. Yet the resilience of African peasantries remains evident in their continued role in food production, cultural reproduction and local innovation. As recent scholarship argues, meaningful development in Africa requires confronting the historical foundations of rural marginalisation and pursuing policies that prioritise land security, equitable markets, climate adaptation and peasant-centred development strategies (Moyo & Yeros, 2011; Scoones et al., 2022). Without structural transformation, peasants will continue to bear the disproportionate costs of integration into a global economy that remains profoundly unequal.

Conclusion

The historical and contemporary experiences of the peasantry reveal a social category that has remained central to global economic transformations while simultaneously bearing the heaviest burdens of exploitation, dispossession and structural marginalization. Across slave societies, feudal economies, colonial occupations and modern capitalist expansion, peasants have played indispensable roles as food producers, labour suppliers and bearers of rural social reproduction. This chapter has demonstrated that far from being an archaic remnant of premodern life, the peasantry has continually adapted to changing social formations, even when those formations were explicitly organised to suppress, extract from or replace them. From internal differentiation within agrarian economies to the externally imposed pressures of conquest, market integration and state intervention, peasants have shaped and been shaped by the dynamics of social transformation at every major historical juncture.

A central argument emerging from this analysis is that peasant studies remain profoundly relevant in understanding contemporary development debates. The agrarian question continues to frame struggles over land, labour, food systems, gendered inequalities and environmental sustainability. The persistence of peasant agriculture despite centuries of predictions of its disappearance makes it clear that peasantries are not merely transitional but are integral to the functioning of many economies in the Global South. They maintain large portions of the world's food supply, generate livelihoods for millions and anchor cultural, ecological and social systems that cannot be substituted by industrial agriculture without catastrophic effects. Contemporary scholarship increasingly recognizes peasants as agents rather than passive victims, capable of forging political movements, shaping land rights discourses, resisting dispossession and demanding equitable participation in national development.

Looking to the future, the prospects of the peasantry in the Global South are marked by contradictions. On the one hand, land grabs, climate change, agrarian capitalism and the deepening integration of rural economies into volatile global markets threaten their survival and autonomy. On the other hand, movements for food sovereignty, sustainable agriculture, environmental justice and community-based resource management illustrate a renaissance of peasant agency. Technological shifts, demographic changes and new forms of rural–urban linkages may redefine but not erase the peasantry. The evidence suggests that rather than disappearing, peasant livelihoods are adapting in hybrid forms that combine subsistence activity, market participation, wage labour, migration and informal economies. The future of peasantries therefore hinges on political choices: whether states and global institutions continue extractive models of development or adopt frameworks that value and protect rural producers.

For development policy and practice, this analysis underscores the need for a paradigm shift. Policies must move beyond the longstanding urban bias and commodity-export orientation that have undermined rural wellbeing since the colonial period. A development agenda that recognizes the centrality of peasants must prioritise secure land rights, equitable market access, infrastructural investment, farmer-centred research, climate resilience and democratic

participation in governance. Moreover, understanding peasant economies requires abandoning stereotypes of inefficiency and backwardness and instead acknowledging their sophisticated knowledge systems, ecological stewardship and social embeddedness. Genuine rural transformation cannot be achieved by displacing peasants or subordinating them to agribusiness interests; it requires strengthening their capabilities and supporting their autonomy. The future of development in the Global South is inseparable from the fate of its peasantries, whose struggles, resilience and labour continue to shape both national economies and global systems of production.

References

- Ake, C. (1981). *A political economy of Africa (pp. viii–196)*. Longman.
<https://archive.org/details/politiceconomy0000akec/mode/2up>
- Ake, C. (1981). *A political economy of Africa*, London: Longman.
- Akram-Lodhi, A. H., & Kay, C. (Eds.). (2010). *Peasants and globalization: Political economy, rural transformation and the agrarian question (1st ed.)*, Routledge.
- Amin, S. (1974). *Accumulation on a world scale*, New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Akram-Lodhi, A. H., & Kay, C. (2010). *Peasants and globalization: Political economy, agrarian transformation and development*. Routledge.
- Bernstein, H. (2010). *Class dynamics of agrarian change*, Kumarian Press.
- Bianco, L. (2008). Peasants and Revolution: The Case of China, *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 2(3), 313–335.
- Bloch, Marc (2004). *Feudal Society: The growth of ties of dependence, Vol. 1*. New York: Taylor and Francis.
- Blackburn, R. (1997). *The Making of New York Slavery*, Verso: New York.
- Berry, S. (1993) *No condition is permanent: The social dynamics of Agrarian change in Sub-Saharan Africa*. University of Wisconsin Press, Madison.
- Chayanov, A. V. (1986). *The Theory of Peasant Economy, with a new introduction by Teodor Shanin*, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Coquery-Vidrovitch, C. (1977). "Research on African Mode of Production", in P. Gutkind & P. Waterman (eds.), *African Social Studies*.
- Dobb, M. (1963). *Studies in the development of capitalism*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

- Edelman, M. (2013). *What is a peasant? What are peasantries? A briefing paper on issues of definition*, United Nations Human Rights Council. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/WGPleasants/MarcEdelman.pdf>
- Engels, F. (1978). *Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Peking: Foreign Languages Press.
- Hobsbawm, E. J. (1973). Peasants and Politics, *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 1(1), 3–22.
- Harriss-White, B. (2020). *Dalit capitalism: State, markets and the making of a new middle class in India*. Routledge.
- Lenin, V. I. (1964). *The development of capitalism in Russia*, Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1977). *The eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*". In *Selected Works, Vol. 1*, Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- McLaughlin, P. (1998). Rethinking the Agrarian question: The Limits of essentialism and the Promise of Evolutionism, *Human Ecology Review*, 5(2), 27–39.
- Ogali, M. D. (2021). *Peasants and social transformation: An essentialist approach (2nd ed., pp. 42–243)*. S.P. Shapea Publishers. (Original work published 2017)
- Oya, C. (2021). Structural transformation, agricultural change and industrialisation in Africa: Challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 21(4), 602–626.
- Patel, R. (2012). *Stuffed and starved: The hidden battle for the world food system (Updated ed.)*, Portobello Books.
- Post, C. (2010). Review of Peasants and globalization: Political economy, rural transformation and the agrarian question, by A. H. Akram-Lodhi & C. Kay, *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 10(1), 143–146. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-0366.2009.00254.x>
- Rodney, W. (1972). *How Europe underdeveloped Africa*, London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications.
- Redfield, R. (1956). *Peasant society and culture: An anthropological approach to civilization*, University of Chicago Press.
- Rosset, P. M., & Martínez-Torres, M. E. (2016). Agroecology, food sovereignty and the new green revolution, *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 43(1), 68–92.

- Rufus, A. (2026 a). *Contending issues in politics of development and underdevelopment in Africa*, University of Port Harcourt Printing Press, Port Harcourt.
- Rufus, A. (2026 b). *Issues in peace, conflict and development studies: an introductory approach to political order in a changing world*, University of Port Harcourt Printing Press, Port Harcourt.
- Rufus, A. (2026 c). *Oracles of political theory*, University of Port Harcourt Printing Press Port Harcourt.
- Rufus, A. & Joseph, P. E. (2016). Peasants and Life-Coping Strategies in the Nigeria's Niger Delta Region. *Wilberforce Journal of Social Sciences*. 1(2)
- Shanin, T. (1968). The peasantry as a political factor, *Sociologija i Prostor*, (19–20), 25–42. <https://hrcak.srce.hr/121356>
- Shanin, T. (1971). Peasantry: Delineation of a sociological concept and a field of study, *European Journal of Sociology / Archives Européennes de Sociologie / Europäisches Archiv für Soziologie*, 12(2), 289–300. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23998674>
- Sweezy, P. (1962). *Theory of capitalist development*, London: Dobson Books.
- Scoones, I., Hall, R., Edelman, M., Wolford, W., White, B., & Borras, S. M. Jr. (2022). Politics of land: Towards an expanded understanding. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 49(1), 1–28.
- Shanin, T. (1972). *The awkward class: Political sociology of peasantry in a developing society*, Russia 1910–1925. Oxford University Press.
- Vanhaute, E. (2010). *Peasants and Depeasantization.* " *Handbook of World-Systems Analysis*, Ghent University version, August.
- Vanhaute, E. (2021). *Peasants in world history (1st ed.)*, Routledge. <https://www.routledge.com/Peasants-in-World-History/Vanhaute/p/book/9780415740944>
- Williams, E. (1944). *Capitalism and slavery*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Wolf, E. R. (1966). *Peasants (Illustrated ed.)*, Prentice-Hall. <https://archive.org/details/peasants00wolf/mode/2up>