

DOES SWAZILAND HAVE A PROLETARIAT?

by

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At the outset it may be said that what is at issue is not the fact of what Marxists gloomily call massive capital penetration in Swaziland (1), which was well underway at the turn of the century, nor of the central place of wages and wage work in the economic strategy of most rural Swazi homesteads (Russell, 1982, 1983). What is at issue is the usefulness of class concepts developed from the rather different circumstances of nineteenth-century Europe to describe this situation.

Such doubts have been expressed before by Worsley (1972, p 226), R Cohen (1972, p 237), and Sandbrook (1975, p 12). Sandbrook and Cohen in 1975 welcomed "The extension and modifications to Eurocentric portrayals of the (African) working class" (p 2), made by some contributors to a 1973 conference on this theme.

But a difficulty with the Marxist paradigm dominant in social analyses of the Third World is that to appear to quarrel with any part of it is to bring upon oneself not only intellectual but moral censure: one has become a victim of "imperialist hegemony" (Glavanis, 1981); one is not merely wrong but bad. Because of the central role of the proletariat in Marx's analysis of capitalism -

through his labour the source of capital,
through revolutionary consciousness the destroyer of
capitalism -

it is difficult for those working within the broad contours of the paradigm to conceptualize wage workers in other terms, despite a sensitivity to discrepancies between the position and role of wage workers in Africa and in Western Europe.

Thus criticisms are often implicit, cautious and muted. Most writers signal some allegiance to the paradigm by retention of the notion of proletariat, if only in its softer form, proletarianization, with its implication that, although the class does not yet exist in its pure form, it is in the process of becoming. Such a formulation seems in line with Marx's own account of the slow development of European wage labourers into a cohesive and eventually revolutionary force. Sandbrook (1975, p 12), describing Kenyan workers, says that while, in view of their access through land to the means of production, they cannot be regarded as full proletarians, through their increasing commitment to long-term employment they are an embryonic proletariat.

First (1977) describes Mozambican miners as worker-peasants who, unable to reproduce their households and their agricultural plots without spells of wage-work, have experienced "an incomplete and impermanent proletarianization".

Stichter (1975) argues that capitalism on the periphery breeds a distinctive proletariat (p 22) some of whose members are "partially proletarianized" (p 22), "semi-proletarianized" (p 21), and suggests that proletarianization refers either to increasing necessity for wage work, or to the fact that the balance of time in work or income from work has shifted to wage work (p 23). (2)

Similarly Arrighi and Saul (1968) distinguish "the proletariat proper" (p 285) from "semi-proletarianized peasants periodically engaged in wage employment" (p 291). Winter (1978) argues that the working class in Swaziland is "not a permanent proletariat" (p 35).

Most analyses concur that the chief hindrance to full proletarianization, access to land, is not likely to go away, either because capital wills that it should remain (Wolpe, 1975; Legassick and de Clerq, 1978; Bettelheim, 1972) or because of "the tenacity of specific communities to resist incorporation" (Martin, 1980), "the inability of capital to carry through a total destruction" (Ajulu, 1981).

The rural connection, serving everybody's interests, thus looks set to remain a continuing feature of African wage work, valued both by the capital "penetrators", as providing not only a subsidy to wages but a cheap pool of labour, and by the "penetrated" to whom it represents, minimally, a source of substance, but often very much more.

We have, in short, a landed proletariat, which is of course a contradiction in terms, which, properly grasped, may lead to new insights into the structuring of interests of wage workers in Africa, however labelled.

In Marx's analysis it is the landlessness of the labourers that forces them into their only option, to sell their labour power to the bourgeoisie in return for a wage which allows them only to survive, not to accumulate. The Roman proletarius, from whom the word derives, were landless; they lacked familias, property. (Briefs, 1929)

Faithful to this model, some writers on Africa look for evidence of either actual landlessness (settler appropriation and overcrowded reserves) or effective landlessness through the degradation of land or the manipulation of markets and terms of trade to render surplus production an unattractive option. In these analyses, African land is either valued or seized, suggesting the classical Marxist paradigm, or it is devalued as a means of production. although they have land, people merely "scratch a living" from it or "eke out a subsistence" on it. (Kimble, 1981; Magubane, 1983) (3)

Typically, rates of out-migration of labour are taken as evidence of the inability of the land to sustain the population.

A more convincing explanation of the persistence but not of the genesis of wage labour (which was often extremely coercive) is that juxtaposed capitalism, with its organizational and technical efficiency (4) and its range of consumer commodities, is able to offer through money wages (exploitative as they technically are) access to a wider range of options than ever existed, or now exists, in the "indigenous system", leaving aside the question of the extent to which the "natural economy" (Bradby) is in "a crippled state ... a travesty of its former self". (Mard 1913, p 301)

Wage labour is a choice, albeit constrained, like all choices. In Swaziland, it is a choice to be able to buy machine-milled refined maize meal, granulated sugar, Sinhalese tea, and acrylic jerseys, which capitalism produces, packages, advertises and delivers, through at least six hundred small Swazi traders, supplied by a few big, non-Swazi wholesalers.

Land, the theoretical alternative to wage labour, is available to all Swazis, and most avail themselves of it. "The mere fact of being a Swazi ... does give one the inalienable right to some place to live and cultivate." (Hughes, 1972, p 247) This right is accorded to a homestead by one of some two hundred chiefs who administer sixty percent of the country on behalf of the king, who has legal title to this portion of the country on behalf of the people. The remaining land is held on freehold, originally by settlers, now joined by large investment companies, and by a small but increasing number of black Swazi freeholders. (5) (See Appendix 1.) Some four percent of Swazis live on freehold as squatters and farm labourers. In return for a pledge of allegiance (*Khonta*), a married man can receive from a chief land sufficient "to satisfy the needs of himself and his family". (Hughes, 1972, p 128)

The average size of such an allocation is presently two hectares of arable land plus some sixteen hectares of grazing land, the latter being the theoretical share to each homestead of communal grazing land: in practice (1983), only sixty percent of homesteads have cattle, and the herd size of any one homestead is unrestricted by any theoretical per capita considerations. The average is eighteen head, but the range is from one to over a hundred. Arable lands are more evenly distributed, the average also being the norm for the fertile middleveld where population is concentrated.

Under prevailing agricultural practice (as measured annually since 1975 by sample survey), two hectares of land can produce at least 2,700 kilos of dry maize annually (6), or sufficient to meet the annual prevailing maize consumption of ten adults. (7) Ten people is indeed the average homestead size (four being adults of whom, on average, two are absent, usually at work). These aggregate figures suggest that the goal of the "traditional" land distribution system, to meet but not exceed the homestead's need for its own food, is practicable. Only eight percent of the country is presently under crops as against a World Bank assessment (1977) that twenty-two percent of the land is arable.

Arable	22%
Poor arable/good grazing	20%
Wet land	3%
Grazing	26%
Steep and rocky	29%

But aggregate figures mask maldistribution. A more painstaking breakdown by Testerink of land distribution in relation to household size for a sample of 632 households in 1982/83 showed that a quarter of homesteads have insufficient land to grow more than 125% (8) of their annual maize supply; at the other extreme, at least 18% have sufficient land to grow more than 200% of their requirements. (Testerink, 1984, pp 2-7) Following Testerink's (high) standards, at least 75% of households could be self-sufficient in annual basic foodstuffs from their land.

The practice is quite different. In 1982/88 three-quarters of all households bought more than half of their household annual maize requirements; nor was this pattern much affected by size of landholdings, except in so far as the largest landholders are the least self-sufficient in maize. (Testerink, 1984, Table 12)

Table showing Swazi household maize-purchase behaviour 1982-1983

N = 632	Households with land less than 125% of subsistence need	Households with sufficient land but who sell no crops	Cash croppers with land below 200% of subsistence need	Cash croppers with land above 200% of subsistence need
Percentage of sample	27.1%	38.4%	16.1%	18.4%
Percentage purchasing maize	73.1%	79.4%	73.5%	72.8%
Percentage of annual maize requirement purchased	58%	56.4%	56%	67.6%

Source: Testerink (1985) Tables 1 and 12.

1982/83 was a dry year but, as Funnell (1981, p 18) has shown, poor rain affects one year in three. De Vletter's figures for 1978 (1983, Table 8), showing only 52.3 percent to have purchased some maize, are better but not much better. The picture is clear.

Swazis buy a lot of basic food, even when they have the land to grow it. Furthermore, they buy it despite the fact that in 1977 the cost of buying maize was four times the cost of growing it (Low and Fowler, 1980): despite twelve years of a rural development programme worth E43 million (de Vletter, 1982) and aimed at transforming Swazi subsistence cultivation into semi-commercial farming (Third National Development Plan 1978-83), and despite a national drive for maize self-sufficiency.

They buy it because they have money, they have money because so many of them work for wages. (9) They work for wages because, if they are men and in the prime of life, they are expected to. These expectations have been shaped over almost a century, since the rinderpest decimated herds and the Transvaal imposed a stiff head tax (Parsons and Palmer, 1977); and since in 1914 Queen Regent Labotsibeni urged all young men into the gold mines of the Witwatersrand as a kind of national service, to be able to contribute a quarter of their earnings to a national fund, to repurchase lands which had been alienated as freehold to settlers, and as British Crown lands, under the Concessions Partition Proclamation of 1907. (Youe, 1978; Crush, 1980)

By the late thirties Kuper observed: "The Swazi are expected to depend on the European trader for essential goods and on the European labour market for money to buy them."

Wages earned at work are still used for taxes and for cattle purchase, but they also allow participation as consumers in the world of commodities that has interpenetrated the older, self-sufficient world of more limited options: at first, cloth rather than skins, matches rather than flints, tea and coffee as well as beer; later radios, tape players, watches, bedroom suites, chrome and plastic kitchen suites, and dozens of smaller household objects - vases, ornaments, saucepans, as well as cosmetics and underwear, now toted back from wholesalers in Johannesburg on

buses and mini-buses by self-employed women trading in other women's grass-and-bead handicrafts, exploiting kinship links in South Africa, and selling on credit to neighbours back home. (Russell, 1984)

Until 1950, opportunities for wage employment in Swaziland were limited. The 1946 Census shows less than 5,000 jobs amongst a de jure African population of almost 200,000, local wage work for only 2.5 percent of the population. By 1956 employment within Swaziland exceeded migration to South Africa, which, by 1976, had shrunk to a fifth of all jobs in a population of half a million, in which 40 percent of all people over fifteen were in wage employment (de Vletter, 1982, p 54).

By 1982 the skill profile of the domestic work force reflected the widening range of opportunities in an economy in which foreign investment was courted with sensitivity (Economic Review, 1982, 8), often in partnership with Swazi capital, most importantly Swazi monarchy's capital from the mineral royalties which passed at independence in 1968 from the British to the Swazi Crown. (10)

Skill profile of formally employed Swazi work force 1982

	Men	Women
Professional and technical	4.1%	5.8%
Administrative and managerial	2.1%	0.5%
Clerical	6.4%	5.3%
Skilled manual	4.2%	0.1%
Semi-skilled manual	12.5%	1.3%
Unskilled manual	45.0%	12.7%
All (100%)	74.3%	25.7%

Source: Government of Swaziland, Employment and Wages 1982

Gross Domestic Product, Swaziland, 1981

Agriculture, Freehold land	15.7%
Agriculture, Swazi Nation land	4.9%
Forestry	2.1%
Mining	3.8%
Manufacturing	25.2%
Construction	3.7%
Public Administration	13.3%
Distribution and Hotels	11.2%
Other, including banking, transport and real estate	19.9%
	<u>100.0%</u>

Source: de Vletter, 1982, p 44

Table showing growth of domestic employment in relation to migrant labour
from Swaziland

	<u>de jure</u> Swazi population	Absentees* as % of population	Employment in Swaziland as % of population
1911	104,533	5.6	Nil
1921	110,295	5.43	2.8
1936	153,270	6.23	2.2
1946	181,269	4.78	2.7
1956	229,744	5.1	5.8
1966	381,687	5.03	15.8**
1976	520,184	4.93	20.0**

Source: de Vletter (1982), p 54.

* Not all absentees are in employment. Survey figures for 1978 suggest that 78 per cent of them are likely to be, half in the mines. See de Vletter (1983), Table 3, p 20.

** Figures include the self-employed and "irregular employees": regular wage earners are perhaps only two-thirds of this number in each instance. See Notes to de Vletter (1982), p 54.

In 1978 a national survey confirmed the very wide spread of Swazi participation in wage labour: 82% of all rural homesteads had some member in paid employment, with an average amongst these of two workers per homestead, most of whom worked (and lived) away from home but within Swaziland (de Vletter, 1983). See Appendix 2. Their wages filter back to the rural sector as direct payments to parents, wives, lovers, and, indirectly, as cattle, houses and agricultural inputs (Russell, 1985). The continuing salience of the rural connection is shown in the fact that only 13 per cent of a sample of men in work disclaimed any active rural connection (Russell, 1983, p 21); others contributed, on average, 4.2% of their annual wages towards the annual cost of ploughing and planting the subsistence crops, which 98% of all homesteads grow.

Cash cropping is much rarer. Only 1% of Nationland (14% of 8% cultivated) was put to cash crops in 1983 (CSO Annual Survey of Swazi Nationland 1983/83), and only one-fifth of households had cash income from crop sales, for half of whom such enterprises yielded less than E100 per annum (Testerink, Funnell and Freund, 1985, p 52).

Cash Income from Crops 1982-83

Annual cash income from crops E	Percentage of households with crop income
0	79.3
1-50	5.9
51-100	3.2
101-250	5.7
251-500	2.8
501-1000	1.7
1001-2000	1.3
2001-10000	0.2
All	100
Mean annual income from this source per participant	E256

Source: Testerink, Funnell and Freund (1985), Table 25,
p 52.

Several incisive analyses (Funnell, 1981; Low, 1982, 1983; Low and Fowler, 1980) account for Swazi avoidance of cash cropping (despite massive government expenditure on appropriate infrastructure) in terms of simple economic rationality.

One member of a household working away at the mines could bring in an income very nearly similar to that provided by improved farming involving all the household.

(Funnell, 1981, p 21)

This economic rationality is underpinned by Swazi norms whose origins can be traced to the "traditional" system of land distribution: for not only is one expected not to "make money" out of access to Swazi Nation land (to do so can provoke accusations of witchcraft, and banishment: see Kuper, 1947), but distribution of fields within the homestead puts the monopoly of all surpluses in the hands of the head, who is also able to command resident homestead labour. Such internal structuring of access to homestead resources promotes wage employment as a route to relative autonomy over time and product - though, even here, strong norms ensure a return to the homestead of a share of earnings (pace Kimble, 1981, and her contempt for "anthropological hang-ups"). (Russell, 1985)

No traditional moves inhibit the making of money from other homestead-based entrepreneurial activities. The so-called informal sector generated in 1978 12.4% of homestead cash income (de Vletter, 1973, p 47) and offers another route to market participation, particularly for women. Matsebula

* But 41% of all homesteads raised money this way (de Vletter, 1983).

(1985, pp 7-10) found 78.5% of formal-sector activity to be by women, with average monthly income from such activities E237, twice the minimal legal wage to unskilled labourers in the building industry and mining. (11)

In 1930, Kuper estimated that Swazis grew only one-fifth of their own food supply. But the deterioration was not sustained. In 1960, 70% of production income was derived from the land, 20% from wages, 10% from cash raised in other activities (Hughes, 1964, pp 262, 258); 40% of homesteads had no wage income (*ibid.*, p 273). By 1978 wage income had risen to 46% of rural homestead income (de Vletter, 1983, p 47) and the proportion without wage income had fallen to 18%. In 1983 wages accounted for 69.5% of all rural homestead income in central Swaziland (Russell and Ntshingila, 1984, p 1). For that same year the central Statistical Office, Swaziland, reported "an astounding 82.2% (of all cash income) from wage transfers". (GOS CSO 1982/83 Annual Survey of Swazi National Land, 1985).

All evidence points to a tighter embrace of capitalism by Swaziland: but does this imply a proletariat or a process of proletarianization?

Gutkind has argued that "any labourers whose labour is commoditized to produce surplus value for which they are not rewarded are 'authentic' proletarians" (p 187). But this is to stress only one half of the essentially symbiotic relationship between worker and capital. It is a capital-centred view. "Authentic proletarians" must, in addition to being thus exploited (in a purely technical, Marxist sense), be dependent.

The relationship between capital and proletariat thus has two aspects:

- what the proletariat is to capital - an indispensable source of surplus value - and
- what capital is to the proletariat - an indispensable means of subsistence.

In Briefs' words, "If he is to be assured continued subsistence he must continue to market his abilities, in as much as the price they bring him gives only enough money to met his running expenses ... In this continuing renewal of the wage-earner group we find the essential character of ... the proletariat" (1929, p 23).

While there can be no doubt of the universality of the first, the second holds only when labourers have been deprived of all other access to the means of subsistence. Gutkind errs in his statement that the labour of African workers is "as commoditized as the labour of those who are viewed as fully proletarianized" (1983, p 187). To the contrary, this same worker sometimes works for himself, to produce use-values from his land. His labour is less commoditized: it is only intermittently commoditized. For long periods it is likely not to be commoditized at all.

As compared with the landless labourer, the landed labourer is in a structurally different relationship to capital, no matter how great or small a proportion of his income derives from wages. For the landed labourer, wage work is a choice. In Swaziland it is a choice to widen the narrow options that are entailed in living exclusively off the land. It is a decision to commoditize one's labour in order to acquire the commodities capitalism offers, and to share in the services of an increasingly monetized state.

This argument implies that land is still a real resource. At the homestead people are housed, warmed, fed, entertained, with minimal expenditure of earned wages. Wages can consequently be accumulated, and invested, often as cattle or in the means to increase agricultural productivity, or education to improve the rewards to the next generation, sometimes as entrepreneurial capital for homestead-based enterprises. The system of deferred pay in the South African mines and its popularity with workers testifies to its status as extra income rather than the means of subsistence.

It is because earnings can be accumulated in Swaziland that petty entrepreneurship features so widely. Wives are set up in the business of brewing, trading, dress-making; men acquire and hire out vehicles or establish rural retail trading outlets.

The genesis of wage labour in Swaziland is a problem for historians. Secondary sources suggest a constellation of the usual precipitators - tax, land expropriation, drought, cattle, plague - effecting, on the whole, a rather benign transition to wage labour, which was enjoined upon all young men by the Queen Regent as a means of raising revenues for the Swazi monarchy to buy back the lands which had provided so handsome a source of revenue for itself through concessions (12) till rudely alienated as freehold and crown lands by the colonial government. (Youe, 1978; Crush, 1980)

The persistence of wage labour can be understood as consequence of the new terms of exchange brought about by the juxtaposition of capital in South Africa. Nothing really changed in what had once been the subsistence economy of rural homesteads, except the value people placed on their products (and hence on their labour) in relation to the newer commodities now available through the expanding market. Through commoditizing their labour people could, and did, have instant access to the seductive world of woollen blankets, gramophones, cast-iron grinding mills, enamelled plates.

Wage employment diverted the labour of younger men, but from national service under the monarch rather than the homestead. (See Kuper, 1947b.)

The shift in the early twentieth century from millet to maize as the staple homestead cereal may have been a response to homestead labour shortage. (The Swaziland Ministry of Agriculture calculates that it takes 14 man days to produce one hectare of maize as against 60+ to produce a hectare of millet (GOS, MOA Crop Profitability Guide, 1982) but its effect must have been to release homestead labour for employment. The shift from hoe to ox-drawn plough at about the same time pulled men, the cattle-keepers, into the agricultural cycle. The seasonal nature of this involvement accorded well with the short-term wage employment contracts of the mines.

The rural homestead lands are still able, as they once were, to produce food sufficient to keep body and soul together, to fatten and reproduce cattle and goats, to yield firewood and building poles and grass for sleeping and grinding mats. But the people aspire to more than that. Since the discovery that capital expands at the expense of labour, it has become hazardous to suggest that capitalism might none the less have positive consequences for those who become labourers in the system. The flood of labour to capital is attributed to direct and indirect coercion rather than to a simple choice of economic maximizers facing new options.

First (1977), in an otherwise incisive analysis, weakly suggested that Mozambican labourers were victims of the propaganda of mine-labour recruiters, though her analysis itself demonstrated the effectiveness of such labour to generate

amongst some peasants sufficient capital to raise themselves into the middle peasantry, and her central policy preoccupation was with how the independent socialist state might supplant this valued South African source of wealth.

In suggesting that African workers with land are not "dependent" for subsistence on wages, I am suggesting that their original economic base has not been "eroded" by capitalism, but simply rendered comparatively (and selectively) less attractive. In Worsley's words, "the countryside can no longer support them, certainly not in the style to which they have become, not so much accustomed (for they live miserably) but to which they aspire ... Their expectations are indeed rising" as they experience "newly generated relative deprivation" (1972, p 210). Similarly, the Ugandan railway workers in Uganda worked to maintain "a standard of living far above subsistence level". They were committed "not only to a high level of consumption but to conspicuous and competitive consumption" (Grillo, 1975, p 62).

All this is a far cry from Bernstein's image of the African peasant and wage worker whose labour is all "expended in order to meet the costs of simple reproduction". (1977, p 54)

For contemporary Swazis, wage work is a choice. The frequency with which this choice is made casts doubt on Wallerstein and Martin's generalization (1979, p 195) that "labour under the imperative of capital is longer, harder and less rewarding". (My emphasis.) The choice is constrained in different ways for people of different ages and sexes as a consequence of the "traditional" patterning of access to land.

Homestead heads, with their right to monopolize surpluses from homestead land, usually choose not to work. de Vletter (1983, Table 3) shows 78 per cent of homestead heads in full-time management of the homestead resources. Homestead heads in work anticipated imminent retirement from wage employment, often as homestead-based, self-employed entrepreneurs. But all homestead heads had been employed for wages at some previous time (Russell 1983), since young men are expected to find paid work and to share their earnings with parents, and, through parents, with siblings. In this way they escape their irksome subordinate role as homestead labourer, or labour pawn to the Royal household (though the latter can bring its own rewards, including land).

Married women supply the bulk of homestead labour, and work for wages only when they can sell their skills for a high price. Hence the high skill profile of women in formal employment. Unmarried (but not necessarily childless) women work either under their mothers at home, where their labour, like that of their mothers, can at best provide surpluses which the homestead head appropriates, or seek wage work. In a national sample, Armstrong (1985) found that 88 per cent of working women had children, 35 per cent were married. (13) The internal structure of the homestead inhibits the production of agricultural surpluses, as do the wider community norms. The combined effect is to inhibit inequalities arising from land ownership. Employment is a much more potent source of inequality.

Access to communal lands entails tribute labour in Swaziland. Contrary to Martin's sweeping generalization (1980, p 29), tribute labour in Swaziland coexists with extensive wage labour: but there are tensions, and Swazi workers are quick to exploit them. In April 1985, the newly appointed Labour Commissioner toured all major industrial establishments and addressed work forces with the enigmatic message that "All work belongs to the King" (Times of Swaziland, April 1985), presumably an attempt to quieten workers' demands for time off to make tribute (which is welcomed as a distraction from wage labour). The Farmdwellers' Protection Act of 1982 specifies the occasions when the King's demands take precedence over the farmer's

for labour. In 1978, 45.5 per cent of all homesteads claimed to have provided tribute labour directly to king or chief, as distinct from 11.5 per cent who had merely provided "labour to the community" (de Vletter, 1983, p 69).

It is thus evident that labour in Swaziland is not "free", even in the most elementary sense; chiefs command the labour of subjects, old women command the labour of daughters-in-law, adults command the labour of children. Kingship and kinship both limit individual freedoms; the ideal type Western proletarian who "economically ... is completely responsible but only to himself" (Briefs, 1929) or who is "masterless and propertyless" (Taylor, Preface to Briefs, 1929) does not exist, despite a century of wage work.

Nor need one be "mesmerized by the communal and redistributive aspects of African social formations" (Kimble, 1981, p 143) to see that in Swaziland the rules for redistribution are clear, respected, and undoubtedly inhibit the crystallization of some inequalities as clearly as they create others (Russell, 1985). Pfefferman (1968, cited Cohen 1972) apparently shows a similar redistribution of earnings for Senegal.

Kimble argues that, though the migrant labourer in Lesotho "retains some means to the means of production ... land, cattle, tools, etc", "At the point of urban production the same migrants can clearly be seen to be wage labourers, free from the means of production and dependent on a wage for subsistence". (p 134)

But why, at the point of entry to urban production, should we see them as "free from the means of production", since we know from her (and Spiegel, 1981) that those with work are precisely those who also have "some access to the means of production"?

Grillo, likewise, suggests that the railway workers in Uganda "in that they are dependent on employment for their livelihood ... are in the same position as any member of the industrial proletariat" (1975, p 62), and, again, "that they are thus dependent for their standard of living on the sale of their labour and that they are proletarians in a more orthodox sense" (1978, p 180). But, of course, they are not orthodox proletarians, nor are they in the same position as any member of the industrial proletariat, for "The farm may subsidize income" (1975, p 48). "At home it [food] is free, or rather the major cost is labour which is of course provided by wives, children and perhaps other relatives" (1975, p 48). The rural home also provides "a livelihood and security in time of difficulty or in the future after retirement. It was often said by informants that a man might need his land should he become unemployed". (1975, p 48)

As for their "livelihood", it is, as we have already seen, "a standard of living far above the subsistence level including the whole range of goods characteristic of a modern consumer society". (1975, p 62)

The "dependence" of these African workers on wages is not, as is that of the classic Marxist proletariat, for survival ("labourers who live only as long as they find work" - Marx, 1935, p 212) but for what Arrighi and Saul (1971, p 291) call "discretionary consumption". Saul and Woods note that wage labour is to meet "new needs" (1971, p 107), Stichter that it is to meet "new wants" (1975, p 29).

The rediscovery of the implications of imperialism in the seventies has generated a lot of theoretical excitement, especially in Africa where generalizations are often better emotionally than empirically grounded. (14) The

discovery of the manipulative power of capital has tended to blind us to the capacity of pre-capitalist structures to adapt creatively to or resist selectively new options.

The assumption of the inevitable proletarianization of Africa is such a generalization, but case studies of African workers (First, Grillo, Sandbrook) point to structural features which suggest a more complex adaptation to capitalism than the classical paradigm allows. The African worker/peasants are indeed a "complex social category" which cannot be reduced to a simple class identity (Cliffe, 1981, p 116).

Worker/peasants are not unique to Africa. Briefs (1929, pp 107-08) reminds us that in the nineteenth century "the great mass of Russian workers" were "bound to soil and to village home" (p 108). "In the interior of Russia the proletarians [sic] remained more or less attached to the soil, many of them cherishing a treasured plot of land in some remote village ... they had no inclination towards revolution" (p 107). He suggests they were "not proletarians in the strict sense of the word" (p 107). Froelicher (1982) notes the persistence of part-time agriculture in France, Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Miljovski (1980) makes the same observations for Yugoslavia. The same surely holds true for much of southern Europe.

Comparative study, away from the confusing heat of colonialism and imperialism, may prove rewarding.

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Notes

- (1) For an earlier statement of some of the ideas developed in this paper, see Russell (1982).
- (2) Balance in source of income offers an appealing working definition which I have used (Russell, 1985, p 601, note 3), but, I argue here, it is conceptually weak.
- (3) J Simons (1969) reckoned that miners' families produced 45-60% of their household income from the land.
- (4) "The most highly developed historical organization of production", Marx (1913), p 300.
- (5) In November 1984, 10% of freehold parcels were in private, black ownership.
- (6) Ministry of Agriculture in 1984 (a year of good rainfall) found an average yield of 3,958 kilos per 2 hectares. See Ministry of Agriculture Extension Service (1984), p 1.
- (7) Following Fowler (1980) and Testerink (1984).
- (8) Testerink, concerned with the production of surplus crops, was interested only in the holders of land adequate for this purpose, not with maladministration per se.

- (9) The population of Swaziland (last census 1976) is approximately 666,000. The formally employed are some 120,000 to 130,000, of whom 100,000 are within Swaziland. 73 per cent of these are in the private rather than in the public sector; 23 per cent are women.
- (10) There are two royal investment corporations: Tibiyo Taka Ngwane, which now generates sufficient capital from its investments, passed royalties into Tisuka Taka Ngwane in 1983. Both corporations publish accounts but are not publicly accountable.
- (11) Minimum wages are reviewed annually under the Employment Act of 1964. For unskilled labourers they ranged, in 1983, from E33 monthly in agriculture (14 cents an hour) to E133 in motor engineering (66 cents an hour). Actual wages are reckoned, on average, to be 10% higher than these minima. See Annual Wage Orders for each industry.
- (12) The Transvaal in 1898 paid the Swazi monarch one thousand pounds a month for the concession to collect all its concession revenues. Youé, (1978).
- (13) Including, of course the 3 per cent widowed and divorced. Two-thirds were married by Swazi law and custom. Armstrong (1985), pp 10-15.
- (14) And may well be defended as such by astute social scientists, who assent to the proposition that ideas are real in their consequences.

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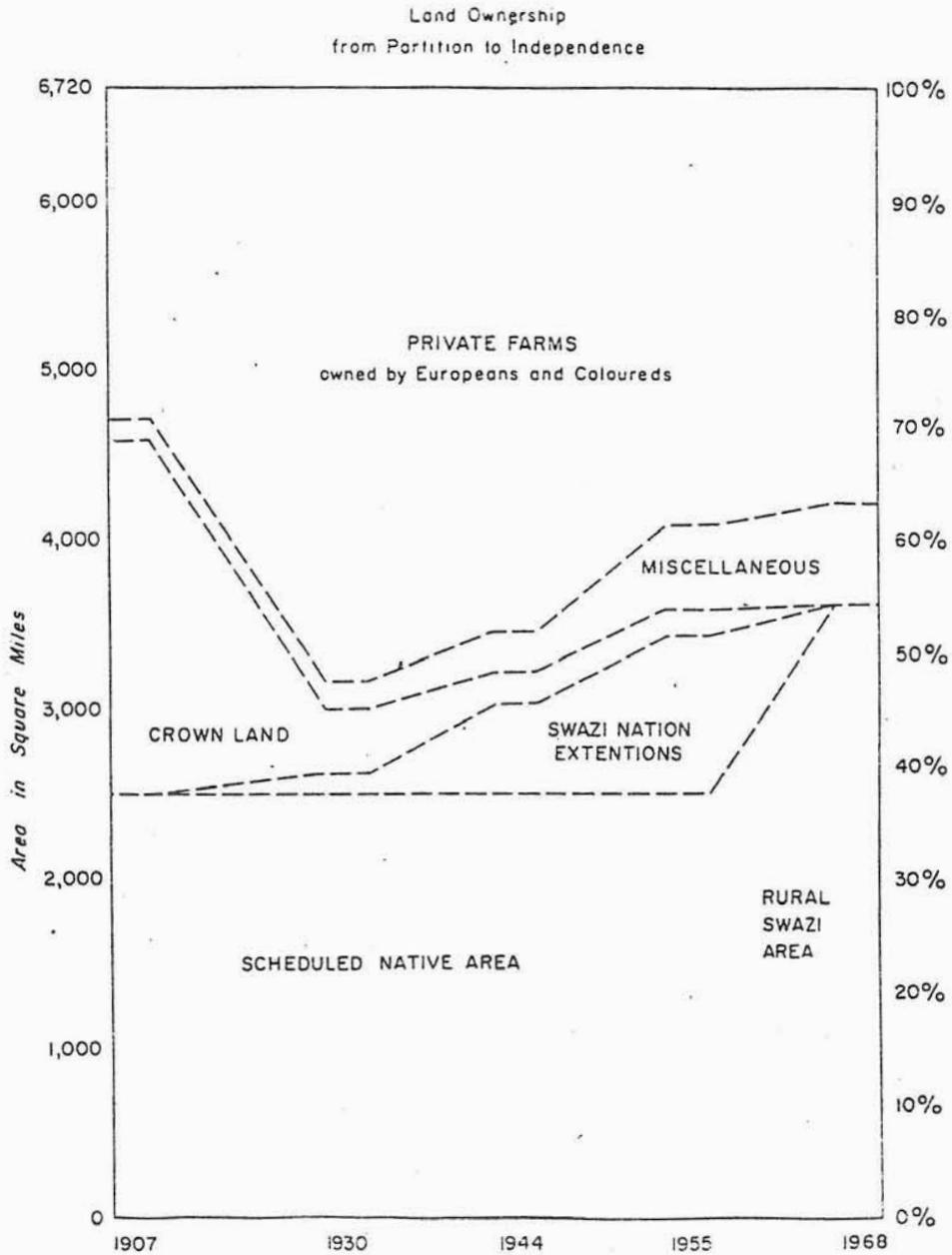
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APPENDIX 1: CHANGES IN LAND OWNERSHIP, SWAZILAND, 1907-1970



G. Murdoch: Soils and land capability in Swaziland, Swaziland ministry of Agriculture, 1970 page 43

APPENDIX 2

Figure 1 shows the distribution of ALL ADULTS belonging to a sample of 1150 rural homesteads in 1978.

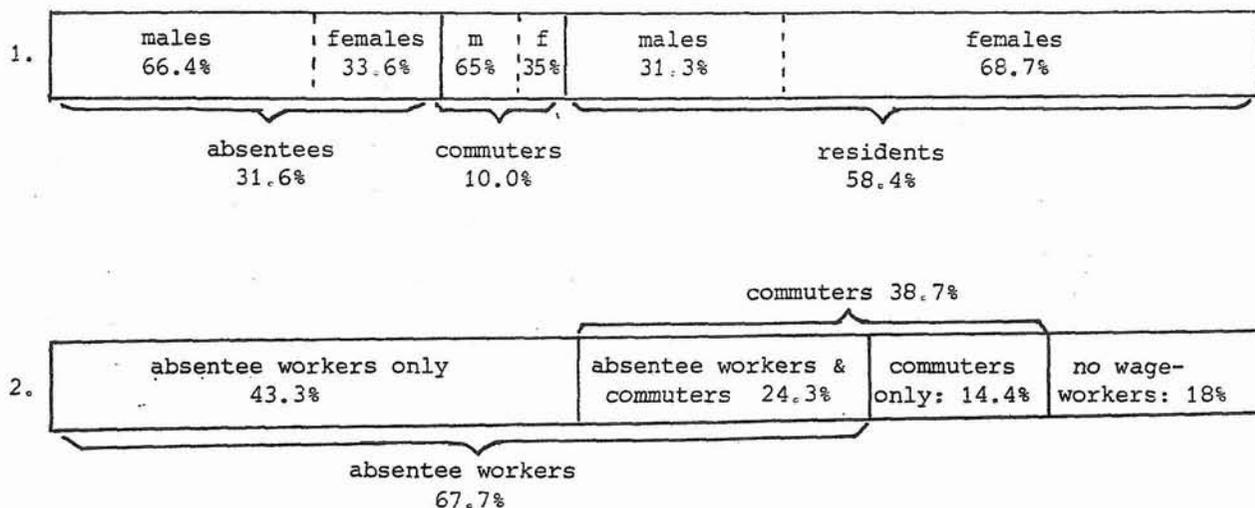


Figure 2 shows ALL HOMESTEADS in terms of their involvement in wage-earning.

Source: F de Vletter, A socio-economic profile of rural Swazi homesteads in de Vletter (ed) 1983 p21.