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**OIL AND THE DISAPPEARING PEASANTRY:
ACCUMULATION, DIFFERENTIATION,
AND UNDERDEVELOPMENT IN
WESTERN NIGERIA**

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OIL AND THE DISAPPEARING PEASANTRY:

ACCUMULATION, DIFFERENTIATION AND UNDERDEVELOPMENT IN WESTERN NIGERIA

By Sara S. Berry

The growth of the petroleum industry appears to have brought about dramatic changes in the structure of the Nigerian economy since 1970. In less than a decade, agriculture's share of gross domestic product (GDP) declined from roughly one-half to less than 30 percent, and its erstwhile preeminence as generator of state revenues and foreign exchange all but vanished. By the mid-1970's, oil accounted for over 80 percent of Federal revenue and more than 90 percent of Nigeria's annual foreign exchange earnings. Manufacturing increased as a share of GDP, but only to 12 percent by the late 1970's. And neither manufacturing nor mining itself - which grew from 10 to 30 percent of GDP in less than a decade - generated proportional increases in employment opportunities. Most of the the people who left farming during the 1970's were absorbed in the tertiary sector. Many found jobs in the civil service, which grew apace, but perhaps even more significant was the proliferation of private enterprise - especially small-scale commercial, transport, and artisanal concerns, engaged in distributing and maintaining the flood of imported commodities purchased with oil revenues by the state, its employees, and its clients. By the end of the 1970's, Nigeria had clearly ceased to qualify as a predominantly agrarian economy.¹

If we look at processes rather than indicators, however, the argument that the growth of oil exports effected rapid and significant structural change is somewhat less persuasive. Both state and economy remain heavily dependent on foreign capital; domestic accumulation continues to be mainly commercial rather than industrial; and the state continues to play a major role in the regulation of foreign transactions and the absorption of domestic surplus. As in the colonial period, the state occupies a crucial position vis-a-vis Nigerians' access to foreign markets and resources. While oil has financed the extension and consolidation of the power of the ruling class, it has not changed the basis on which its power rests. Nor has it altered the structure or focus of Nigerian politics. The perennial demand for the creation of more states simply carries on the pattern of regional and ethnic competition for state controlled resources which was established under colonial rule and dominated the history of the First Republic. In short, the growth of oil production and exports has served less to bring about unprecedented structural change than to reveal with unprecedented clarity economic, social and political processes which have been under way for some time.

In the present essay, I shall develop this argument on both an empirical and a theoretical level. The argument of the paper is based on a case study of accumulation and social mobility among Yoruba cocoa farmers and their descendants. Using material from the life histories of farmers and farmers' children, I trace the changing uses of agricultural surplus and their

implications for the structure of western Nigerian economy and society, and for the terms on which cocoa farmers have participated in it, both before and after the development of the petroleum industry. From the empirical discussion, I go on to re-examine on a theoretical level the nature of accumulation arising from the expansion of export crop production during the colonial period and after, and the historical relationship between accumulation, differentiation, and political action in western Nigeria. Since the theoretical argument grew out of the case study, I shall describe the latter first.

The Case Study

The case study was designed to investigate the changing role of agriculture in the transformation of the regional economy by tracing lifetime patterns of resource allocation by cocoa farmers and their descendants. My approach rests on the notion that "people make their own history, but not exactly as they please" - i.e., that individuals' experiences are shaped by larger social processes but also contribute to them and that, therefore, it is necessary to study individual histories and social processes simultaneously and in relation to each other. In the present case, I set out to map historical patterns of migration, exchange and social interaction between cocoa farming villages and the rest of the regional economy and society, and to collect life histories of resource use and social relations for individuals at various points on that map. The field research, conducted in 1978-1979, began in two cocoa villages southeast of Ife, in the heart of the Nigerian cocoa belt. I had conducted a previous study in one of the villages (in 1970-1971), and was thus in a position to observe directly changes which occurred during the first years of large-scale petroleum exports.

Like most villages in that area today, these two were established by migrant farmers from Yoruba communities in the savannah, who came to the forest belt to plant cocoa during the period of rising prices in the late 1940's and early 1950's (Berry, 1975; cf. Olusanya, et al., 1978). Migrant farmers acquired long-term use rights, but not freehold title, to rural land from local families. As their farms matured, they built houses near them and established permanent villages throughout the cocoa belt. They did not, however, sever connections with their home towns, but continued to visit there regularly, to participate in local political and family affairs, and often to invest part of their agricultural earnings in home-based projects or assets. Similarly, farmers who profited from cocoa production did not reinvest all of their proceeds in cocoa or other forms of agricultural production, but often diversified into trade or other small-scale service enterprise and/or trained their children for non-agricultural employment. At the time of my field work, 60 percent of the children (aged 10 or more) of farmers residing in the two villages had left the villages either to work or to attend school. Of the emigrant children, fewer than 15 percent were occupied in farming. Most of the rest were engaged in trade or other service activities: most commonly, as schoolteachers, drivers, motor mechanics and traders.

In addition to collecting life histories from some sixty men and women residing in the villages, I also followed up their links with extra-village communities and enterprises. Specifically, I selected two occupations common among farmers' children (teaching and motor repair) and carried out small-scale studies of these occupations similar to the village studies. The institutional setting of the non-agricultural studies varied with the

occupation: in the case of mechanics, I worked through the Ife Mechanics Association; in the case of teachers, I conducted interviews in several schools attended or staffed, in part, by descendants of the home town from which most of my rural informants had also migrated. In addition, I spent a good deal of time in that home town, collecting information on the history of town development and on emigrants' participation in local affairs. In this phase of the study, I traced a number of individual emigrants from the town, including a number of relatively well-to-do professionals, civil servants and businessmen, and interviewed them both about their own careers and about the history of the town. Throughout my research, I attempted both to record life histories of individual men and women and to observe their participation in various institutions and social arenas, including household, work place, home community and occupationally based organizations. The resulting body of information is intended to contribute to our understanding of social processes by examining individuals' participation in them.

As I interviewed and observed residents of the two cocoa villages, it became clear that the strategies with which farmers were attempting to cope with declining farm income and opportunity in the 1970's were not very different from those they had employed to capitalize on an expanding agricultural market in the 1950's and 1960's. Migration to the cocoa belt was, for most of my informants, part of a lifetime process of accumulation - or attempted accumulation. Since the early years of the colonial period, Yorubas had sought access to cash income through wage employment, trade and agricultural production for the market. Often, cocoa farms were established with savings from previous periods of wage employment or petty trade (cf. Peel, 1980), and the proceeds were reinvested, in part, in additional income-generating ventures. Many farmers acquired at least one additional plot of cocoa - an investment which, once land in the vicinity of their initial farm had been taken up, entailed further migration and the problems of effectively managing widely scattered farms. Accordingly, farmers often preferred to diversify into trade - where the potential scale of accumulation was considerably greater than in cocoa growing - and most sought to train their children for non-agricultural careers. While a great many farmers (and their sons) never left cocoa growing, they tended to regard cocoa as a means to enter potentially more lucrative sectors of the economy rather than as an end in itself. In 1978, 45 percent of the adult men living in the larger of my two villages were engaged in trade, craft or other service occupations (compared to 30 percent in 1971), and I recorded at least a dozen cases of men who'd left the village altogether to specialize in trade during the same period. The development of the oil economy accelerated the rate at which people were leaving the cocoa sector, but did not alter their underlying strategies of mobility and accumulation.

Oil did, however, affect the conditions which determine the likely outcome of farmers' strategies. The rate at which farmers could accumulate and/or diversify their assets has always depended to a great extent on the price they received for their cocoa. This was determined in western Nigeria not only by changing world market conditions, but also by the monopoly power of foreign firms and the state. During the 1920's and 1930's, the British condoned the consolidation of firms' buying power in both Nigeria and the Gold Coast, thus shifting much of the burden of fluctuations in foreign demand onto the cocoa growers. When, in protest, a coalition of African middlemen and growers held the bulk of the Gold Coast crop off the market, in 1938, the colonial state took over the marketing of cocoa directly - not only in the Gold Coast, but

also in Nigeria (Hopkins, 1966; Beckman, 1976). Thereafter, the domestic price of cocoa became a central focus of conflict between Yoruba farmers and the state. As the state emerged as the chief appropriator of agricultural surplus, farmers' resentment at their own limited share of that surplus focussed on the state. Antagonism towards state intervention in the cocoa sector gave rise to organized and sometimes violent opposition, by the Maiyegun League in the 1950's and the Agbekoya Movement in the late '60s. In the sixties especially the disturbances included attacks on local officials and forced the closure of local government offices in some rural areas of Ibadan for up to two years.

Some observers have concluded that these incidents heralded a trend towards increasing peasant solidarity and militant opposition to the existing political and economic order (Beer and Williams, 1975; Williams, 1976). Farmers certainly resented state exploitation, but not because it "threatened their way of life" (Williams, 1976). Rather, they resented interference with their own efforts to accumulate, and exclusion from state-controlled resources and opportunities outside the agricultural economy. When revenues from oil soared in the 1970's, the state no longer needed to extract surplus from the peasants: accordingly, the cocoa price was raised in the wake of Agbekoya, and continued to increase as world market prices advanced during the seventies. The producer price in Nigeria went from N310 in 1970/1971 to N1,030 in 1977/1978. Farmers' incomes did not, however, keep pace. Not only did inflation nullify much of the apparent rise in the real value of a given quantity of cocoa, but the cost of rural labor rose even faster than the cocoa price, as more and more people sought to take advantage of the growing volume of trade and speculative activity generated by the revenues from oil. Many farmers could no longer afford to hire labor to maintain their farms, and output began to decline, especially in some of the older cocoa growing area. Many of my informants were worse off at the end of the decade than they had been in 1969, at the end of a fifteen year decline in the cocoa price.

Despite the worsening of cocoa farmers' position in the 1970's, the militant demonstrations of the '50's and '60's were not repeated. Oil removed the need for state exploitation of the cocoa farmers and, in so doing, eliminated the principal incentive for farmers to organize or to identify themselves as peasants in order to protest exploitation or to improve their economic circumstances. As the structure of opportunities shifted decisively away from agriculture in the 1970's, farmers reacted by abandoning their efforts to act collectively as cocoa producers and redoubling their efforts to leave agriculture, as individuals and as families. In addition to the farmers mentioned above who moved into trade or other service enterprise during the decade, the proportion of farmers sending one or more of their children to secondary school more than doubled. Those who couldn't afford post-primary schooling almost invariably apprenticed their sons and daughters to traders, artisans or other small-scale non-agricultural entrepreneurs. The only time during my fieldwork when I heard farmers mention the possibility of organized resistance to the state occurred during a discussion of the costs of secondary schooling. Some of my informants had heard rumors that the government was planning to impose a new tax on secondary school pupils and opined that, if that happened, there would be "trouble."

The farmers in my survey villages had not participated directly in Agbekoya, which was largely confined to the western half of the cocoa belt. During the 1960's they had, however, organized several local societies (egbe) whose members pooled their cocoa in order to bypass small rural buyers and

sell directly to a licensed buying agent or large cocoa buyer in Ife. By doing so they could obtain a slightly better price for their cocoa. The money so collected was used by the society to pay a fellow villager to keep written records of members' sales, to make loans to members in need and to increase the farmers' own earnings from their crop. The societies had no connection with the state-sponsored Cooperative Marketing Union or the Western State Farmers' Union. They were completely local in origin and composition and represented an alternative to militant resistance in farmers' efforts to increase their share of the export crop value. During the seventies, however, the societies' turnover declined to a point at which they could no longer afford to keep operating. The collapse of the village marketing societies was a further example of the demise of peasant-based collective activity in the era of petronaira.

Instead, farmers' collective activities shifted towards descent-based networks and institutions. Many joined in efforts to reorganize the annual family meeting in their natal compounds along the lines of a corporate enterprise (with officers, written minutes and a bank account), in order to improve the descent group's chances of access to profitable opportunities and resources. Similarly, during the election campaign of 1978/1979, most of my informants supported the UPN - both because the party promised to expand educational opportunities and because its candidate for Deputy Governor of Oyo State was a son of their home town. In short, the growth of petroleum revenues reinforced the importance of education and politics as means to wealth and power in western Nigeria, but undermined the efficacy of peasant militancy as a strategy of access to them. Accordingly, farmers fell back on the principal alternative set of social relations available to them - those based on descent - in their efforts to seek a better life for themselves and their children.

The foregoing picture of intergenerational rural emigration and occupational mobility derived from the testimony of village residents is, on the whole, borne out by the experiences of my informants in town. Just as the children of my rural informants were for the most part attending school or working outside of agriculture, so the majority of teachers, mechanics and even professionals whom I interviewed were sons and daughters of cocoa farmers. Like their parents, teachers and mechanics shared lifetime ambitions of accumulation and upward mobility. Their chances of realizing these aspirations and their strategies for doing so were, however, shaped by the particular circumstances of their employment. Unlike cocoa farmers, mechanics faced an expanding market in the 1970's - although the hardships and tensions felt throughout the economy when oil revenues dipped indicated just how dependent all small scale enterprise was on the fortunes of the petroleum industry. Perhaps as a result, the mechanics I studied were, on the whole, investing more in their firms and less in the education of their children than were the farmers. The principal limits on the expansion of mechanics' firms were the competitiveness of the market and the difficulty of controlling the labor of their apprentices.

The competitiveness of markets for services such as motor repair is directly related to the exodus of people from agriculture seeking opportunities for self-employment in towns and cities. This exodus has been greatly stimulated by the increased traffic in commodities - both domestic and imported - resulting from the inflow of oil revenues in the region as a whole. In the town of Ile-Ife, where I studied the motor repair industry, there had been a phenomenal influx of people into the market during the 1970's, under

the combined influence of oil and the growth of the university on the outskirts of town. In 1972, a survey of small-scale enterprises in Ife listed 212 persons engaged in motor repair (Aluko, et al., 1972), a figure which included apprentices as well as master mechanics and journeymen. In 1979, the Ife Mechanics Association had 1,256 registered members - excluding apprentices, who were not permitted to join the association until they had completed their training.

Despite the rapidly intensifying competitive pressures in the motor repair business in Ife, a number of my informants had managed to build up fairly successful businesses. Problems of labor supervision increased, however, in direct proportion to the growth of a firm. Most mechanics employ apprentices rather than hired workers. Apprentice labor has the tremendous advantage of not having to be paid and therefore minimizes the firm's need for working capital. The main disadvantage is that the principal incentive for apprentices to work efficiently (or at all) is the threat of the master's displeasure. To enforce any kind of labor discipline masters need, therefore to be present in the shop. (This need was reinforced by mechanics' reluctance to delegate responsibility to inexperienced or unsupervised apprentices. In most of the shops I observed, no job could be started nor payment accepted without the master's personal authorization. When the master was not physically present in the shop, his own rules of management tended to prevent any work being done at all.) As a firm grows, however, the master also has to spend more and more time away from the shop - personally negotiating for credit or spare parts, or cultivating good relations with potential customers on whose patronage the survival of the firm ultimately depends. Thus growth generates contradictory managerial requirements which constrain the possibility of profitable expansion of the firm. In Ife, the Mechanics Association struggled to help its members cope with these problems - largely without success. The Association was powerless to restrict entry into the market, largely because members' need for apprentices preempted any effort to use the apprentice system to limit access to the trade. Efforts to act as a debt collection agency were somewhat more effective, but did not obviate the necessity for mechanics to spend time away from the shop building their own networks of clients and creditors. And, as a political lobbying group within the town, the IMA's effectiveness was limited by the potential for sectional conflict among its own members.² In short, solidarity among the mechanics of Ife was fragile, despite very real shared interests, and their efforts at collective action were largely symbolic, both in form and effect.

If mechanics were struggling to become successfully self-sufficient in a growing but risky market, teachers held relatively secure but low-paid jobs in an increasingly stratified profession. Nigeria's educational system has expanded enormously in the last thirty years, and especially since 1970, in response both to popular demand and to the desire of the ruling elite to professionalize both the production and the conduct of public affairs. Recruitment to all levels of the civil service is now formally tied to educational qualifications and education is also becoming increasingly important for success in private enterprise - not because schooling imparts crucial productive or managerial skills, but because it is a condition for building effective relationships with educated bureaucrats and politicians who dispose of government loans and contracts or control the enforcement of government rules and regulations. Educational expansion has, in turn, involved both increased educational opportunities and intensified state efforts to control access to them. In 1970's, the reinstatement of plans for universal

primary education was accompanied by full nationalization of the school system. All teachers are now members of the civil service, and educational policy is completely controlled by the state. At the same time, the educational system has become increasingly stratified internally, both through the proliferation of levels of higher education and through differential access to schools within a given level.³ In the process, primary school teachers have slipped from a fairly prominent position in the small professional class of colonial days, to the bottom of a large and increasingly differentiated class of educated people today.

In the process, school teachers have lost political as well as economic status. In the 1950's, teachers constituted the largest occupational group in the Western Region House of Assembly and dominated elected local government offices in many areas (Abernethy, 1969). The Nigeria Union of Teachers, which had been organized in the early 1930's, functioned primarily as a professional association, pleased to be consulted by the colonial regime on matters of educational policy and reluctant to press for higher wages. By the late 1970's, primary school teachers were relatively low-level state employees - pleased to earn a little extra money supervising rural ballot boxes for FEDECO in the 1979 elections - and the NUT had become a mass organization whose members succeeded in shutting down the schools in Oyo State for most of December 1978, in a strike protesting non-payment of salary arrears.

Schoolteachers' response to the relative proletarianization of their position was still confined, in the late 1970's, to working within the system. Teachers whom I interviewed were spending more on education than either farmers or mechanics. Married men and women in their thirties and forties were devoting a substantial part of their earnings to their children's education, while younger unmarried teachers were saving for their own further training and/or contributing to the school fees of their siblings. Like cocoa farmers in the past, young teachers regarded their jobs as temporary - a means to personal upward mobility and further accumulation, rather than as a lifetime profession. Similarly, older teachers were attempting to train their children beyond the levels they'd completed themselves, to facilitate their upward mobility in the future. Members of the NUT, like farmers who participated in village-level cooperative marketing societies or larger-scale movements such as Agbekoya, were agitating for higher wages and better terms of employment as a means to further accumulation as well as current consumption. The principal difference between farmers and teachers in the 1970's was that, as state employees, teachers were in a position to exert collective pressure on the state, whereas cocoa farmers had lost whatever leverage they once possessed as producers of a major share of state revenues. Mechanics never possessed such leverage, vis-a-vis the state or any other class or institution, and their efforts to organize on occupational lines were primarily symbolic.

With the exception of the teachers (who were automatically members of the NUT), most of the working people I studied were not organized as workers to exert pressure on the state. Apart from investing in education, my informants' primary strategy for gaining access to state-controlled resources and opportunities was through descent-based networks and institutions. Under colonial rule, Yorubas were often encouraged (or constrained) to base claims to property and government services on relations of descent and/or traditions of origin. The bitterness of postcolonial struggles over the constitution and control of Nigeria's federal system attests to their continuing importance as instruments of access to wealth and power. In pursuit of these ends, most of my informants who lived and worked away from their home communities (and, except

for teachers who'd requested jobs in their home towns, this included most of my informants) visited home regularly, participated in family and community meetings and conflicts, and often contributed both to the education and enterprises of individual kin, and to projects designed to develop the resources and amenities of the community as a whole. In the small savannah town I studied, descent groups were making increasingly self-conscious efforts during the 1970's to organize as agencies of accumulation. During the election campaign of 1978-1979, emigrants from all occupational and economic strata were also focussing much of their political activity on the home town. In doing so, their aim was as much to strengthen the town's claim to amenities and resources with the impending civilian regime, as to mobilize support from kinsmen and neighbors for particular parties and candidates.

In my earlier research (Berry, 1975a), I was much struck by evidence of migrant farmers' on-going commitment to their home compounds and communities and curious to know just how far descent-based institutions were operating as agencies of community investment and social transformation. Did non-farm emigrants also contribute to home town development and how were the resources mobilized by descent groups and communities actually used? What I found, in this recent study, was that apart from daily maintenance of elderly or junior relatives, emigrants' remittances to their descent groups were used primarily for school fees or building houses in or near the family compound, while contributions to community projects which weren't directly absorbed in contests for political offices or chiefly titles went to construct public buildings to house service or political activities. Between 1945 and 1979, the town had built (or started) a high school, two maternity clinics, two post offices, a town meeting hall and a palace for the *oba*. Members of the town's professional elite talked enthusiastically but vaguely of "bringing industry to the town" sometime in the future, while lamenting the fact that one of the few local "industries" of the past (commercial onion-farming by local women) had completely dried up. In short, many of the town's most educated and politically active citizens were pinning their hopes for local development on building better bridges to the state. To this end, the funds mobilized by the town from the earnings of its emigrant farmers, workers and petty traders had been largely devoted to the duplication of public facilities and the erection of monuments.

Theoretical Implications

On a theoretical level, the preceding description of personal strategies and social processes in contemporary western Nigeria suggests the following observations. The growth of oil exports hastened the demise of a conscious and mobilized peasantry in western Nigeria partly because the "peasantization" of the rural population was never more than a partial and temporary process to begin with. Cocoa farmers were peasants vis-a-vis merchants and the state, who together controlled the share of export proceeds passed on to Yoruba growers and the terms on which farmers could gain access to credit. However, there was nothing in either the technical requirements or the social organization of cocoa cultivation which acted to reproduce the peasant household, as a unit of production or as a stable residential group. Although the spread of cocoa growing in western Nigeria relied extensively on the mobilization of family labor, individuals did not work on the same farm or for the same kinsman for long periods of time. Instead, labor tended to cycle in and out of a given cocoa farm - just as cocoa farmers moved into cocoa growing and then out again, when they had saved enough to establish a more profitable form of

enterprise. Even men who had saved enough from previous occupations to employ some hired labor could rarely finance all of their need for labor during the seven years it takes a cocoa farm to mature. Most farmers relied on the assistance of their wives, children and junior siblings, as well as on hired labor, to establish their first cocoa farm and maintain their families while they did so (Berry, 1975a). Family members were not paid for their services - but, once the farm matured, the farmer was expected to fulfill his obligations as a senior member of the domestic establishment by helping his juniors to further their own careers. Thus, wives, children and junior kinsmen were released from the farm in the long run, and were often supported by their erstwhile employers while they established farms or non-agricultural enterprises of their own. Since the opportunity to further a young man's or woman's career often lay outside the village of his/her elder kinsman,⁴ junior kin tended to leave the senior's household as well as his farm. In the village which I surveyed twice - in 1971 and 1978 - the total population remained constant during that time, but 60 percent of the individual residents whom I enumerated in 1971 had departed by 1978. The people who replaced them were, for the most part, relatives of farmers established in the village: thus, the turnover occurred primarily within existing households, rather than through the disappearance of old households and the establishment of new ones. This pattern reflected the high degree of occupational and residential mobility not only among farmers' dependents, but also within farmers' own economically active lifetimes. Farmers who used part of their savings to acquire additional farms or to go into trade rarely sold or abandoned their original farms. Instead, they left them in care of a wife, junior brother or occasionally a son, while spending much of their own time away from the village in other occupations or ventures. Even small-scale agricultural or commercial accumulation often involves a high rate of spatial mobility in western Nigeria.

Taken together, the tendency for cocoa farmers and their descendants to alter or diversify their productive activities over time, and the concomitant high rates of turnover within rural households, communities and enterprises, imply that there are few forces internal to the agricultural sector which are leading to the formation of agrarian classes along either Chayanovian or Leninist lines. In western Nigeria, the impetus for both peasant solidarity and rural differentiation comes primarily from outside the agricultural sector and operates through the conditions whereby farmers seek access to non-agricultural opportunities for employment, investment or political influence. Manifestations of militant peasant solidarity, such as Maiyegun or Agbekoya, appear to have been temporary coalitions against particular instances of state intervention, rather than actions of a Chayanovian peasantry impervious to commercial penetration and collectively committed to its own autonomy and way of life. But agricultural accumulation hasn't led to the division of rural society into capitalists and proletarians either. Agricultural laborers have tended to become farmers or to leave agriculture for tertiary self-employment, while "rural capitalists" use their savings to enter trade and educate their children. Moreover, following the Yoruba practice of inheritance per stirpes, farmers bequeath their farms to their descendants as groups, rather than to favored individuals among them. Both inheritance and the structure of commercial opportunities have thus militated against the concentration of ownership of agricultural assets (Berry, 1975b). Differentiation among cocoa farmers and their descendants has arisen from differential access to non-agricultural sources of wealth and power, rather than from differential access to the means of agricultural production.

Both during and after the colonial period, accumulation in western Nigeria has been dominated by merchants and the state. In both these spheres of resource mobilization and use, accumulation has taken place often - though not entirely - on a larger scale than in agriculture, but it has not involved a fundamentally different process of exploitation or labor control. Neither agricultural nor commercial and state accumulation entailed the complete separation of workers from the means of production. Most agricultural labor was provided by people who were simultaneously self-employed (in and outside of agriculture) or who expected to be self-employed in the future. Both merchants and the state had more to gain from the preservation of a stable population of small-scale farmers, petty traders and artisans than from their dispossession. Producers were exploited through the terms of exchange - in the market, through the fiscal system and/or through different forms of clientage - rather than through the creation of a system of exclusive access to property and productive assets. As we've seen, the great majority of cocoa farmers acquired long-term use rights to land rather than outright ownership of it, and mobilized labor services in exchange for future opportunities to accumulate. Similarly, merchants depended on sharing the market in exported and imported commodities with a vast network of local traders, who bore the costs and risks of small-scale transactions, while the state relied on local chiefs and notables to facilitate the task of colonial administration. Both merchants and the state depended, in other words, on giving producers limited access to profits and power, and, hence, did not attempt systematically to exclude them from access to the means of production or the opportunity to use them to advantage.

If accumulation, both in and outside of agriculture, did not create a large class of people who had only their labor power to sell, neither did it lead to sustained increases in labor productivity. This was not due to the presence of "unlimited" supplies of labor: indeed, the very fact that most workers had access to land and small amounts of capital implies that the opportunity cost of their labor was greater than zero. Rather, it was the nature of workers' options - the terms on which they acquired and maintained access to productive resources - which constrained the effectiveness with which accumulators could control workers' activities, and hence limited the possibility of increasing productivity.

In most capitalist economies, the principal avenue of access to the means of production is through the market. To accumulate, one must acquire the means to purchase land, capital or claims thereon. Purchase, in turn, conveys exclusive rights to use or dispose of the assets so acquired, and such rights are legally sanctioned and enforceable. Historically the legitimization of private property has often served as a condition for the development of capitalist accumulation.⁵ In colonial western Nigeria, commercialization engendered increasing efforts to acquire productive assets through purchase, but titles to land or claims on debtors were not always easy to enforce. Accordingly, would-be accumulators often sought to protect their claims by developing relationships with people more powerful than themselves, whose support might help to make a claim enforceable. The aid of a wealthy or powerful patron could, in fact, be instrumental not only in defending claims to land, labor or outstanding debts (e.g., through the customary courts) but also in securing access to lucrative opportunities - to buy cheap, sell dear or attract customers. The importance of relationships of obligation and dependence as conditions of accumulation was partly a reflection of the incomplete privatization of property rights, but also derived from the predominant role of the state (both during and after the colonial period) in

controlling access to resources and opportunities. The greater the state's power to dispose of jobs, loans, contracts and especially to regulate foreign transactions, the more closely does accumulation depend on access to the state. Power is, in turn, a function of wealth as well as of the apparatus of resource control. The Nigeria state, with its oil wealth, offers accumulators far more to compete for than do poorer governments, and oil has served to enhance the importance of political connections as a condition for successful accumulation in Nigeria.⁶

Access to wealth and power may be obtained through a variety of social relations in western Nigeria. Some, like the ties of mutual obligation between patron and client, master and apprentice, or political candidate and loyal party supporter, are built up through direct interaction in processes of production, distribution and political mobilization; others rest on cultural or genealogical foundations such as language, shared cultural practices or traditions of common descent. In Yoruba society, however, even relations among close kin can be significantly strengthened or weakened by deliberate action. A person who has worked on a kinsman's farm (or in his/her firm), taken the kinsman's part in disputes, or championed his/her claim to office is more likely to receive tangible support than is another who hasn't troubled to build up the relationship through such actions. The fact that ascriptive relationships can also be achieved - through changes in ethnic identity or the adoption of kinship terms and practices among unrelated individuals - further reinforces this point.

Similarly, the possibility of a person's drawing on another's services, wealth or influence may also be enhanced by demonstrations of commitment to shared practices or social principles. David Parkin (1972) has shown how Giriama farmers sought to enhance their ability to summon credible witnesses to defend their titles to coconut palm trees in customary courts by publicly displaying their commitment to the principle of gerontocracy. Thus, rural accumulators often made generous contributions to funeral ceremonies in order to enhance their ability to acquire and defend claims to agricultural capital in the long run. (In the process, they also acted so as to uphold the local authority of the elders, rather than to use their wealth as a basis for challenging the established order.) In the Yoruba case, one can see similar tendencies at work. Many of my informants attended family meetings, contributed to the school fees of distant cousins, contested titles in their descent groups or home towns and built houses there, which stood empty most of the time - partly in order to demonstrate their commitment to the solidarity and welfare of the group, and thereby enhance their individual claims on the reciprocal support of its members should the need arise. Given especially the importance of political means of access to resources in the colonial and postcolonial order, people often used surplus to create or reinforce social relations rather than to produce or acquire the means of production per se.

This process can be seen at several levels of economic and social activity. To the extent that accumulation has been directed towards multiplying or enhancing relations of loyalty and dependence in western Nigeria, it has interfered with the development of impersonal methods of labor control and hence tended to limit increases in labor productivity. The oft-cited managerial shortcomings of Nigerian enterprise, for example, reflect the basic contradiction between entrepreneurs' desire to cut costs and their need to retain workers. If laborers are exploited too thoroughly, they are likely to exercise their options and leave in search of a more obliging patron. Hence, both agricultural and non-agricultural producers compete - not

by raising productivity to cut costs and increase profits, but by offering workers a chance of future self-employment and accumulation, in order to attract labor and raise profits by expanding the volume of the firm's business. This strategy serves not only to reduce barriers to entry and thus increase competitive pressure on all entrepreneurs in the long run, but also reproduces both the mobility of labor (among firms and occupations) and the fostering of reciprocal patron-client relationships analagous to those held to obtain among kin. As we've seen, the need to maintain such relationships often limits an entrepreneur's ability to manage an expanding business. Cousins are undesirable, as employees and as credit risks, because in the event that they malinge or default, relatives will put pressure on the defrauded proprietor to forgive his erring kinsman. However, efforts to get around this problem by employing or doing business with non-kin ultimately founder on the ubiquity of patron-client relations in Yoruba society. As one informant explained, referring to his own reluctance to use legal sanctions to recover outstanding debts, "I do not want to fight anyone over money. Who knows when we may meet again and what I might need from him then."

The importance of descent-based or analogous forms of social relations as instruments of access to wealth and power affects not only the performance of firms in western Nigeria, but also patterns of collective resource allocation and the conduct of political affairs. The literature on Yoruba economic development is full of complaints about the amount of money spent by people at all socio-economic levels on ceremonies, titles, bribes, litigation or simply interpersonal transfers (Akeredolu-Ale, 1975; Schatz, 1977; Joseph, 1978). My informants were no exception. As I noted above, in the savannah town where I did part of my research, townspeople had over the years made periodic contributions to descent group or community funds for local development, most of which were ultimately spent in relatively unproductive ways. The tendency to invest in structures and ceremonies, rather than in more directly productive assets, grows directly out of the importance of personal and political connections as a condition of accumulation. The point emerged with particular clarity during the 1970's, when the town was rent by a bitterly divisive struggle over the choice of a successor to the oba (or head chief). The central issues in the conflict were which candidate would act most effectively as a liason between the community and the state, and whose interests he would serve in doing so. The allocation of community funds during this period came to be governed almost entirely by the dispute, as various factions within the town sought first to influence the outcome and later to strengthen the chosen candidate's ability to overcome lingering local opposition and thus to deliver the united support of the town to his favored political party in the 1979 elections. In the process, the town's "development funds" were expended either on the duplication of existing facilities (clinics, post offices, etc.) within the town, or on the erection of political monuments - purchasing a car and building a palace for the oba. The very intensity of local competition for access to the state served to promote unproductive uses of community funds.

Similar contradictions operate at the level of the state. On the one hand, oil has reinforced the tendency for the state to act as a class in Nigeria - by virtue of its control over access to foreign markets and capital on which much of the domestic economy depends. The extent to which the state works (and is seen to work) to the benefit of a wealthy and powerful elite is partly reflected in ordinary people's increasing desire for education as a means for their children to enter this class, even if they cannot hope to do so themselves. At the same time, by further divorcing accumulation from

production and the control of productive work, oil has also reinforced Nigerians' propensity for political competition as an alternative means of access to state-controlled wealth. Political competition hinges, in turn, on the manipulation of descent-based and sectional loyalties, as well as class identities, as it has since the colonial period. Thus, senators and chairmen of corporation boards continue to mobilize followings by taking titles as well as offering bribes; while struggles for promotion or preferment among politicians and bureaucrats continue to involve the mobilization of kinship and ethnic ties (cf. Turner, 1978; Joseph, 1978). And the issue of creating new states remains, together with that of wage and salary scales within the civil service, at the forefront of policy debates and political campaigns - at the expense of serious discussion of ways to transform the economy or improve the living standards of the common people.

The upshot of the processes of accumulation and political competition just described is that, while investment in descent-based relations has reinforced their significance in Yoruba society as frameworks of social identity and social action, it has in no way precluded increasing exploitation and economic differentiation. As we have seen, Yoruba kinship relations entail differential rights and obligations - expressed primarily through the idiom of seniority (Aronson, 1976; Eades, 1980) - which were mobilized in the service of rural accumulation and colonial administration. Accumulation, in turn, has promoted differentiation - within kin groups and communities as well as among them. Neither production nor the political modus operandi has changed in any fundamental way since independence, or since the development of oil as the principal source of national wealth. Kinsmen are often the first to exploit as well as to patronize one another - within firms and descent groups as well as at the level of regional or national politics. Farmers who turned to their home compounds and communities to escape the deterioration of the cocoa economy in the 1970's, found that family meetings and town projects were being directed by and towards the benefit of the town's educated elite, many of whom had acquired their training and launched their careers from the proceeds of their elders' cocoa farms. As one self-employed professional explained, a propos his own connivance in the state's expropriation of his family's land, "you have to play tricks on them" in order to "develop."

In the final analysis, the growth of the oil exports has served to intensify processes of state and mercantile accumulation in western Nigeria which tend both to reinforce sectional identities and alliances, and to divide kin groups and communities by promoting their members' differential access to productive assets and the power to exploit them profitably. Descent-based networks cut across class lines, but do not blur them or reduce inequalities in wealth and power. Class formation is taking place, but without transforming the structure of the economy. As we have seen, access to the state has become an object as well as an instrument of accumulation; members of the ruling class are bent on self-aggrandisement but are too busy struggling among themselves for control of the state to formulate a coordinated strategy of long-term accumulation based on the development of the productive forces. In similar fashion, descent groups' efforts to act as corporate accumulators tend to break down over internal differentiation and the opportunism of individual members. The contradictions of this development process were exemplified in the Land Use Decree of 1978, which proclaimed the nationalization of land ownership throughout Nigeria in the name of private enterprise.

The burden of my argument may be summarized through an analogy. Twenty-five years ago, Albert Hirschman (1958) suggested that when states try to promote economic development by centralizing investment decisions, they are obliged to internalize the social costs as well as the private gains of accumulation. Hence, state planning and control of the investment process may reduce the rate of accumulation. In Nigeria, Hirschman's argument may be pushed a step further. In extending and consolidating its control over the principal economic resources of the country (especially the foreign trade sector), the state has internalized not only the social costs of accumulation and economic growth, but also the process of class formation itself. The result is a kind of explosive paralysis: the state is not free to act either as an agent of the accumulating class, or as an arbiter of class conflict, but can only reproduce class divisions, unproductive accumulation and sectional conflict - and be rocked periodically by the resulting upheavals.

FOOTNOTES

¹The best source of data on aggregate trends in the Nigerian economy is the Central Bank's Economic and Financial Report. For a convenient summary of economic performance and economic changes during the 1970's, see Kirk-Greene and Rimmer, 1981.

²During my field research, a rumor spread that several mechanics living in Modakeke had held a separate meeting - without first consulting or obtaining the approval of IMA leaders. The people of Modakeke, a quarter of Ile-Ife, trace their descent from Oyo and have a long history of conflict with the chiefs and people of Ife. The news that a group of mechanics living in (though not necessarily descended from) Modakeke had met independently of the IMA was received with alarm by the Association's leaders, who spent weeks trying to discover whether this portended an emerging split within the Association and demanding repeated public assurances of loyalty from the Modakeke fourteen.

³Among secondary schools in particular, a distinct stratum of elite schools appears to be emerging, which includes the old federal colleges and some of the older mission-founded schools. Applicants to these schools are interviewed as part of the admission process, and it commonly held that admissions are based as much on descent from elite or politically influential parents as on examination scores.

⁴Since land in the vicinity of a particular cocoa village was often planted to cocoa within a few years, farmers seeking to invest part of the proceeds of a mature farm in additional cocoa plots often had to go some distance to obtain additional land. Similarly, even rural trade or artisanal activities often involve a good deal of movement among sources of supply, markets and the proprietor's place of work and/or residence.

⁵Political connections can, of course, serve as an alternative channel of access to resources and opportunities in a capitalist economy too. The history of industrialization in Britain and other European or European derived economies indicates that, to the extent that the state committed itself to the recognition and enforcement of private property, this ultimately facilitated the process of proletarianization. In many advanced capitalist economies, on the other hand, organized workers have become accumulators and the extent of state intervention into processes of production and distribution has expanded greatly, especially since the 1930's. Often such developments have been accompanied by a tendency for the "sanctity" of private property rights to break down, under the pressure of political corruption, state contracting and the growth of "white collar crime".

⁶In some cases (in Ghana, for example) patronage relations may lose their value as means of access to wealth and power because the state itself is impoverished. This is not necessarily true in all cases, however, since people may also try to use patronage or descent-based relations to protect themselves against the effects of economic decline. In general, the ways in which people seek access to resources and opportunities depend on the conjuncture of social, legal, and political processes shaping the conditions of production and accumulation - not just on the rate of accumulation alone.

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