

# *The State, Crop Production and Differentiation in Botswana, 1947–1966\**

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*This article analyses the colonial government's intervention in crop production in Botswana through the 'progressive farmer' scheme, from 1946 to independence in 1966. Crop production was not a highly remunerative venture in colonial Botswana because of persistent droughts, inadequate markets and lack of sufficient draught power and farming implements. Although cattle constituted the basis of wealth and, hence, their ownership led to social differentiation from pre-colonial times, the introduction of the 'progressive farmer' scheme accentuated the existing social stratification by favouring the well-to-do producers. While only a few farmers benefited from state assistance, this development marked a departure from the period before 1947 when the colonial state did almost nothing to bolster crop production in the country. By utilising statistics and case histories of farmers who joined the scheme, the article argues that the support extended to a few selected farmers in only some reserves accentuated intra-peasant differentiation and differentiation between regions of the country. The article begins by briefly presenting a survey of the concept of peasant differentiation, then focuses on the nature and organisation of progressive farmer schemes and their impact on peasant differentiation. It then discusses the position of farmers in the various categories of the scheme and finally presents and analyses case studies of three progressive farmers from three different reserves.*

## **Introduction**

Numerous works address different aspects of the agricultural history of colonial Botswana. An in-depth analysis of the effects of colonial intervention in crop production, however, has remained outside the realm of most of these studies.<sup>1</sup> The conventional wisdom in Botswana's historiography has been that, from 1885 to about 1955, the colonial government achieved little economic development in the country.<sup>2</sup> While this assessment is true, a closer

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1 Several University of Botswana dissertations analyse the effects of co-operator schemes in various reserves of the Protectorate, but none provides a detailed account of the organisation of the scheme or case studies or empirical data to inform their findings. Most notable are P. Molutsi, 'The Roots of Agrarian Underdevelopment in Kgatlang, 1930–1970' (BA dissertation, University of Botswana, 1992); C. Molebatsi, 'The Rise of the Kulak Farmers in Kweneng' (BA dissertation, University of Botswana, 1981). A unique situation was that of the Barolong of southern Botswana who were freehold farmers engaged in commercial crop production. For a detailed discussion of the Barolong, see J. Comaroff, 'The Structure of Agricultural Transformation in Barolong: Towards an Integrated Development Plan' (unpublished paper, University of Manchester, 1972).

examination of the few cases of state assistance to agriculture would provide a better understanding of the agrarian history of the country. The cases analysed in this article reveal that immense benefits accrued to the few farmers selected for the programme, suggesting that a large-scale programme would have enhanced the position of many more farmers and contributed significantly to self sufficiency in grain production. Comparisons shall be drawn between the progressive farmer scheme in Botswana and its counterparts in various provinces of colonial Zambia, where the aims, nature and effects of progressive farmer schemes were similar in several respects.

### **Differentiation of the Peasantry**

A notable scholar on peasant studies, Teodor Shanin, defines socio-economic differentiation of the peasantry in the following way:

Cumulative polarization of rural wealth and means of production followed by mutation of some peasants into the rich farmers who adopt entrepreneurial strategies based on employment of wage labour while the poor become the rural wage labour, emigrate or die out.<sup>3</sup>

Shanin further reminds us that there can be different peasantries among peasants, 'differentiated according to their structural position at a specified moment of time', thus reminding us of the complexity that arises when we attempt to analyse peasant societies.<sup>4</sup> In his study of the peasantry in Zambia, Jonathan Momba defines peasant differentiation as the process through which a peasantry develops 'internal contradictions' due to increased commodity production. This could be in the form of 'economic stratification, gradual concentration of wealth in fewer hands, and a struggle for land'.<sup>5</sup> Thus, an intensification or increase in production which results in sizeable remuneration and enhances the ability to invest in more advanced means of production by some peasants sets them apart from others and promotes stratification of peasant society.

In the process of differentiation, Momba and Shanin categorise the peasantry into 'rich', 'middle' and 'poor'.<sup>6</sup> According to Momba, rich peasants are those who produce a surplus in excess of their requirements and obligations. They are capable of increasing the draught power at their disposal, improving the quality of agricultural technology, increasing its quantity and also employing casual agricultural labourers. Middle peasants are those who produce a surplus product that is more or less equal to their obligations, while poor peasants produce less than they need to meet their obligations.<sup>7</sup> Although poor peasants cultivate their own land, they also engage in casual labour to supplement their inadequate incomes from agriculture. To a large extent, middle and poor peasants employ family labour in their agricultural pursuits.<sup>8</sup> In his study of the peasantry in central Botswana, Jan Hasselberg provides a definition of peasant differentiation similar to that of Momba and Shanin. He maintains that 'rich' peasants are those who can accumulate wealth and invest in other businesses besides farming, while 'middle' peasants are capable of reproducing themselves through family labour on agricultural production alone. Middle peasant households combine

several sources of income, with men usually taking up wage labour while women engage in crop cultivation. Poor peasants, on the other hand, cannot reproduce through household production alone and consequently sell their labour on a regular basis.<sup>9</sup>

In this article, I will categorise the peasantry in colonial Botswana using certain selected determinants, which will provide a more nuanced account appropriate for understanding the historical experiences of Botswana farmers. The following categories will be used: the ownership of the means of production (such as farming implements), the amount of land under cultivation, monetary returns from crop sales and the employment of wage labour in agricultural enterprises.<sup>10</sup> In several instances, the amount and quality of some of these determinants, after some years in a particular scheme, are compared to the farmer's position before the introduction of the scheme in order to gauge the level of transformation. The paucity of production data for the majority of peasants who did not enrol in the scheme makes it difficult to use the schema devised by Momba, Shanin and Hasselberg and hence divide the peasantry in Botswana into rich, middle and poor. The fact that, in peasant society, there is always some 'middling' or straddling section between categories also makes a precise division problematic. Available evidence, however, will be used to demonstrate that a tiny stratum of rural 'capitalist' farmers, engaged in commodity production, was emerging in Botswana from the late 1940s, while a large section of the peasantry remained poor.

These categories – the amount of land under cultivation, ownership of the agricultural means of production, the employment of wage labour and the monetary returns from crops production – were also used by Vladimir Lenin in his study of the Taurida peasantry in Russia.<sup>11</sup> In Taurida, the 'well-to-do' peasants made up one-fifth of the population but cultivated over half the available land. The 'middle' peasants consisted of two-fifths of the total households and used their income from land to meet their average expenditure. Poor peasants comprised the majority of households but held about one-eighth of the total land cultivated – too little for them to 'meet their obligations from farming'.<sup>12</sup> As I will demonstrate, the 'progressive' farmer scheme in Botswana led to a situation similar to that described by Lenin, especially from the early 1950s.

The argument in this article pertains to the general economic situation of colonial Botswana, a situation in which cattle constituted the main source of wealth and basis of social stratification. Those with more cattle, such as chiefs and other nobles, were the richest in society. These groups acquired cattle in different ways, for example, through court fines, tribute, levies and inheritance. Cattle were also used for draught power, determining the amount of land one could cultivate and allowing one to cultivate at the optimal time during the short rainy seasons. Wealthy Botswana owned cattle ranches (*meraka*) and also engaged in petty general trading especially from the late 1940s. These activities promoted social stratification. Thus, the skewed distribution of cattle holdings from precolonial times formed the basis of social stratification, continuing into the period discussed in this article.<sup>13</sup>

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9 J. Hasselberg, *The Third World in Transition: The Case of the Peasantry in Botswana* (Uppsala, Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1985), p. 12.

10 In Botswana cattle have always formed the material basis of wealth, the main yardstick through which a man's wealth was measured and the main economically differentiating factor within society as a whole. Evidence from the 1950s, however, demonstrates that crop production also played a crucial role.

11 For a comprehensive analysis of peasant differentiation resulting from agricultural commodity production in Russia, see V. Lenin, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia, Collected Works*, Vol. 3 (Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1960), p. 71.

As previously mentioned, Botswana's colonial government paid little attention to crop production, focusing instead on preventing cattle diseases because of the centrality of cattle to the country's economy. Only after the establishment of the department of agriculture in 1935 did the government attempt to improve crop husbandry. These belated and inadequate attempts were disrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, which shifted emphasis to the cultivation of 'warlands'.<sup>14</sup> After the war, colonial crop production schemes favoured the already existing elites because of their large cattle holdings, and hence deepened the established social stratification.

### The 'Pupil/Co-operator' Scheme and Differentiation in Botswana

At the end of the Second World War, Britain provided more economic assistance to her colonies partly in preparation for their self-government.<sup>15</sup> This increase in economic intervention may also have represented an attempt by Britain to secure urgently needed foodstuffs and materials in short supply after the war. Thus, the post-war period, which has been dubbed 'the second colonial occupation', saw an increasing number of development experts 'descend' on Africa to urge peasants to change their methods of production.<sup>16</sup> The British colonial government aimed to increase food production in some of her colonies by launching progressive farmer schemes. The position of the colonial state in the question of food production in Africa after the war has been summarised by Frederick Cooper:

The agricultural extension agent replaced the district officer as the embodiment of colonial authoritarianism. New regulations about seeds, contouring, cattle dipping, and marketing went along with massive efforts to get Africans to produce more.<sup>17</sup>

In southern Africa, a scheme similar to the one set up in Botswana was started in the southern and eastern provinces of Zambia in 1946 and 1947. This scheme, which was called the African Farming Improvement Scheme (AFIS), also targeted the few already well-off, elite peasants (called 'Improved Farmers') with the hope that the bulk of the peasantry would learn from them. Support for these farmers promoted a class whom it was thought would ensure stability in the rural areas and production for the market. In this scheme, which was the brainchild of the Department of Agriculture, progressive farmers received subsidies in the form of fertiliser and agricultural equipment. The assisted farmers mechanised their production by purchasing more ploughs, harrows and tractors, and they increased their acreage and yields and supplemented household labour with wage labour. This response accentuated class differentiation in the two provinces of Zambia.<sup>18</sup> Similar objectives and

14 Cultivation of these lands was to assist the British war effort. For the organisation, implementation and results of these programmes, see H. Bhila, 'The Impact of the Second World War on the Development of Peasant Agriculture in Botswana, 1939–1956', *Botswana Notes and Records*, 6 (1984), pp. 63–71; D. Mulindwa, 'Bechuanaland Protectorate and the Second World War', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, XII, 3 (May 1984), pp. 31–49; A. Jackson, *A Country at War: Botswana 1939–1945* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1999).

15 See J. Darwin, *Britain and Decolonization* (London, Macmillan, 1996), pp. 137–9; J. Hageaves, *Decolonization in Africa* (London, Longman, 1996), pp. 104–5.

16 J. Darwin, *The End of the Empire: The Historical Debate* (Cambridge, Blackwell, 1981), pp. 45–7. See also J. Lonsdale and D. Low, 'Introduction', in *Oxford History of East Africa*, Vol. 3 (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 12.

results characterised the situation in Botswana where, in addition to increased production, the state propped up a class that identified with the colonial power politically and economically. As in Zambia, the colonial state considered this class necessary for stability.<sup>19</sup> Although Britain neglected the economic development of Botswana until the late 1950s because of her initial desire to transfer the country to either the British South Africa Company or South Africa, she did not systematically stifle progressive peasant agriculture. It was largely in the settler colonies of Southern Rhodesia, South Africa and Kenya that the state unleashed an onslaught on African progressive farmers. Here, the policies were designed to prevent competition between white settler farmers and African producers.<sup>20</sup> In the non-settler colonies of Botswana and Zambia there were aspects of policy which discriminated against African producers, but they were not implemented systematically on a grand scale.

In Botswana, this period saw an increase in funding from the colonial government, especially through the Colonial Development and Welfare Fund (CDWF). Between 1946 and 1956, the CDWF provided slightly over £3 million for the development of agriculture in the Protectorate. Of this, only around £27,000 was devoted to a scheme code-named D680 – the Development of African Agriculture. In 1950, this fund was further boosted by the provision of an additional £45,225 for a four-year period beginning 1 April 1952. Under this scheme, a programme for progressive farmers was started in 1947. This scheme, whose participants were initially called co-operators or pupil farmers, began as an experimental exercise in the Bakgatla Reserve.<sup>21</sup> The programme began with the growing of crops in demonstration plots carried out by ten agricultural demonstrators. Five of the demonstrators were under the supervision of the Animal Husbandry Officer, while the other group remained under the Agricultural and Livestock Officer. In this exercise, four to five selected co-operators were allocated to each demonstrator. The ‘co-operator’ would learn the so-called improved methods of farming, such as planting in rows and crop rotation. The selection of these farmers rested mainly with the chief and his councillors.<sup>22</sup>

As already noted, the pupil/co-operator scheme in Botswana was characteristic of similar British colonial schemes elsewhere in Africa. Their distinguishing features were the selection of an elite who also had some previous work experience, such as working on white farms and the mines, and having what was then considered a high level of education compared to the majority. In many of the schemes, it was also assumed that the benefits accruing to the few participants would ‘trickle down’ to the majority of the peasants.<sup>23</sup> The schemes undertaken in the provinces of colonial Zambia are strikingly similar to the Botswana scheme in this respect. Here also, peasants who participated in the AFIS were the ones who had demonstrated their interest in innovation to the Department of Agriculture. They were required to have ‘... successful work records on European settler farms, plus possession of some formal education...’, while the majority of peasants outside the scheme were expected to learn from the selected elite, and also learn *about* them.<sup>24</sup>

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19 Parson, *Botswana: Liberal Democracy*, p. 60.

20 See Robin Palmer, ‘The Agricultural History of Rhodesia’, in R. Palmer and N. Parsons (eds), *The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1977), pp. 221–45; E.A. Brett, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment in East Africa: The Politics of Economic Change, 1919–1939* (London, Heinemann, 1973), pp.180–90; C. Bundy, *The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry* (London, Heinemann, 1979).

21 Botswana National Archives, Secretariat Files (hereafter BNA, S.) 286/1, Colonial Development and Welfare Fund: Application of Grant for African Agriculture, Ten Year Plan, 1946–1956; BNA, S. 539/8, Colonial Development and Welfare Grant, 1952.

22 BNA, S. 286/1, Colonial Development and Welfare Fund: Application of Grant for African Agriculture, Ten Year Plan, 1946–1956.

The requirements of the scheme favoured those few already possessing the needed resources. Describing the scheme in the late 1940s, an official of the department of agriculture stated that:

Each demonstrator stands at the elbow of several progressive peasants as their agricultural mentor, teaching them improved, though still simple methods. Each group of demonstrators is supervised by a European officer. It is hoped that the better results obtained by the progressive farmers, called 'co-operators', will influence their more backward fellow tribesmen to follow their example.<sup>25</sup>

This quotation confirms the view held by some agrarian analysts that colonial officials (like policy makers in today's developing countries) were content with assisting a few progressive farmers with the hope that the results would trickle down to the mass of the peasantry.<sup>26</sup> The scheme also targeted men, and there was no mention of a woman ever becoming a progressive farmer. This was probably because of the patriarchal nature of Batswana society, with all major agricultural decisions being made by men.

The co-operator scheme started in the Bakgatla Reserve and, after 1950, extended to other reserves in the country. In the scheme, each demonstrator was provided with a set of implements consisting of a harrow, a single-row planter and an inter-row cultivator. The co-operator had to provide a plough, draught animals, kraal manure and labour, while the Department of Agriculture provided fertiliser and seed.<sup>27</sup> Already in 1947 agricultural officials noted some successes of the scheme in the Bakgatla reserve, reporting that the adoption of the so-called 'sound cultural methods' alone led to a 200 per cent increase in yields. The average returns from a drought-resistant sorghum variety on cultivated and manured lands were ten bushels per acre, or more than three times the yield obtained in an average season.<sup>28</sup> This represented a massive transformation and substantial benefits for those who adopted the measures.

By 1954, the scheme had been extended to other parts of the country, such as the Bangwaketse, Balete, Bakwena and Bangwato reserves. The scheme became more elaborate in terms of farmer category as it was expanded. In addition to receiving implements and seeds, selected farmers were trained for a period of from three to four years, after which the implements belonging to the department were withdrawn. At this juncture, co-operators were expected to purchase their own implements with some of the proceeds from their increased production.<sup>29</sup>

Agricultural schemes such as the co-operator scheme in Botswana enhanced the position of the relatively well-off peasants both by subsidising their production and by giving them technical assistance that led to increased yields. This led to further differentiation of the peasantry, based on commodity production. The effects of the co-operator-oriented extension scheme on peasant differentiation, and what could have resulted from a fully-fledged programme, can best be illustrated by statistics on production levels and case studies of the experiences of different farmers in the scheme. The scheme also promoted differentiation of landholdings, with those in the scheme accumulating more land. Some of the lands held by co-operators are reported to have been in excess of 100 acres. There were also massive transformations in the value of crops produced. This is exemplified by the case of grain beans, whose average value from a rotation plot was approximately £7.00 per acre, compared with a value of about £1.00 per acre for farmers who were still using the 'old methods' (i.e. the majority who did not join the scheme).<sup>30</sup> If the claim that monetary value from plots

cultivated under the new methods increased from £1.00 per acre to £7.00 were valid, then this indicates considerable remunerative gains for co-operator farmers. This stratified rural communities in the reserves.

As noted, the co-operator scheme was organised in such a way that a co-operator would go through an initial tuition stage, after which he progressed until he purchased his own implements and was capable of learning through experience by applying new methods on his own lands. He would then be designated 'ex-co-operator' and, to maintain his interest in the scheme, 'prizes were given for outstanding plots, farmers days were organized, master farmers certificates issued and other propaganda methods employed'.<sup>31</sup> Ex-co-operators would graduate to become progressive farmers and ultimately reach the pinnacle of the hierarchy – the master farmer level – after achieving a high standard of both crop and animal husbandry.

Grain from co-operator plots was marketed by the Department of Agriculture. This aspect of the scheme also promoted the well-being of progressive farmers, whilst the majority of peasants remained (as they had been at least since the 1880s) at the mercy of what some officials called 'unscrupulous traders'. Otherwise, in view of the lack of market outlets, they were exposed in good years to the risk of destruction of their grain by weevils.<sup>32</sup> Thus, according to the Livestock and Agricultural Officer, the Department of Agriculture purchased 260 bags of seed grain from co-operators in the Bangwaketse Reserve, and this brought in approximately £270.00 for co-operators in the 1959–1960 season. Proceeds from grain sold on behalf of co-operators were used to purchase agricultural implements. Furthermore, the co-operators also obtained loans to purchase farming implements from the American Revolving Loan Fund which was established in 1961.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, the 'improved' farmer scheme in the southern province of Zambia also featured preferential treatment given by the state to a few peasant farmers.<sup>34</sup>

The co-operator scheme was largely concentrated in the central, south-central and southern parts of Botswana. In the 1953–1954 season, in the Bangwaketse Reserve, implements, spares and grain bags valued at £420.00 were supplied to the co-operators through an advance account operated by the Tribal Administration, while grain valued at £2,900 was marketed for co-operators.<sup>35</sup> In 1961, in the Bakgatla Reserve, 83 row crop implements, 28 ploughs and five scotch carts were purchased by farmers.<sup>36</sup> Few benefits of the co-operator extension scheme, however, reached the Tati Reserve, and only in the early 1960s was the scheme introduced in the Batawana Reserve. It was never extended to the Kgalagadi and Gantsi regions. It is probable that the absence of this scheme in these areas deprived farmers of the opportunity to try new methods, and hence they could not increase crop yields, thereby promoting differentiation between the different regions of the country.

The effects of the scheme on the peasantry can best be gleaned from production statistics, especially those of the early to mid-1960s. Colonial annual reports and annual reports from the Department of Agriculture provide data on co-operators and constantly make reference to the fact that farmers who did not join the scheme continued to produce about one bag per acre.<sup>37</sup> These provide some evidence from which plausible suppositions could be made.

In the 1950s and the 1960s, the average acreage of farmers who were not in the scheme was estimated to be seven acres, while that of farmers in the programme was seventeen acres.

The 1960–1961 season was a good one in terms of grain harvest, and the 948 farmers in the scheme produced 47,785 bags of grain, with an average per farmer of 53 bags of sorghum, and a monetary value of R159.00.<sup>38</sup> During the same season, there were about 90,000 farming families who were not in the scheme and these produced about 1,112,917 bags, with an average per farmer of twelve bags and a monetary value of R37.00.<sup>39</sup> In the following season, 1962–1963, which was described as poor, farmers in the scheme numbered 1,438 and they produced 30,671 bags, with an average per farmer of 21 bags and a monetary value of R84.00. On the other hand, there were about 100,000 farmers outside the scheme who produced 232,011 bags, being an average per farmer of two bags and a monetary value of about R900.00.<sup>40</sup> Although the average number of bags for farmers in the scheme appears very low, it was significant for arid Botswana, a difficult environment for crop production.

The figures for farmers who were not in the scheme during the two seasons indicate that the majority of peasants did not enrol. Only about 1 per cent of the farming families in the country are said to have been in the scheme. This stifled the productive capacity of many peasants, and, as Alain de Jainvry has noted in his study of peasants in Latin America, if peasants are marginalised from sources of information, credit and education, the possibility to transmit techniques that might improve their productive capacity is diminished.<sup>41</sup> This is, indeed, what happened in colonial Botswana after the initiation of the co-operator scheme.

The differing averages of bags per farmer in the scheme in both the good and the poor seasons testify to the effectiveness of the co-operator scheme. The number of participants was very low indeed, when compared to non-participants. It is thus possible to argue that a tiny section of farmers produced much more than the majority, and as they tended not to rely mainly on family labour, they could be called the emerging 'rural capitalists'. Although some peasants outside the scheme owned some implements and draught animals, they could not compete or compare favourably with these progressive farmers. Many peasants owned very few or no cattle, and they depended on borrowed implements to cultivate their fields.<sup>42</sup>

Poor peasants in Botswana had few or no farming implements, no access to agricultural credit and only small plots for cultivation. In his study of Russia, Lenin noted that the well-to-do peasants possessed the means of production, and hence they more often employed improved farming techniques compared to the rest of the peasantry. As a result, they sowed their crops faster and exploited favourable weather by sowing when conditions were still humid. This enhanced their production.<sup>43</sup> A similar situation seems to have prevailed in Botswana where the skewed ownership of cattle and other factors hampered poor peasants' productivity.

### **Categories of Farmers in the Scheme and Some Case Histories**

Analysis of a questionnaire developed by the acting Senior Agricultural Officer, P.R. Weare, in 1964, reveals the increasing differentiation of the Botswana peasantry. Weare administered the questionnaire to 35 farmers in the scheme. Six of these farmers fell into the highest category, the 'master farmers'; fourteen in the second layer, the progressive farmers; while



fifteen were pupil farmers. Of the master farmers, three were mechanised while the other three employed draught power. Farmers in the sample had average holdings of 112 acres, while their average size of landholdings prior to joining the scheme was 33 acres. This indicated a percentage increase in holdings of 239.4 per cent. The average value of farming implements owned by these farmers was R882.00, while before joining the scheme it stood at R141.00. Concerning labour, they spent, on average, about R31.00 on labour in kind and about R34.00 in monetary value. The value of crops produced by these farmers before joining the scheme was R160.00, while after enlisting it leaped to R891.00, an increase of 456.9 per cent.<sup>44</sup>

One can deduce from this survey that, from the mid-1950s to the early 1960s, crop production had become a crucial factor in accentuating the existing social stratification in the country. The statistics indicate considerable increases in remuneration for the few selected farmers. The 1965 Annual Colonial Report states that a survey carried out in the previous year revealed the following features: a fivefold increase in income per acre for pupil farmers, an increase in investment in livestock and implements, the doubling of land under cultivation by such farmers and a rise in their standard of living as indicated by the purchase of more consumer goods.<sup>45</sup> These factors indicate the transformation that farmers in the scheme had undergone. These were the individuals who benefited from 'mass' extension methods conducted by the Department of Agriculture through the radio, press, cinema vans and farmers' visits to more 'developed' parts of the country.<sup>46</sup>

Increases in crop quantities produced by these farmers and the phenomenal rise in their value strongly indicate that grain production played a significant role in remuneration for those involved. The total yields for farmers in the scheme, growing crops over a three-year period, also indicate considerable increases. For sorghum, the average yield was 131 bags valued at R515.00, while for maize it was 70 bags valued at R238.00. Cowpeas averaged five bags valued at R38.00, while for cotton it was three bags valued at R68.00.<sup>47</sup>

A closer look at farmers in the different categories – using factors such as the ownership of the means of production, total yields and value of crops and the employment of wage labour before and after joining the scheme – can help to demonstrate the resulting differentiation. (The currency used is the one provided in the source.)

### *Master Farmers*

The survey assessed three mechanised farmers. The average value of their implements increased by 994 per cent after they joined the scheme, while their average holdings rose by 1,172 per cent and they employed wage labour which was paid with cash and in kind. The total average value of the crops they produced in a season increased by 446.3 per cent. Three other master farmers in the survey employed draught power. The average value of implements held by these farmers rose by 672 per cent and the average value of the crops they produced had shot up by 498 per cent. They also cultivated comparatively large acreages, averaging 230 acres, and they employed wage labour. This stratum of master farmers, who also owned large herds of cattle and in some instances general trading stores, comprised the apex of the new 'rural capitalists' of late colonial Botswana. The increases in the value of implements they owned, landholdings, average value of crops produced and expenditure on

labour indicates that these men progressed rapidly to form a core of relatively rich farmers in the country.

### *Progressive and Pupil Farmers*

Fourteen of the farmers in the survey fell into the progressive farmer category. The average value of their implements after joining the scheme increased by 270 per cent and the total gross income from their crops went up by 421 per cent. They also employed labour paid in both cash and in kind. In Botswana, those who recently joined the scheme – the ones at the bottom of the ladder – were called pupil farmers. There were fifteen such farmers in the survey. For them, the average value of implements after joining the scheme shot up by 191 per cent, while that of crops they produced went up 367 per cent. They also employed some wage labour.<sup>48</sup>

The general picture emerging from the study is that, on the whole, the value of implements owned, the value of crops produced and the expenses on labour tended to be higher as one moved up the ladder. Pupil farmers at the bottom of the hierarchy spent less on labour and implements, produced crops of lower value and had smaller landholdings compared to the following grade – the progressive farmers. In terms of the numbers of labourers employed, the higher a farmer was on the ladder, the more labourers he employed. Generally, after enrolment in the scheme, the production capacity of all farmers increased substantially in all the categories. The increase in the value of crops produced, together with the adoption of mechanised power by a few farmers in the scheme, indicates that these men made notable transformations and became prosperous farmers who turned increasingly to the use of wage labour. This marks the emergence of a tiny stratum of incipient capitalist farmers.

### *Case Histories*

The degree of peasant differentiation resulting from the co-operator programme can also be gleaned from an analysis of case histories of farmers from different reserves in 1959. The then-Director of Agriculture, J.S. de Beer, provided case studies from the Bangwato, Balete and Bangwaketse reserves. The transformation attained by these farmers after enlisting in the scheme affirms my contention that colonial progressive agricultural crop production schemes increased social differentiation. This scheme was a desirable venture, however, as I shall explain shortly.

*(a) Farmer G.S. Raditholo, Bangwato Reserve*

In the Mahalapye area, G.S. Raditholo joined the scheme in 1957. At that time he cultivated 60 acres of land and owned two single-furrow ploughs which cost him £7.12s. each. Previously, his biggest harvest had been 45 bags. His total capital value stood at £315.45s. Raditholo employed seven labourers and was also assisted by his wife. After enlisting in the scheme, he owned a single two-furrow plough which was second-hand, one harrow which was also second-hand, two single-furrow ploughs, one second-hand cultivator, and one new two-row planter; with his total capital now valued at £508.45s., an increase of 61 per cent. He employed five labourers and continued to use his wife's labour. Before joining the scheme, Raditholo produced crops valued at £45.00 with a total loss of £151.00 on capital invested and recurrent expenditure. After joining, his gross return jumped to £409.00, an increase of

809 per cent, and he made a profit of £222.75s. in a season.<sup>49</sup> It appears Raditholo was well equipped when he joined the scheme because he already owned a few farming implements. The quality and quantity of implements and the increase in the value of crops produced, however, indicate a considerable transformation in the position of this producer.

*(b) Pogiso Makoatsane, Balete Reserve*

In the Balete Reserve, Pogiso Makoatsane joined the scheme in 1952 with a single-furrow plough. His total investment was valued at £47.00, and he employed the family labour of his wife and two daughters. Before becoming a co-operator, his annual gross income from agriculture was £30.00 in a season. After enrolment, however, this more than quadrupled to £167.00, an increase of 457 per cent. His farming implements now consisted of two single-furrow ploughs, one cultivator, one harrow, one planter, trek chains and yokes, all together valued at £271.00, an increase of 477 per cent. In addition to his wife and daughters, Makoatsane also employed ten labourers. He was awarded a Master Farmer's certificate in 1957 after he introduced crop rotation, owned a complete set of implements and maintained a high standard of husbandry.<sup>50</sup> His position clearly changed after he enrolled in the scheme.

*(c) W. Moatlapedi, Bangwaketse Reserve*

W. Moatlapedi joined in the 1955–1956 season with a holding of ten acres. His acreage doubled to 20 acres after enrolment. On joining the scheme, Moatlapedi's capital consisted of two single-furrow ploughs, a home-made harrow, rimes, yokes, trek chains and eight draught animals valued at £150.00. His total capital investment was £203.10s. and he employed five labourers for hoeing, bird-scaring and reaping, spending an average cash outlay of £45.00. Moatlapedi's wife also provided labour. The highest-ever yield from his ten-acre field was 20 bags of sorghum corn valued at £22.00. This co-operator's farming implements after joining the scheme included one two-furrow plough, two cultivators, one single-row planter, one furrow plough, one harrow, trek chains and yokes valued at £372.12s., an increase of 83 per cent. This farmer also employed ten labourers, an increase of 100 per cent. The total profit from agriculture in a season was £85.00. The 1958–1959 season in which Moatlapedi made this profit was described as a very poor one in the Bangwaketse Reserve, with a general crop failure.<sup>51</sup>

Although it is possible that Weare might have exaggerated the increases in the production levels of these farmers, the case studies nevertheless demonstrate the effect of the co-operator scheme in increasing differentiation in Botswana. The three farmers in the case studies above seem to have been already well-equipped when they joined the scheme, an indication that the scheme selected those who were relatively well-off. They were better educated than the majority of peasants, and their previous employment record also worked in their favour. This is clearly exemplified by Raditholo, who had completed Standard 3 – high by Botswana's standards at the time.<sup>52</sup> He had worked on South African farms from 1928 to 1930 before going to the mines from 1930–1939. He later joined the Veterinary Department as a cattle guard from 1945 until 1954. With his capital valued at £315.45s. and a landholding of

60 acres, Raditholo was already relatively well-off before the scheme. Moatlapedi had also completed Standard 3 and had worked in South Africa as a farm labourer until 1942.<sup>53</sup> The increases in the numbers of labourers employed and the fact that these co-operators made profits ranging from £70.00 to £220.00 per season from their crops, whereas before they had made very little or none, indicated that they were among the emerging capitalist farmers in Botswana.<sup>54</sup>

Nevertheless, the employment of wage labour remains a complex issue since in some instances – for example, Raditholo's case – the number of labourers fell after farmers joined the scheme. This could have been caused by the use of new technology. It seems that to some extent these farmers also utilised family labour, thus complicating the labour situation. Increasing reliance on wage labour, however, indicates that these farmers must have been part of a dramatic process of scheme-induced differentiation in the country. The marked differences have been noted especially in the Bakwena and Bakgatla reserves.<sup>55</sup> In the mid-1960s, it was reported that the extension scheme had created a very few African farmers of substance, men such as Quett Masire of the Bangwaketse reserve, Tau Kante from the Bakwena reserve, Sefako Pilane from the Bakgatla reserve and Pogiso Makoatsane from the Balete reserve.<sup>56</sup> Yet the majority of the farmers – those outside the scheme – produced one bag per acre and they remained at the bottom of the production ladder with little hope of progressing. They could easily be termed the poor peasants. The three case studies above only serve as examples to demonstrate the level of transformation by farmers who had enlisted in the scheme.

### **Migrant Labour, Crop Production and Differentiation**

In the case studies above, some of the progressive farmers had been migrant labourers before enlisting in the colonial crop production scheme. Thus, any study of crop production and class differentiation in Botswana must examine the role played by migrant wages and remittances. One could easily argue that migrant wages played a crucial role in the emergence of some progressive farmers, especially those who did not have any royal connections. The royal families in Botswana owned more cattle than non-royal families, cattle which could be sold for money to purchase essential agricultural implements, such as the ploughs and planters required for enlisting in the scheme. For those with few or no cattle, one of the means through which both cattle and agricultural implements could be acquired was through migrant wages, since waged employment opportunities within the country were almost non-existent.<sup>57</sup>

Botswana men listed acquiring money to buy cattle and purchase ploughs as an important reason for migrating to South Africa. The remittances and deferred pay from mine labour allowed some peasants to acquire cattle and agricultural implements.<sup>58</sup> Although no overall statistical evidence indicates the implements purchased through this medium, oral interviews and statistics on the Bakgatla Reserve lend weight to the theory that migrant labourers invested their wages in agriculture. For instance, in 1932 alone, migrants from the Bakgatla

Reserve sent home 24 ploughs. Three years later, in 1935, traders in the Reserve reported that returning mine migrants bought cattle, ploughs and other agricultural implements. Informants who worked in the mines in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, coming from different reserves in the country, maintained that they purchased cattle and agricultural implements with their mine wages and that a man could assemble a span of oxen within a few years.<sup>59</sup> As indicated, migrant wages appear to have been one critical way through which poor peasants could set themselves up and later qualify for the co-operator scheme. They could also use remittances from the mines to pay tribal levies, while funds from this source were also deposited into the tribal treasuries of different reserves. Some of these funds were later used to assist co-operators to purchase agricultural implements.<sup>60</sup> Thus, the colonial state, through the tribal treasuries, used mine wages to subsidise farmers in the agricultural scheme. Amongst the British dependencies in Africa, Botswana was one of the most neglected in terms of development. Migrant labour was the second largest revenue earner in the country, after the cattle sector.<sup>61</sup> This would suggest that it was essential for enhancing the agriculturally based economy of the reserves.

### **The Cattle Industry and Differentiation**

The role that crop production played in social differentiation in Botswana cannot be appreciated without a discussion of the position of the cattle industry there. From pre-colonial times and throughout the colonial period, cattle formed the lifeblood of the economy of Botswana. Cattle conditioned what Botswana perceived as wealth, defining social status in Tswana society.<sup>62</sup> As Andrew Mushingeh states, 'Cattle ownership [in pre-colonial and colonial Botswana] became the most important determinant of socio-economic and political status. Cattle became instrumental in understanding power relations and social differentiation among the Tswana'.<sup>63</sup> Cattle ownership and distribution have always been unequal among Botswana, a situation that was exacerbated by colonial schemes favouring large cattle holders. The schemes, vigorously undertaken from the early 1930s, were a product of the architect of the development of Botswana's cattle industry, Resident Commissioner, Charles Rey. Realising the precarious nature of Botswana's economy, Rey 'revolutionised' the cattle industry through the development of permanent water supplies, making it the main revenue earner in the country. The bulk of the development budget from 1933 to 1939 – about 62.1 per cent – was used in activities related to the cattle industry, while 39.7 per cent was shared by other sectors, such as crop production, communications and health.<sup>64</sup> From 1946 to 1956, the authorities applied for development grants of £2.5

million and £830,000 from the Colonial Development and Welfare Fund (CWDF). From this, the livestock industry and the development of water sources (mainly for cattle) received nearly £500,000, while the development of African agriculture was allocated a paltry £26,995.<sup>65</sup> The allocation of substantial funds to the cattle industry at the expense of other sectors served the interests of the well-off farmers because they could afford to drill boreholes. They moved their cattle to pastures with available water where they could increase their herds and save them from recurring droughts. This consolidated the differentiated nature of Tswana society. Periodic droughts in the 1930s, 1940s and 1960s also contributed to differentiation, together with the frequent outbreaks of foot-and-mouth disease that were more devastating to poorer farmers occupying marginal lands with thin pastures.<sup>66</sup> The operation of the co-operator scheme should be understood alongside the central role that cattle played in crop production and social stratification, together with tangible state support for the cattle industry and the general neglect of crop production. The cultivation of large acreages depended on cattle, and the scheme also required that farmers possess a certain number of cattle. Because drought occurred during some of the years of the scheme, it heavily favoured large cattle owners. Thus, cattle ownership was the main determinant of social stratification in the country, and improvements in crop production only added to a process that was already underway.

### **The Limitations of the Progressive Scheme**

Throughout much of the colonial period, Botswana suffered a grain-deficit, importing substantial amounts from both South Africa and Southern Rhodesia.<sup>67</sup> The progressive farmer scheme aimed to increase food production and reduce the country's dependence on its neighbours. Its supporters argued that it would enhance self-sufficiency and earn revenue for the majority of peasants. Although the programme was bound to accentuate differentiation, if successful it would have uplifted many farmers rather than only a tiny fraction. In reality, the scheme failed to achieve its objectives due to several factors. Only a few farmers enlisted in the scheme – about one per cent of the estimated 100,000 farming families in the country.<sup>68</sup> As previously indicated, stringent requirements for enlisting kept out the majority of peasants. The author of the 1963–1968 Development Plan noted the prohibitive effect of these requirements, complaining that:

[a] great disadvantage to the extension programme was the comparative poverty of peasant farmers. It became evident that in many cases despite a willingness by many a man to better his farming methods, he often lacked the necessary capital to purchase the carts, wagons, implements etc. to undertake the measures essential to make his improved farming a success.<sup>69</sup>

Furthermore, chiefs and headmen played a role in determining who could enter the scheme, potentially biasing the process in favour of their protégés.

Nevertheless, the increases in production experienced by farmers who participated in the scheme proved that the goal of attaining self-sufficiency in grain production would have been attainable if the majority of farmers had been able to enlist. For instance, in the 1960–1961

agricultural season, 948 farmers participated in the scheme (representing one per cent of the farming families in the country), producing an average per farmer of 52.5 bags of sorghum, whilst the majority of farmers outside the scheme produced an average per farmer of 12.4 bags.<sup>70</sup> The massive difference in production levels demonstrates the effectiveness of the programme in increasing crop yields. Difficulties plagued the scheme, however, including inadequate staffing at the Department of Agriculture. In 1950, the department employed about 57 people. In 1958, a commission set up to look into the economic situation of the country concluded that the present number of agricultural demonstrators and agricultural officers could only train about 450 new progressive farmers every three years, therefore only reaching one per cent of the total number of farming families in the territory.<sup>71</sup> Even by the mid-1960s, the staffing remained woefully inadequate, with only 130 agricultural demonstrators for about 100,000 farming families, while at least 4,000 agricultural demonstrators and supervisors would have been needed to cover the country adequately.<sup>72</sup> For the scheme to succeed, the department would have had to expand substantially to reach more peasants. The colonial government would also have had to increase funding needed to purchase farming implements and to provide more trained agricultural demonstrators to teach peasants the new methods. It would also have had to develop approaches that would take into account the already existing agricultural practices of the peasants, as well as ease the entry requirements to enable more of the poorer farmers to qualify. This would have meant a substantial increase in the number of co-operators and, thus, a greater increase in productivity. The colonial government, however, did not heed calls by local officials, including the Director of Agriculture, to expand the scheme to involve more farmers.

The progressive farmer scheme in colonial Botswana can be compared to the situation of the Taurida peasantry in Russia, as observed by Lenin, albeit in a different epoch and context. The well-off peasants in Taurida engaged in commercial production and netted a gross income ranging from 574 to 15,000 roubles per annum. Thus, Lenin concluded, 'This commercial cultivation then becomes capitalist farming, for the areas cultivated by the well-to-do peasants exceed the family labour (i.e. the amount of land that the family can cultivate by its own labour), and compel them to the hiring of workers'.<sup>73</sup>

In the ownership of the agricultural implements and the employment of wage labour, the scenario described by Lenin was in some ways similar to that of Botswana. Nevertheless, the situation of agricultural wage labour in Botswana was also more complex because of labour paid in kind. Although it is difficult to measure the level of commercial agriculture in Botswana, a process similar to what Lenin called the emergence of 'new types of rural inhabitants'— the 'peasant bourgeoisie'— was clearly taking place in late colonial Botswana.<sup>74</sup>

The overall aims and nature of the agrarian scheme in colonial Botswana had striking similarities with its counterpart in colonial Zambia. The major aim of the mother country – Britain – was to increase food production in her two 'dependants'. The schemes in the different provinces of Zambia were organised along lines similar to the co-operator scheme in Botswana's reserves and had similar results. Both schemes fell under their respective Departments of Agriculture, which selected a few farmers who met certain requirements. These farmers were then provided with technical expertise, farming implements and marketing assistance. The larger peasantry was expected to learn from the few.<sup>75</sup> As a result,



a thin stratum of capitalist farmers emerged who could employ agricultural wage labour and mechanise production, resulting in increased hectarages and crop yields. The schemes also accentuated differentiation between regions and among peasants.

## **Conclusion**

Colonial improved farmer schemes focused on those peasants who were already well-off, failing to reach the majority of peasants. The possession of farming implements and draught animals was crucial for crop production, especially in Botswana, where farmers had to take advantage of early rains. Many poor peasants could only cultivate their fields after their patrons (those who had draught power) had finished ploughing, forcing them to cultivate during the period of diminished rains, unsuitable for maximum crop production. Although many peasants wanted to enlist in the co-operator scheme, the scheme's requirements excluded them. A fully-fledged and well-funded scheme would have gone a long way towards attaining the goals of the colonial government. This would have entailed a complete reversal of previous British policy on the economic development of Botswana, however. Despite the increased tempo and flow of development funds from the mid-1950s, the co-operator scheme did not signify a significant break from the policy of relative neglect.

Interestingly, even after many years of independence (in 1966), some of the state's directed schemes, such as the Arable Lands Development Programme (ALDEP) and the Accelerated Rainfed Arable Programme (ARAP) of 1978 and 1984, continued to favour well-off farmers at the expense of the majority of poor peasants. The differentiation caused by the co-operator scheme had long-term consequences because the well-off farmers would be in a better position to utilise the new schemes in independent Botswana. This would further accentuate differentiation in the rural areas.

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