



## Subsistence and Control: The Persistence of the Peasantry in the Developing World

Heather Johnson

**ABSTRACT** – *Depeasantization, measured through rates of urbanization, is defined as the erosion of an agrarian way of life that combines subsistence and commodity agricultural production with an internal social organization based on family labour and village community settlement (Bryceson, 1999, p. 175). It is a theory that is contested, with disappearance and permanence theses. Beyond this, the role of depeasantization within the development process as representative of modernization or of marginalization is also disputed. This is particularly prevalent on the continent of Africa. If the peasantry is a unit engaged in a form of production based solely on agriculture, depeasantization is occurring. If seen as a population whose form of production is by subsistence while retaining some control over the means of production, however, the peasantry still exists as evidence of the continuing failure of the development project.*

**RÉSUMÉ** – *La dépeysanisation, mesurée par les taux d'urbanisation, est définie comme étant l'érosion d'un mode de vie agrairien qui combine la subsistance et la production agricole de commodités avec une organisation sociale interne basée sur la main d'oeuvre familiale et l'établissement de la communauté villageoise (Bryceson, 1999, p. 175). C'est une théorie contestée. La destruction du paysannat est contestée entre les thèses de disparition et de permanence. Au-delà de cela, le rôle de la dépeysanisation à l'intérieur du procès de développement comme représentatif de la modernisation ou de la marginalisation est aussi disputé. Ceci est particulièrement courant sur le continent Africain. Si la paysannerie est une unité engagée dans une forme de production basée uniquement sur l'agriculture, la dépeysanisation se déroule. Si vue comme une population dont la forme de production est par subsistance et retient quelque contrôle sur les moyens de production, par contre, la paysannerie existe toujours comme témoignage de la faillite continue du projet de développement.*

In his *Age of Extremes*, Eric Hobsbawm declares that “the most dramatic change in the second half of this century, and the one which cuts us forever from the world of the past, is the death of the peasantry” (cited in Bernstein, 2001, p. 25). This claim is controversial, but it is reflective of what is commonly accepted to be a major part of the development process. Depeasantization, defined by Deborah Bryceson (1999) as the erosion of an agrarian way of life that combines subsistence and commodity agricultural production with an internal social organization based on family labour and village community settlement, is taken as a parallel process of modernization and industrialization. Most commonly measured through rates of urbanization, it seems to be irrefutable that depeasantization is occurring at an ever-increasing

pace. On October 12, 1999 the world's population reached six billion and it is predicted that very shortly the majority of people in the world will live in urban areas. This marks a drastic shift in world population demographics; for the first time in history, rural populations will be in the minority (Bilsborrow, 1998). The urbanization of the planet has been interpreted as a key indicator of the death of the peasantry, as any trend that sees a decrease in the rural population is also seen as a decrease in the peasantry.

Depeasantization, however, is contested. At the most basic level, the utter destruction of the peasantry is challenged; it is argued that the peasant way of life will always exist in some form. Beyond this, the role of depeasantization within the development process is also challenged. Far from being an indicator of a positive 'evolution' of rural populations, the role of the peasantry in society (whether declining or persisting) is, instead, evidence of the profoundly negative consequences of structural adjustment programs and economic liberalization, both of which have resulted in a subsistence crisis. This is particularly prevalent on the continent of Africa, a region that Ankie Hoogvelt (2001) has identified as the "switched off" region of the world. What has been identified as a process of depeasantization can instead be viewed as a diversification of survival coping mechanisms on behalf of the rural poor. When viewed in this context, urbanization and the decline of the peasantry are not reflective of a modernization process. They are instead a manifestation of increased marginalization and desperation for a growing proportion of the world's population. If the peasantry is a unit engaged in a form of production based solely on agriculture, then the world is indeed witnessing a process of widespread depeasantization. If seen as a population whose form of production remains driven by subsistence and retains some control over the means of production, however, the peasantry still exists as populations employ diverse mechanisms to meet household needs.

The peasantry, like any general category, is not a homogeneous group. It contains within it diverse populations that live in widely varied conditions. As such, any attempt to assess depeasantization as a general process will be superficial. It is, however, an issue that is not sufficiently addressed in the literature and is situated instead at a strange intersection between migration, urbanization, population and peasant studies. In the following I will provide an account of this intersection, outlining the major debate within peasant theory and its role in development, and briefly highlight the case of Africa. I will then examine depeasantization as a process characterized by a diversification of income sources, including migration strategies, and suggest that the current trends are not leading to the death of the peasantry but rather to its redefinition within the current climate of poverty in the developing world.

When speaking of peasant theory, as with any discussion of broad and general subjects, it is necessary to define terms. In the study of depeasantization, therefore, the definition of who counts as a 'peasant' becomes crucial. Always linked to agriculture, the term peasant is used differently according to the historical epoch that is being described. The definition of peasant can encompass anyone from those involved in basic subsistence agriculture to members of a modern family farm, depending on the literature being reviewed. It is most useful to define peasants according to their form of production. At a basic level, peasants are traditionally defined as people involved in agriculture that have direct access to the production of their means of subsistence (Araghi, 1995). This may or may not involve direct ownership, although for Marx it was ownership that fundamentally separated peasants from the proletariat (Archetti & Aass, 1978). What is definitive about the peasant form of production is that, regardless of ownership, the logic of production is subsistence. Building upon Alexander Chayanov's theory of a peasant mode of production, Henry Bernstein (1979) argues that peasant production is distinguished from capitalism because there is no appropriation and realization of surplus value or accumulation of capital. The object is the satisfaction of family needs, not profit (Araghi, 1995). Beyond this, Bernstein (1979) argues that it is not a form of proletariat production because the individual retains some control. There are therefore two central components of peasant production: the driving logic of subsistence and the maintenance of some control over the means of production.

Within peasant studies there is a major cleavage between those that advocate what Farshad Araghi designates the ‘disappearance thesis’ and those that support the ‘permanence thesis.’ Both attempt to situate the historical course of the peasantry within the development of society, although the disappearance thesis is far more teleological than that of permanence. The disappearance thesis is premised on the idea that capitalism will lead to the dissolution of the peasantry as individuals become wage workers in urban areas and capitalist farmers in the countryside. The permanence thesis, by contrast, argues that peasant societies do not abide by the ‘laws’ of individualistic capital and have a developmental logic of their own that will result in the survival of both the peasantry and the conditions of its reproduction (Araghi, 1995).

In Araghi’s analysis, the disappearance thesis is fundamentally linked with modernity. First articulated within Marxist thought, it is also reflected in the theories of Durkheim and Weber. It was further developed and refined by Russian thinkers such as Kautsky in *The Agrarian Question* (1899) and V.I. Lenin in his *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* (1899). The disappearance thesis characterizes traditional peasant society as simple, undifferentiated, and rural while modern society is complex, differentiated, urban, and individualistic. Throughout history, it argues, there has been a clear move from the first to the second stage (Araghi, 1995). A key component of the disappearance thesis, present in the work of Marx and Engels through to present day development theorists, is the sense that peasants are a class representative of ‘barbarism,’ unable to shape history and blocking the development of civilization (Araghi, 1995). For civilization to progress, therefore, the peasantry must dissolve as society moves from a traditional to a modern state.

This move is fundamentally connected to the progress of capitalism. David Lehmann (1982) argues that the development of capitalism is understood as both causing and requiring free labour. He cites Lenin as arguing that capitalism requires the formation of a home market and therefore also the “freeing of small producers from the means of production” (p. 136). Individuals must cease both producing for subsistence and owning the means of production; this cessation would ultimately result in class differentiation among peasants (Bernstein, 2001; Lehmann, 1982).

Araghi (1995) identifies three key variants in the disappearance thesis: the first allows for historical variation rather than a unilinear progress to dissolution; the second identifies the persistence of the peasantry, explaining it as a result of functionality within capitalism, but arguing this as a temporary state as capitalist farms become dominant; the third argues that essence and appearance must be considered separately, and that remaining peasant societies are actually concealed rural proletariats (Lehmann, 1982).

In contrast to the disappearance thesis, the permanence thesis argues that the economic laws that govern peasant societies are distinct from capitalist societies. Araghi situates its intellectual origins within the debate between Marxism and Russian populism, which was influenced by thinkers such as Nicolai Chernyshevskii and Aleksander Herzen, and romanticized the peasantry, particularly in its communal character (Araghi, 1995). The thesis is most clearly expressed in Chayanov’s *The Theory of Peasant Economy* (1966), which proposed the peasant mode of production (Araghi, 1995). Eduardo Archetti and Svein Aass argue that Chayanov outlined a peasant economy constituting an economic system where land, labour and the means of production were combined according to the natural process of family development, and where the labour provided by the family is the only possible source of income (Archetti & Aass, 1978). The permanence thesis draws support from the persistence of family-based agriculture. Bernstein (2001) notes that in agriculture there is more risk in investment due to uncertainties in the natural environment. There is also a non-identity of labour and production time; labour is at times unable to realize profit, because of growth cycles. Both of these tendencies make agriculture an area that is problematic for capitalist incorporation. While there are developments in technology as production is standardized and simplified through biochemistry and mechanical development,

permanence theorists argue that there will always remain an area that is inhospitable to the rigours of capitalism.

The debate between disappearance and permanence is not simply academic; it has concrete, real-world applications for development strategy and process. Within development, the disappearance thesis has traditionally carried the most weight as industrialization and modernization have become synonymous with development, and the persistence of traditional societies has been seen as peripheral and unimportant at best and obstructive at worse. Araghi (1995) identifies two phases in the depeasantization process resulting from development. The first, from 1945 to 1973, is representative of the development of a world market and the establishment of a new world economy and political order under the hegemony of the United States. The second extends from 1973 to the present and has seen a collapse of that world order and an ongoing reorganization of world political and economic institutions. The first period coincides in development with the emergence and implementation of modernization theories. The second period encompasses the period that has come to be identified with post-colonial globalization, and begins with dependency theory.

During Araghi's first phase, from 1945 to 1973, development was largely seen in an optimistic light. Modernization theories were dominant, pro-active, and policy-oriented, directing processes of social and economic change designed to incorporate the developing world into the emerging world order, raising standards of living for all populations and creating and stabilizing nation-states. Hoogvelt (2001) argues that modernization theories turned the abstracted, generalized history of European development into a necessary logic; development was seen as a matter of ordered social reform that removed the dysfunctional elements. Included in these was the peasantry. Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI), which emphasized the growth of domestic industry, was a strategy that provided the economic content of national independence (Araghi, 1995; Hoogvelt, 2001). Philip McMichael (1996), however, notes that industrial growth fuelled by international assistance often led to forms of economic development that relied upon imported capital-intensive technology. In the agricultural sector, the American model of integration of agriculture and industry was followed, represented by massive projects such as the Green Revolution and various land reform strategies (Araghi, 1995). Designed to promote the development of the capitalist farmer, on a large or small scale, this strategy often neglected basic food production (Araghi, 1995; McMichael, 1996). Overall, the strategy failed as only a minority become capitalist farmers, and the vast majority of rural populations remained petty commodity producers, dependent upon state subsidies and public and private financing for both their production and consumption needs (Araghi, 1995). Growing numbers of the urban and rural poor were being deprived of the benefits of industrialization (McMichael, 1996).

During the 1970s it became clear that the modernization strategy of development was not succeeding. Dependency theory emerged, arguing that colonial capital had distorted the economy and society of colonial countries, resulting in the reproduction of economic stagnation and the extreme pauperization of the masses. This trend, it was argued, was continued in the post-colonial era as advanced societies continued to subordinate the developing world, relying upon it for primary products and raw materials (Hoogvelt, 2001). After 1973 and the collapse of the Bretton Woods monetary system, the hegemony of the United States declined, precipitating a period of prolonged crisis that continues today and during which Araghi argues capital is being reorganized on a global scale. This process has driven the internationalization of finance capital and the transnationalization of the state (Araghi, 1995). Development was redefined by the World Bank as "participation in the world market" and the emphasis shifted from national development to specialization so that states could compete in the global economy (McMichael, 1996, p. 109).

Beginning in the 1980s, Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) and economic liberalization were imposed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund as panaceas for the economic difficulties of developing states. Foreign debts had mounted throughout the

1970s, and the 1980s and 1990s witnessed a prolonged debt crisis in the developing world. Outward-oriented and export-led development strategies replaced ISI; for the developing world this meant the export of primary products (Araghi, 1995; Hoogvelt, 2001). An international division of labour developed, concentrating high-value added production in the developed world and low-skilled, menial manufacturing in the developing world.

For rural agricultural populations in Africa, the policies implemented resulted in the removal of agricultural subsidies and price supports, land deregulation, wage freezes, and the devaluation of national currencies (Araghi, 1995). The resulting environment is assessed by Bryceson (1999) as one of high risks and low returns where small-scale peasant farmers were unable to compete. Where industrialization strategies had already resulted in a reliance on imports or food aid for basic food stuffs, vulnerability and exposure to world markets and price fluctuations for agricultural producers only increased this dependency, while negatively impacting the purchasing power of populations. Farm incomes and investment were dramatically depressed while liberalization generated new opportunities for land grabbing by both domestic and foreign capital interests at the expense of the peasant holdings (Bernstein, 2001). This, combined with natural disasters and environmental degradation causing decreased crop yields, has meant that declining food security is now a major issue, with a massive subsistence crisis in rural areas. This is arguably the most severe in Sub-Saharan Africa, but it is the case for the developing world as a whole.

It is this subsistence crisis that has precipitated depeasantization, as rural populations move to diversify their income sources in an attempt to cope with the negative environment. Araghi argues that, as small owners are increasingly exposed to world market forces, they have turned to petty commodity production, rural labour, seasonal migration, occasional wage labour on capitalist farms and subcontracting to multinational corporations as methods of meeting their subsistence needs (Araghi, 1995). More than anything, rural populations are searching for an approach that will provide what Carswell (1997) calls a 'sustainable livelihood'. In her words, a livelihood is:

[T]he capabilities, assets and activities required as a means to a living. A livelihood is sustainable if it can cope with, and recover from, stresses and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets and provide net benefits to other livelihoods locally and more widely, both now and in the future, without undermining the natural resource base. (cited in Bryceson, 1999, p. 173)

In economic theory, income diversification is seen as economically rational risk management. Bryceson (1999) argues that income diversification is biased towards non-agricultural activities and caters to local and national, rather than international, markets. She also argues that evidence shows it to be a far more successful strategy for wealthier households, and that it may actually decrease rural productivity as labour is diverted from agriculture to other activities. As a result, in her view "income diversification is not a step forward, but rather a fumbling attempt to 'make do' in a severely deficient market environment" (p. 174).

Bryceson (1999) also argues that income diversification represents a fundamental change in the labour form of a household from peasant production to that of wage labour; self-employment; or reliance upon remittances, pensions or other income transactions. She argues that subsistence based activities are increasingly substituted by monetized activities for rural populations. Citing survey results throughout Africa she contends that, although it varies from country to country and community to community, approximately forty percent of rural income is today derived from non-farm sources (p. 174). Throughout her analysis, Bryceson implicitly defines peasant production as meeting all needs through exclusively agricultural activity. Reliance upon remittance, therefore, is seen as representative of depeasantization.

Income diversification encompasses any activity a household takes on in addition to traditional agricultural subsistence production. Its purpose is to attain more purchasing power within the market so that the needs of the family unit can be met. Frequently, this diversification is not possible within the confines of the traditional community and it is here that migration intersects with depeasantization. The migration that is associated with depeasantization is primarily internal, of which there are four kinds as identified by Richard Bilsborrow (1998) according to origin and destination. They are: rural-rural, rural-urban, urban-urban, and urban-rural. Rural-rural migration has been a part of many African societies for generations and represents coming-of-age rituals for young men in particular. It is generally felt to have little impact on depeasantization. Urban-urban migration is also unimportant in assessing the decline of the peasantry and urban-rural migration has been found to be extremely rare. The remaining category, rural-urban migration is the critical form of population movement in the assessment of demographic changes. Normally measured through population censuses, rural-urban migration represents a process that Araghi identifies as 'deruralization.' Araghi argues that this process, causing a depopulation and decline of rural areas and resulting in 'overurbanization' as people concentrate in urban areas, is the primary coping mechanism used by rural populations. It is the central feature of depeasantization, which he defines as a process where an increasing number of people who were involved in agriculture with direct access to the production of their means of subsistence become rapidly and massively concentrated in urban areas (Araghi, 1995).

If it is accepted that rural-urban migration is the primary process driving depeasantization, and, as argued by Ronald Mears (1997), rural-urban migration is tantamount to urbanization, urbanization measures are a key indicator of the rate of depeasantization in a given society. Urbanization is the rate of change in the percentage of the total population that is urban. It can increase due to three major factors: the reclassification of areas from rural to urban; natural increase driven by birth rates; and rural-urban migration. In Africa, reclassification is rare and, in census measurements, has had very little impact. Fertility is higher in rural areas than in urban areas, so a natural increase in population alone would actually lead to a decline in urbanization. As a result, we are left with rural-urban migration as the primary driver for urbanization (Mears, 1997).

In Africa, only twelve percent of the population was urban in 1960, which Josef Gugler (1996) attributes to the colonial structure of African states. Colonial powers used cities only as trading hubs, and actively maintained the rural and agricultural character of the state. Since independence, migration has increased dramatically and thirty-four percent of the population of Africa was urban by 1995. The African urban population is expected to become the fastest growing urban population in the world (Chen, Valente, & Zlotnik, 1998). This trend is in evidence despite the lack of economic development that is normally identified as the drive for urbanization.

Neo-classical economic theory argues that migration flows will go from low wage to high wage areas (Bilsborrow, 1998; Mears, 1997). Dennis Rondinelli and Gyula Vastag (1998) argue that the economic growth of cities has impacted population distribution and migration since the Industrial Revolution. The jobs, wealth, services, infrastructure and new opportunities that are characteristic of development typically attract migrants from surrounding rural areas. As argued by Charles Becker and Andrew Morrison (1988), however, most African economies have not demonstrated this sort of growth and development. Particularly during the 1980s, economic growth in Africa was negative, a trend that experienced only slight improvements during the 1990s. Sub-Saharan Africa today contains thirty two of the forty Least Developed Countries as identified by the United Nations. The export of primary commodities has declined dramatically in both value and volume since the 1980s, as has foreign direct investment (Hoogvelt, 2001).

As centres of development, cities have also failed to grow economically as a result of national decline. Therefore, urbanization is not easily explained by the attraction of cities. According to the Todaro model, which is widely accepted as definitive in migration studies, however, it is the *potential* for higher wages that drives migration, not actual wages (Bilsborrow,

1998; Mears, 1997). As such, high unemployment or lack of growth is not a deterrent, nor is the lack of 'pull' factors such as increased opportunities in urban areas. Rather, it is the difference between the rural and urban areas created by the immiseration of the countryside that is generating Africa's urbanization. As Becker argues, "it is conceivable that... rural 'push' facts have accounted for a large portion of the urban growth" (Becker & Morrison, 1988). As growth declines and urban problems, including inadequate infrastructure, poverty, crime, unemployment and disease increase, it may be expected that the 'pull' factors exerted by urban areas will only continue to decrease. The decline in urban areas is reflected in rural areas, however, and 'push' factors are proving to have more impact. It is expected that the number of urban dwellers in Sub-Saharan Africa will triple by the year 2025 (Frayne, 2002). This trend seems to affirm the process of depeasantization as reflective of the negative consequences of the failure of development.

Whether the destruction of the peasantry is truly occurring in a complete way, however, remains a question. Urbanization in Africa is increasing. This has been documented consistently, both historically and in recent measurements. All projections are for the trend to continue. The relationship between this trend and the depeasantization of the continent remains unclear, however. To assess the relationship between urbanization and depeasantization it is important to assess the character of the migration that is occurring. It is rarely the entire household that migrates. Rather, migration is a family decision and usually involves the movement of one household member. This produces what Gugler (1996) has termed a "one family, two households" model as the husband migrates to an urban area to pursue wage labour while the wife and children remain on the farm, tied to subsistence agriculture (p. 228). In this way, part of the household maintains control over at least some of the means of production upon which the household relies. Migration of this kind also tends to be circular or reciprocal. In the colonial period, circular migration was the norm as active colonial policies worked to deter specifically black populations from becoming mobile. Low wages, limited contracts and outright migration control ensured that migration was individual and temporary (Gugler, 1996). John Ouchou (1998) argues that in Sub-Saharan Africa in particular, circular migration remains the norm. He notes that this makes population movement, demographic characteristics, and urbanization very difficult to define and measure because the circular nature of movement is generally not detected in censuses. He argues that coping with famine in particular produces two alternate responses: the migration of one or more family member to urban areas to earn income, which can then purchase food, and 'distress migration' which moves the entire family and is long-term. Distress migration, while it is occurring with growing frequency, is far less common. The motive for migration is not profit or accumulation; it is survival. The retention of the family farm and its, albeit limited, production capacity can only contribute to subsistence. It is therefore in the interests of the household to differentiate rather than migrate as a unit. Close connections are maintained between the origin and destination, the rural and urban areas, and remittances are exchanged.

Bruce Frayne (2002), in his study of food security in Namibia, notes that this remittance is two-way. While income is often sent to rural areas, food is sent to urban migrants in links that are fluid. He argues that, "[w]hile permanent urbanization certainly continues in the region, the persistence of non-commercial agricultural production and a rise in urban poverty have set in motion a complex system of cyclical or reciprocal migration between rural and urban areas" (pp. 12-13). These linkages are only enhanced by the development of modern communication and transport technologies that make the flow of goods and people easier (Frayne, 2002).

The rural-urban migration networks and linkages represent a system that, in traditional literature, is driving depeasantization. They represent an increase in the reliance upon wage labour for peasant farmers. The peasant form of production as exclusively agricultural, therefore, is no longer sufficient to meet the subsistence needs of the household. Lehmann (1982),

however, argues that peasant production is distinct even when members leave in search of wage labour.

It is difficult to argue that family members engaged in wage labour remain peasants. The peasantry, as previously stated, has two central components: the driving logic of subsistence and the retention of at least some measure of control over the means of subsistence. While engaged in wage labour, individuals lose that measure of control over their production; their means of subsistence is determined by someone else. Even if the household as a unit does not lose peasant status, the individual member does. The peasantry is a unit of production that is oriented to the household as a whole, however, not to the individual members. As such, even when individual members join the capitalist labour force, the household remains representative of the peasantry. The driving motivator of basic subsistence persists. Those that remain in rural areas continue to operate at a subsistence level, producing to meet family needs rather than to accumulate. In addition, the temporary migration to urban areas that splits a family is also an attempt to meet the basic subsistence needs of the household, not to profit. As an extension of this, if it became possible to meet these needs without the contribution of the migrant's wage labour income this practice would end, and the migrant would return home. The prevalence of circular migration, which occurs as needed, and of return migration is testimony to this. As migrants return to rural areas, re-engaging in peasant production and regaining control over their means of subsistence, a process of 'repeasantization' for individuals occurs.<sup>1</sup> The household in total, however, retained peasant status throughout.

This argument is valid only if it is accepted that agricultural production for the majority of the rural population in Africa remains a peasant form of production. It is part of the disappearance thesis that this is not the case, and that agricultural producers may appear to be peasants but are, in essence, wage labourers because of their engagement with the market. Luis Llambi argues that producers are embedded in the market, and are subject to its constraints and incentives. They must make decisions on the basis of relative costs and returns (Llambi, 1988). In this argument, agricultural producers still operate according to the logic of the market and the decision to diversify their income sources, including the decision to migrate, is a direct consequence of this. Llambi (1988) acknowledges, however, that production for mere survival is not a capitalist activity. In fact, he states that farmers only behave as "Chayanovian peasants [...] under conditions verging on subsistence" (Llambi, 1988, p. 362). Again, the question becomes one of motivation: depeasantization is at least questionable for as long as the primary motivation for production is only subsistence.

Bernstein (2001) adds usefully to this discussion by arguing that depeasantization is not complete when the separation of producers and the means of production is incomplete. He instead argues that what has occurred is a differentiation within the peasant population. He identifies three crucial categories in rural populations: the poor, the middle, and the rich farmer. The poor farmers in his view are those completely unable to reproduce themselves with household production. They are therefore required to exchange their labour regularly, achieving reproduction only through its sale. They are, in essence, what the disappearance thesis argues has developed: a rural proletariat. The middle farmers, by contrast, are able to reproduce themselves mainly through family labour on family land, but only in specific relations to other forms of production. These are the households who diversify their incomes and differentiate within themselves, as one member migrates in search for wage labour. It is in this category we may find the persistence of the peasantry. Finally, he argues that the rich accumulate sufficient capital to invest in production through the purchase of superior means of production or additional labour. These have succeeded in becoming capitalist farmers, and, like the poor, represent depeasantization (Bernstein, 1979).

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'repeasantization' is also used by Bernstein when referring to workers fleeing desperate conditions in urban areas and returning to rural areas.

The destruction of the peasantry, therefore, is in no way complete. This does not represent an ideal situation, and the persistence of the peasantry is not reflective of its romantic communal status. Rather, its persistence is a direct result of a continually increasing marginalization of the poor. Hoogvelt's central thesis is that global capitalism has entered into a period of involution rather than expansion where increasingly larger parts of the world's population are systematically excluded from participation. She argues that the global core and periphery is no longer geographical, but social (Hoogvelt, 2001). The persistence of the peasantry, therefore, is reflective of the exclusion of peasants and their inability to 'modernize' and to fully participate in the global market.

The social changes that are occurring in rural societies and their role in depeasantization is an area far too large to be explored here, but it is important to note that while, the peasantry may be persisting, this does not mean that traditional rural societies remain unchanged. As Bryceson (1999) notes, the search for alternatives in income diversification has resulted in changes in traditional gender and generational roles; the monetisation of traditionally reciprocal exchanges; and duty-bound activities such as healing or midwifery. Oucho also notes that fundamental changes are occurring in rural areas, particularly in the growing prevalence of female-headed households. In societies where women are often denied land ownership and participation in some economic activities, massive social change is happening as a result of the new migration patterns. There is also an increase of value exchange between rural and urban areas that is having an impact on gender relations (Oucho, 1998). These changes can be seen in the migration patterns themselves as the number of women migrants, particularly of young women migrants, is increasing (Agesa, 2003; Gugler, 1996). Bryceson (1999) argues that these changes, in particular the assertion of economic autonomy by women, are coming at the expense of social cohesion, at least in the short term. The persistence of the peasantry is not, as may be argued by many traditional peasant theorists, a carrying forward of the past into the present. Rather, it is a particular form of production that is continuing because of, and in some cases despite, global capitalism. The populations that engage in this production are as variable and dynamic as those that do not.

Development, for the majority of the world's population, remains an ideal to be sought. The failures of various development projects in the latter half of the twentieth century make this goal seem ever more illusory. The failure of development, however, has not meant that societies have not changed. Processes are at work in the developing world that are fundamentally changing its nature, altering the context in which development might occur. One of the most prevalent trends is that of urbanization, with resulting changes in the rural population. Although many interpret these changes as reflective of a process of depeasantization, the peasant form of production as operating according to a driving logic of subsistence and retaining at least some control over the means of production is not disappearing. Rather, it persists as rural populations are increasingly marginalized and impoverished by the currents of global capital. The persistence of the peasantry is not a positive process. It stands as a testament to the failures of the development project, and of the continuing exclusion of the world's poor from participation in the world economic and political order. Neither the disappearance nor the permanence thesis has proved to be completely correct.

The problem of the peasantry in Africa is made more complicated by the prevalence of civil war, which displaces massive numbers of people from their land, and of environmental degradation and natural disasters, which cause widespread hunger and famine. Disease is also fundamentally changing population dynamics. Deborah Bryceson (1999) states that,

Incessant references to Sub-Saharan Africa's lagging economic performance and the widening gap between it and other parts of the developing world is not accompanied with acknowledgement of the fundamental problem, namely

African peasant agriculture's inability to compete in today's global market. (p. 185)

Whatever solutions are to be found, they must be found quickly. The number of people living in poverty increases every day and, while depeasantization has not occurred to the extent argued by some, it may become the dominant process as agriculture becomes increasingly non-viable. Henry Bernstein (2001) observes that "the peasantries [...] that inhabited 'the world of the past' [...] are indeed destroyed by capitalism and imperialism" (p. 45). This process has resulted not in the disappearance of the peasantry, but in its redefinition. Today's peasantry is a population struggling for survival, clinging to control over the means of production that are increasingly unable to meet their subsistence needs, and excluded from the system that used to offer hope of development. Not aiming for an accumulation of profit, the peasants of today are instead in search of a sustainable livelihood that will ensure their survival, within any mode of production, into the twenty-first century.

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