

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Beyond Agency: The African Peasantry, the State, and Tobacco in Southern Rhodesia (Colonial Zimbabwe), 1900–80

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Abstract

This paper examines African peasant tobacco production in Southern Rhodesia from 1900 to 1980, from the cusp of colonialism to its end. It analyses shifting state policy towards African tobacco producers, the concomitant impact on peasant economies, accumulation patterns and the rural physical landscape and peasant responses. It focuses on the changing agricultural commodity value chains, cash crop asymmetries, and global market forces to explain colonial responses to peasant production and peasant agency. We argue that the symbolic value of each agricultural commodity, in entrenching the hierarchy of power relations and the institutionalisation of white control, mediated colonial responses to peasant production and concomitantly ‘peasant agency’. We use this case study to highlight the structural constraints on ‘agency’ and to explore how cash crop asymmetries helped structure agrarian encounters and power relations in colonial Africa. The paper uses archival sources from the National Archives of Zimbabwe, newspapers, and journals from the Tobacco Research Board (TRB).

Keywords: Zimbabwe; labour; land; colonial policy; agriculture

Peasants are a fundamental part of African historiography, yet the historiographical debate has stalled in recent years. This stasis prompts the imperative to revisit African peasantries and locate their colonial encounters within the structural precincts of classical ‘peasant agency’ theory. There is a need to engage with how peasant agency was constrained in settler colonies by structural factors such as commodity asymmetries, cash crop hierarchies, and global market forces. The 1960s and 1970s scholarship on peasant studies and colonial development and underdevelopment in Africa underestimated the role of peasants as historical actors and collapsed the complex processes of rural transformation into a single trajectory of ‘strangulation’ and collapse.¹ However, new approaches to African peasant studies foregrounded peasants’ ingenuity in navigating the complex disruptive colonial infrastructure and highlighted peasant agency to emphasize how enclaves of

¹For comprehensive reading on scholarship and debates surrounding colonial Africa peasantries, see: W. Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London, 1972); A. G. Frank, *The Development of Underdevelopment* (Boston, 1966); G. Arrighi, ‘Labour supplies in historical perspective: a study of the proletarianization of the African peasantry in Rhodesia’, *Journal of Development Studies*, 6 (1970), 197–234; C. Bundy, *The Rise and Fall of The South African Peasantry* (London, 1979); I. Phimister, ‘Peasant production and underdevelopment in Southern Rhodesia, 1890–1914’, *African Affairs*, 73:291 (1974), 217–28; R. Palmer, ‘The agricultural history of Rhodesia’, in R. Palmer and N. Parsons (eds.), *The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa* (London, 1977), 221–45; and W. Barber, *The Political Economy of British Central Africa* (London, 1963).

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peasant production survived the colonial economic onslaught and fomented centres of rural resistance, rural entrepreneurship, and political consciousness.²

Despite foregrounding agency, this scholarship stressed the ubiquitous structural constraints under which peasants operated at various levels and how these constraints impinged on their limited choices.³ John Lonsdale referred to this embedded pervasive precarity and intractable dilemma of African producers in hegemonic colonial and neo-colonial capitalist world systems as ‘agency in tight corners’.⁴ Thus, while there were moments of African prosperity and independent production of cash crops, these transient episodic booms were structured by and subject to the broader colonial relations and institutional arrangements that predisposed African peasantries to eventual collapse and failure. In this paper we interrogate cash crop and commodity asymmetries within the colonial economy as structural constraints on peasant agency. Each cash crop or agricultural commodity occupied a unique space within the matrix of colonial economic and political power relations in Africa and these power asymmetries were based on the respective export value and the concomitant economic influence it bestowed upon white settler power.

A cursory perusal of agricultural archives reveals how settler colonial states in Africa systematically triaged cash crops and agricultural commodities into hierarchies. These were not only based on dispassionate economic calculations, but also invested with notions of what was ‘right’ and what was ‘might’ — what was fitting and what was hegemonic. In essence, they were invested with tacit ideologies of power and powerlessness, domination and subservience, knowledge and ignorance — evinced in their production and marketing. These commodity asymmetries concomitantly mediated peasant agency, accumulation patterns, and peasant options in the countryside. High value export cash crops and commodities such as coffee, tea, and tobacco, that were the basis of white economic power and privilege in settler colonies, were often subjected to more stringent production and marketing controls deliberately meant to exclude African producers and entrench specific paradigms of development that benefitted white settler interests. In some instances, Africans were banned from participating in the production of high value export crops for much of the colonial period. Meanwhile, commodities with a low value in the hierarchy of colonial economic power relations, because of their lower unit returns on the global export market (such as cotton), were often used by the colonial state to entrench domination of peasantries through the stick of coerced production or, more often as time went by, the carrot of state subsidies to peasant producers.⁵

In settler colonies such as Kenya and Southern Rhodesia, export expansion targeted white farmers to create a monopoly in the cultivation of high value export crops while restricting Africans from those crops to ensure supply of labour to white farms. By the late 1940s though, with new global and local pressures such as festering nationalism, rural discontent, and postwar booms in agricultural commodity prices, colonial policy on high value export crops altered to allow a cautious and guided

²T. Ranger, *Peasant Consciousness and the Guerrilla War in Zimbabwe* (London, 1985), 54–96; W. Beinart and C. Bundy, *Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa* (Berkeley, 1987); C. Van Onselen, *The Seed is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine, A South African Sharecropper, 1894–1985* (London, 1987); S. Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals: Anthropology and History in Tanzania* (London, 1990); P. Mosley, ‘Agricultural development and government policy in settler economies: the case of Kenya and Southern Rhodesia, 1900–60’, *The Economic History Review*, 35:3 (1982), 390–408.

³Allen Isaacman’s review article of Terence Ranger and the works of William Beinart and Colin Bundy contains a useful discussion of ‘agency’ and its structural constraints: A. Isaacman, ‘Peasants, social protests and Africanists’, *The Journal of African History*, 22:4 (1989), 745–65.

⁴J. Lonsdale, ‘Agency in tight corners: narrative and initiative in African history’, *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 13:1 (2000), 5–16.

⁵During the first half of the twentieth century high prices for cotton forced European countries to shift their attention to African colonies. State subsidies were given to African peasants as inducement to grow cotton and cotton was viewed by colonial officials as a ‘blackman crop’: A. Isaacman et al., ‘Cotton is the mother of poverty’: peasant resistance to forced cotton production in Mozambique, 1938–1961’, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 13:4 (1980), 581–615; P. Nyambara, ‘Colonial policy and peasant cotton agriculture in Southern Rhodesia, 1904–1953’, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 33:1 (2000), 81–111.

entry of African cultivators in a way that would not disrupt the status quo and imperil white settler agriculture.

In this paper we engage with how cash crops were constructed in the colonial state and given a significance that controlled relations of production and the changing dimensions of African participation in commodity production that, in turn, impacted on the possibilities of peasant agency. Using this framework, we examine African tobacco producers in Southern Rhodesia chronologically across three distinct periods: a precolonial to early colonial period of independent production and boom (the early 1900s through the late 1930s); an era of state curtailment of peasant modes of production and decline of African participation in the tobacco economy (the 1930s through the 1950s); and, lastly, a period of colonial state-assisted African production of Turkish tobacco (1952 through 1980).⁶ The first period witnessed an ephemeral boom for African peasants because of the domestic market provided by emerging mining settlements and towns. The second period marked the collapse of production and trade in 'indigenous' African tobacco as the state systematically pushed Africans out of production through restrictive statutory interference in production and marketing as well as the introduction of Western cigarettes. The third period saw the initiation of African production of Turkish and Burley tobaccos, and their integration for the first time into the global export economy under the colonial state's modernistic agenda to transform African agriculture and cash crop production.⁷

There is also scant historical literature on the participation of Africans on tobacco production in Southern Rhodesia beyond their role as labourers on the white settler farms.⁸ The only historical work on the subject is Barry Kosmin's early colonial study that ends in 1938 and misses the integration of peasant producers into the global export market between 1952 and 1980.⁹ We argue that, although colonial policy towards African tobacco producers shifted across the twentieth century from curtailment to encouragement, it was nevertheless enduringly informed by the imperative to restrict Africans to certain types of tobacco that would not challenge European tobacco farmers or lead to the rise of an independent African agrarian bourgeoisie that could compete with white settler farmers.¹⁰ Thus, at all points during the colonial period, the African peasant producer was enmeshed within a complex global and local economic infrastructure in which he was susceptible to failure, and remained economically marginal and vulnerable.

⁶National nomenclature changed over time: the territory was referred to as 'South Zambezia' until 'Rhodesia' came into use in 1895. The appellation 'Southern' was used from 1898 and discarded in 1964, but 'Rhodesia' (officially, from 1970 the Republic of Rhodesia) was retained until the declaration of Zimbabwe Rhodesia in 1979 and the Republic of Zimbabwe in 1980.

⁷Turkish tobacco or oriental is an aromatic type of tobacco that is sun cured. Turkish tobacco is used as a blend in the manufacture of cigarettes because of its mild flavour, low nicotine content. Burley tobacco is air cured and is usually used for pipe smoking. Although Africans grew both Turkish and Burley tobacco beginning from 1952 and 1964 respectively, this paper focuses on Turkish tobacco only – as a representative sample as state policy (its motives and results) were significantly similar for both crops across time.

⁸F. Clements and E. Harben, *Leaf of Gold: The Story of Rhodesian Tobacco* (London, 1962); P. Scott, 'The tobacco industry of Southern Rhodesia', *Economic Geography*, 28:3 (1952), 189–206; T. Mbanga, *Tobacco: A Century of Gold* (Harare, 1991); V. Machingaidze, 'The development of settler capitalist agriculture in Southern Rhodesia with particular reference to the role of the state, 1908–1939' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1980); S. Rubert, *A Most Promising Weed: A History of Tobacco Farming and Labour in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1890–1945* (Athens, OH, 1998); and S. Ncube, 'Colonial Zimbabwe tobacco industry: global, regional and local relations, 1949–1979' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of the Free State, 2018).

⁹B. Kosmin, 'The Inyoka tobacco industry of the Shangwe people: the displacement of a pre-colonial economy in Southern Rhodesia; 1898–1938', in Palmer and Parsons, *The Roots of Rural Poverty*, 268–87.

¹⁰The categorisation of peasantry into the social hierarchy as to what constitutes a true rural bourgeoisie has always been challenging. Some Marxists like Lenin identified as many as six rural classes: the capitalist big landowners exploiting wage labour, the big peasants, the middle peasants, the small peasantry, and the agricultural proletariat obtaining livelihoods by working on the farms (V. I. Lenin, 'Preliminary drafts on the agrarian question', in *Collected Works, Volume XXXI* [Moscow, 1966]).

From incentives to curtailment? The rise and fall of an African tobacco economy in Southern Rhodesia, 1904–38

The cultivation of tobacco in Africa predates colonialism. By the end of the seventeenth century the crop had penetrated much of the continent as a result of Portuguese, French, English, and Arabic trade networks.¹¹ The traditional species of tobacco cultivated in Africa was *Nicotiana rustica*.¹² In the area that came to be known as Southern Rhodesia, Africans began cultivating tobacco from at least the fifteenth century when it was introduced by Portuguese traders.¹³ Its cultivation during the later parts of the precolonial period is well documented in historical accounts.¹⁴ For example, Thomas Morgan Thomas of the London Missionary Society, in memoirs of his adventures in Southern Africa between 1864 and 1873, records that Ndebele people grew large quantities of tobacco: ‘indeed I cannot remember seeing a single village around which there were no tobacco gardens’.¹⁵ Tobacco was integral to the cultural rituals of the Ndebele people who took it as snuff and smoked it in *ingiti* (clay pipes) and *igudu* (smoking horns). Africans cultivated and irrigated patches of tobacco in their gardens for their own consumption, for barter, and for annual tribute to the king.¹⁶

Tobacco was the first important ‘European crop’ that was cultivated by the pioneer white settler farmers as early as 1893.¹⁷ The British South African Company (BSAC) developed an interest in tobacco production for colonial economic growth and sampled ‘indigenous’ African tobaccos to ascertain their potential commercial value.¹⁸ The Company concluded that this tobacco had no export value since its flavour was alien to British consumers.¹⁹ Consequently, white settler farmers began to cultivate ‘superior’ varieties of *Tabacum* (flue-cured, Turkish, and fire-cured) from American seeds while Africans cultivated the ‘inferior’ *rustica* for the peripheral domestic market.²⁰ Africans could only interact with the European types of tobacco as labourers, not as producers.²¹ The growing of tobacco became particularly important from around 1908, when the colony’s company administration launched a White Agricultural Policy (WAP).²²

Tobacco became a symbolic agricultural commodity conveying white power and privilege.²³ Buoyed by the fortunes offered by the Union of South Africa’s market, white settler tobacco production expanded significantly. In 1914, 2.2 million lbs of tobacco were exported to the Union’s

¹¹J. E. Philips, ‘African smoking and pipes’, *The Journal of African History*, 24 (1983), 303–19. For further reading on precolonial African tobacco cultures, see: C. Duvall, ‘Cannabis and tobacco in precolonial Africa’, *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of African History*, (<https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.44>), 2017.

¹²There are dozens of species of *Nicotiana* but the two most important are *Nicotiana tabacum* L. (grown for commercial purposes) and *Nicotiana rustica* L. (produced for household consumption).

¹³H. Weinmann, *Agricultural Research and Development in Southern Rhodesia, 1890–1923* (Salisbury [Harare], 1972), 12.

¹⁴J. Wood, *Through Matabeleland: The Record of a Ten Months Trip in an Ox Waggon Through Mashonaland and Matabeleland* (Bulawayo, 1893); T. M. Thomas, *Eleven Years in Central South Africa* (Cardiff, 1873), 180–1.

¹⁵Thomas, *Eleven Years*, 179–80.

¹⁶National Archives of Zimbabwe, Harare (NAZ) AOH/59, Interview with Mudzongani Maodzwa, 8 Aug. 1979.

¹⁷M. Rooney, ‘European agriculture in the history of Rhodesia, 1890–1907’ (unpublished MA thesis, University of South Africa, 1968); Machingaidze, ‘The development of settler’, 183; H. Thomson, *Rhodesia and Its Government* (London, 1898), 67; and Clements and Harben, *Leaf of Gold*, 70.

¹⁸NAZ A11/2/2/13, Tobacco 1904–Nov. 1909, Professor Wyndham R. Dunstan, report on tobacco from Rhodesia received through the BSAC, June 1902.

¹⁹NAZ A11/2/2/13, Tobacco 1904–Nov. 1909, Dunstan, report, June 1902.

²⁰Clements and Harben, *Leaf of Gold*, 55.

²¹Department of Agriculture, *A Handbook on Tobacco Culture for Planters in Southern Rhodesia* (Salisbury [Harare], 1912), 92.

²²The colony of Southern Rhodesia was founded on the hope of finding a second mineral Rand but when the hopes of a gold-based El Dorado faded, the Company administration had to reorient their priorities to support white settler agriculture from 1908.

²³Clements and Harben, *Leaf of Gold*, 187–91.

market. This rose to nearly 10 million lbs in 1928.²⁴ The United Kingdom's granting of an imperial preference for empire tobacco from 1919 expanded the export market for Rhodesian tobacco, prompting production to reach 14 million lbs in 1928 and resulting in white settler tobacco production contributing 42.7 per cent to agricultural export revenue.²⁵ Tobacco was second only to gold in aggregate value of all exports in Southern Rhodesia between 1916 and 1947, accruing nearly 43 million pounds sterling.²⁶

While the settler export tobacco market expanded, the cultivation of indigenous *Inyoka* tobacco amongst African peasants (who grew it together with other crops such as maize) continued. The exact size and scale of the precolonial *Inyoka* tobacco trade and economy cannot be ascertained because of limited records, but historical evidence does suggest that there was a significant manufacturing and tobacco trade economy.²⁷ This tobacco economy developed from around 1899, as European traders bought stocks of tobacco to resell on the mines, providing African peasants with money to pay taxes and accumulate wealth.²⁸ Indeed, the role of tobacco as a 'progressive crop' that provided economic opportunities for smallholder and peasant producers and prevented their proletarianisation into the colonial wage labour economy has received a lot of scholarly attention.²⁹ However, the resultant pecuniary gains to the prosperous peasant *Inyoka* tobacco economy restricted the flow of Africans into wage employment — which outraged some key colonial officials just when African labour was most desired for white settler tobacco production.³⁰ Between 1922 and 1938, this lucrative African tobacco economy declined precipitously as a result of the penetration of the African market by European cigarettes and lack of state support at a time when the state was subsidizing the growing European tobacco sector.³¹ The decline of the *Inyoka* tobacco economy was contemporaneous with the decline in African peasant production that happened in Southern Rhodesia, and in most African colonies, during the 1930s, as 'the further development of settler capitalism could no longer contain the very peasantries it had created'.³² In Southern Rhodesia, the competitiveness of African producers was purposefully stymied through land alienation, and the state-imposed centralisation and conservation models codified more effectively by the 1930 Land Apportionment Act (LAA).³³ However, the early *Inyoka* tobacco industry remained outside much of the state centralisation and conservation injunctions of the 1930s. The industry was a

²⁴*Ibid.* 76.

²⁵Machingaidze, 'The development of settler', 183.

²⁶This value greatly exceeded other major exports, such as beef, asbestos, iron, and maize. See, E. Frankema et al., *An introduction to the African Commodity Trade Database, 1730–2010*, (<https://doi.org/10.17026/dans-xt9-fzkw>), 2017.

²⁷Knight-Bruce, *Memories of Mashonaland*, 100; H. N. Hemans, *The Logs of a Native Commissioner* (Bulawayo, 1971), 168.

²⁸Kosmin, 'The Inyoka tobacco industry', 274.

²⁹J. McCracken, 'Planters, peasants and the colonial state: the impact of the native tobacco board in the central province of Malawi', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 9:2 (1983), 172–92; M. Prowse, 'A history of tobacco production and marketing in Malawi, 1890–2010', *Journal of East African Studies*, 7:4 (2013), 691–712; A. Kanduza, 'The tobacco industry in Northern Rhodesia: 1912–38', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 16:2 (1983), 201–29. For studies in peasant cash crop production in Latin America and Caribbean, see: P. A. Howard, *Black Labour, White Sugar: Caribbean Braceros and their Struggle for Power in the Cuban Sugar Industry* (Baton Rouge, LA, 2015); M. Baud, *Peasants and Tobacco in the Dominican Republic: 1870–1930* (Knoxville, TN, 1995); and M. Baud and K. Koonings, 'A laboura dos pobres: tobacco farming and the development of commercial agriculture in Bahia: 1870–1930', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 31:2 (1999), 287–329.

³⁰The settler tobacco industry in Southern Rhodesia experienced cyclical labour crises from as early as 1899 and had to rely on migrant labour recruitment from Mozambique, Northern Rhodesia (Colonial Zambia), and Nyasaland (Colonial Malawi).

³¹Kosmin, 'The Inyoka tobacco', 279–84.

³²J. S. Saul and R. Woods, 'African peasantries', in T. Shanin (ed.), *Peasants and Peasant Societies* (London, 1971), 106. For further readings on experiences of colonial African peasantries during the 1930s, see: D. Anderson and D. Throup, 'Africans and agricultural production in colonial Kenya: the myth of the war as a watershed', *The Journal of African History*, 26:4 (1985), 327–45.

³³G. Arrighi, *The Political Economy of Rhodesia* (Berkeley, 1967), 41.

feature of the precolonial system and its cultivation methods were adapted to its environment.³⁴ The region where *Inyoka* was cultivated in southwestern Zimbabwe was dry, infested with tsetse flies, and lacking ‘modernisation’ such as water schemes or agricultural demonstrators in the production methods of their tobacco.³⁵ In essence, this tobacco economy remained outside the global export network, isolated from the white settler tobacco economy and the orbit of state agricultural policy in its marketing and production. Nevertheless, its autonomy was dependent on extraneous variables such as stable global market dynamics balancing with local production in white farms and averting the need to dispose of tobacco on the local market space where *Inyoka* thrived. This began to change after a 1914 glut precipitated a tobacco slump that ruined white growers.³⁶ The slump prompted the colonial government to prioritise securing the local market for poor grades of tobacco produced in white farms through the imposition of a cigarette tax on Rhodesian cigarettes sold on the local market. It was pointed out during the course of the debate on the tax by one of the directors of the BSAC, Earl Grey, that the tax would be paid for by the ‘native’ consumer and not the grower, since the habit of smoking cigarettes was growing amongst natives due to the availability of cheap locally made cigarettes in ‘penny packets’.³⁷ The state’s anxiety about the increasing supply of ‘native’ tobacco on the domestic market escalated in the 1930s, as a 1928–30 tobacco export market slump destroyed European tobacco growers.³⁸ The slump was so severe that the contribution of tobacco to agricultural exports fell from 46.4 per cent in 1927 to 17.4 per cent in 1930.³⁹ Subsequently, an investigation into the ‘native’ position in the tobacco industry was initiated in 1931 so as to seek ways to promote local manufacturing for domestic consumption.⁴⁰

Reports by native commissioners on ‘native’ tobacco during the 1930s all concurred that there was gradual collapse of the *Inyoka* tobacco industry from 1934, attributable to an African preference for European cigarettes.⁴¹ These reports unanimously point to ‘little trading of tobacco’ by ‘natives’, and a decrease in the practice of smoking *Inyoka* tobacco in the mines, as Africans now preferred a cheap type of tobacco they could roll into cigarettes.⁴² The decline in the smoking of *Inyoka* tobacco in Southern Rhodesia follows a trend found in most parts of colonial Africa, Asia, and America where the consumption of traditional tobacco products was disrupted by the introduction of the modern cigarette industry during the twentieth century.⁴³ Demand for cigarettes amongst Africans was stimulated through their portrayal in advertisements as a class symbol of urban sophistication, and an escape from the countrified antediluvian living represented by coarse *Inyoka* tobacco. The nucleus for the African tobacco market was built by creating demand and ‘getting the African into the habit of smoking’.⁴⁴ This was done through the handing out cigarettes as presents to African labourers, and the opening of retail shops on farms and mines which distributed cigarettes to whet the appetite amongst Africans.⁴⁵ Most white miner owners gave their African

³⁴Kosmin, ‘The Inyoka tobacco’, 282.

³⁵NAZ S235/511/4, Report of NC Sebungwe district, 1933.

³⁶Clements and Harbern, *Leaf of Gold*, 64.

³⁷*Ibid.*

³⁸Kosmin, ‘The Inyoka tobacco industry’, 282.

³⁹Machingaidze, ‘The development of settler’, 183.

⁴⁰NAZ S1542/A4/2, Chief Native Commissioner (CNC) to NC Victoria district, 21 Feb. 1934.

⁴¹NAZ, S235/511/4, Annual Report of NC Sebungwe district, 1933.

⁴²NAZ S1542/A4/3, NC Victoria district to CNC, 4 Apr. 1934; NAZ S1542/A4/3, NC Mvuma to CNC, 28 Mar. 1934.

⁴³J. Goodman, *Tobacco in History: The Cultures of Dependence* (New York, 1993), 96. For other discussion on how the modern cigarette disrupted traditional tobacco consumption in colonies see: G. Boudreau et al., ‘Why the world will never be tobacco-free: reframing “tobacco control” into a traditional tobacco movement’, *American Journal of Public Health*, 106:7 (2016), 1188–95.

⁴⁴Native smoking’, *Vuka* (Salisbury [Harare]), Sep. 1946.

⁴⁵T. Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption and Cleanliness in Morden Zimbabwe* (London, 1996).

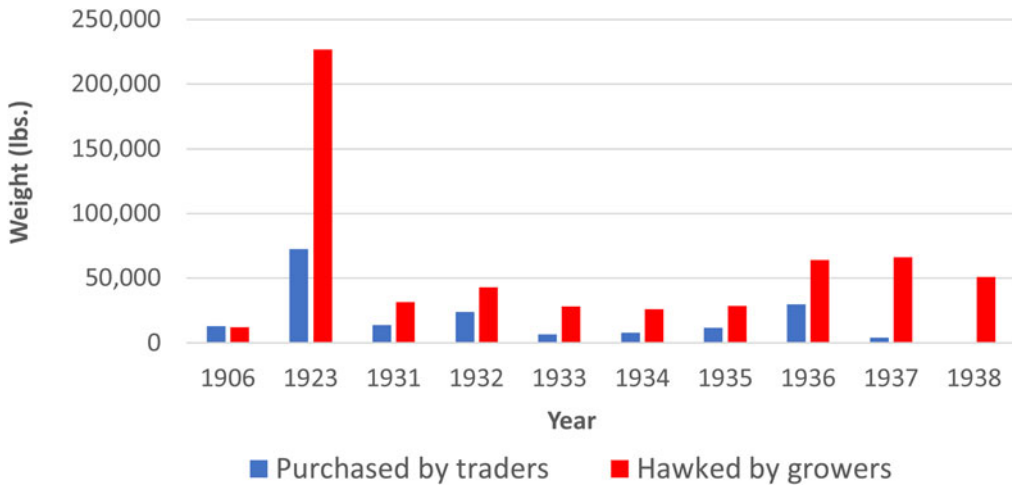


Fig. 1. *Inyoka* tobacco production and trade by Africans in Southern Rhodesia, 1906–38.
Source: Kosmin, 'The *Inyoka* tobacco industry', 281.

labourers weekly rations of tobacco for 'excellence of work' and added motivation.⁴⁶ The consumption of tobacco amongst African mine workers was also popularised by a curiously widespread but erroneous medical opinion amongst white mine owners that smoking could cure scurvy.⁴⁷ It was believed that the disease was a mental affliction that could be disposed of 'as soon as a "boy" buys a six-penny pipe and learns to smoke'.⁴⁸ The increased popularity of cigarettes and European tobacco on mines significantly affected the indigenous tobacco economy over time (see Fig. 1, above). *Inyoka* marketing statistics show that the amount of tobacco purchased by traders declined significantly from 7,980 lbs in 1934 to just 560 lbs in 1938, as a result of the promotion of domestic manufacture of cigarettes for local consumption by the state.⁴⁹ Simultaneously, tobacco sales from purchases by traders dropped precipitously in value from 234 to just 8 pounds sterling. However, over the same period, the amount of tobacco hawked by the growers increased from 26,220 lbs to 51,000 lbs.⁵⁰ By 1938, the sale of the *Inyoka* tobacco by traders had ceased in the mines. Consequently, from 1939, the native commissioners' reports are silent on *Inyoka* production as it had receded into an informal almost black-market entity.⁵¹

While historians like Gary Blank have contended that the *Inyoka* tobacco industry prospered until the 1960s, there is no oral or archival evidence to support that inference.⁵² In fact, the crop disappears from the official colonial sources thereafter, and Kosmin could only surmise that all the vestiges of its production had been virtually wiped out by the 1960s.⁵³ Also, as other sources have shown, the Shangwe area became famous for cotton production (and not tobacco) during

⁴⁶C. Van Onselen, *Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia, 1900–1933* (London, 1976), 172–3.

⁴⁷Scurvy was endemic in most mines in colonial Zimbabwe because of poor diet lacking in vitamin C. See, I. Phimister, 'African labour conditions and health in the Southern Rhodesia mining industry, 1893–1953, part three: health', *The Central African Journal of Medicine*, 22:9 (1976), 173–81.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*

⁴⁹Kosmin, 'The *Inyoka* tobacco industry', 281.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 283.

⁵²G. Blank, 'Prosperity, penury and polarisation: disaggregating the peasantry in the historiography of colonial Zimbabwe', *African Journal of History and Culture*, 7:1 (2015), 1–7.

⁵³Kosmin surmises this based on a personal conversation he had with Reverend R. Peaden and the district commissioner of the area who had no knowledge or records of any tobacco industry. Such ignorance of this industry from sources living in the area during the mid-1970s further substantiates that it had collapsed so spectacularly into extinction from the late 1930s,

the rest of the colonial period and, indeed, even up until today.⁵⁴ However, although Kosmin attributes the decline of the African tobacco economy to a shift in taste and preference for European cigarettes and the marketing infrastructure set up by the colonial state, there were other more disruptive legislative tools that were enacted to force Africans out of production. These policy regulations were constructed to disrupt African tobacco producers and push them into the colonial labour market.

State curtailment of African peasant tobacco production in Southern Rhodesia, 1930s–1950.

The 1930s marked the low point for the agricultural viability of peasantries in Southern Rhodesia as African commodity production was severely curtailed to stem the tide of ‘native’ competition on European agriculture. Although the impact of this policy varied from crop to crop, the discrepancies between tobacco and other crops was particularly marked. While other commodities like beef and maize suffered the harsh effects of state curtailment policy in Southern Rhodesia during the 1930s, enclaves of peasant production still survived and even boomed during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s.⁵⁵ African cotton production under state subsidies flourished such that by 1949 peasant cultivators produced cotton with an export value of £156,650.⁵⁶ At the same time peasant grain production gained so much momentum that by the mid-1950s African farmers produced twice as much maize as European farmers.⁵⁷ Other crops such as ‘kaffir corn’, *munga* (millet), groundnuts, and beans grown in African areas also expanded in production during the same period. Meanwhile amongst African peasants tobacco was being cultivated on less than 1,000 acres of land.⁵⁸

In 1936 the government emphasised the value of integrating African producers into world markets, but insisted this had to be limited to ‘those crops which Europeans cannot produce at world prices’ and Africans had to be assisted only to produce ‘certain crops’ such as cotton, maize, and peanuts.⁵⁹ Consequently, crops that Europeans could produce at ‘world prices’ or produce for the export market profitably, such as tobacco, remained on the peripheries of African peasant production. Resultantly, while crops such as maize, groundnuts, *rapoko* (finger millet), and cotton did relatively well in African areas, tobacco remained an almost invisible commodity within the production and marketing matrix of African peasants, as Figs. 2 and 3 show below.

Yet tobacco still occupied a higher place within the export hierarchy of agricultural commodities in Southern Rhodesia.⁶⁰ In 1940, tobacco accounted for 15 per cent of total exports, and in 1944 the crop contributed 54 per cent of the gross value of agricultural exports.⁶¹ A postwar tobacco boom expanded the export market for Rhodesian tobacco, resulting in lucrative earnings, capital build-up, and an expansion of area under tobacco production on white settler farms, see Fig. 4 below.⁶² By 1947, tobacco had overtaken gold as the colony’s chief export, contributing more than a third to total export receipts.⁶³ By 1961, of the £55.6 million total value of agricultural production tobacco

leaving behind no vestiges of its existence. It further questions the credibility of sources that Blank used to conclude that the industry was prosperous well into the 1960s.

⁵⁴P. Nyambara, ‘A history of land acquisition, commercialisation of agriculture and socio-economic differentiation among peasant farmers in a frontier region: the Gokwe district of Northwestern Zimbabwe: c. 1945–1990s’ (unpublished seminar paper, University of the Witwatersrand, 26 May 1997).

⁵⁵N. Samasuwo, ‘There is something about cattle’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cape Town, 2000), 68; A. A. Le Roux, ‘African agriculture in Rhodesia’, *The Rhodesia Agricultural Journal*, 66:2525 (1969), 85.

⁵⁶Nyambara, ‘Colonial Policy and peasant’, 81–111.

⁵⁷A. A. Le Roux, ‘African agriculture in Rhodesia’, *The Rhodesia Agricultural Journal*, 66:2525 (1969), 85. For more on African grain production in Southern Rhodesia, see, M. Yudelman, *Africans on the Land* (Cambridge, 1964), 240.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*

⁵⁹‘World markets’, *Rhodesia Herald* (Salisbury [Harare]), 28 Nov. 1936.

⁶⁰I. Phimister, *An Economic and Social History of Zimbabwe* (London, 1988), 61, 131.

⁶¹K. Muir, ‘Crop production in Zimbabwe’s commercial agricultural sector, 1940–79’ (unpublished working paper, July 1981), 2–3.

⁶²Scott, ‘The tobacco industry’, 189–206.

⁶³*Ibid.*

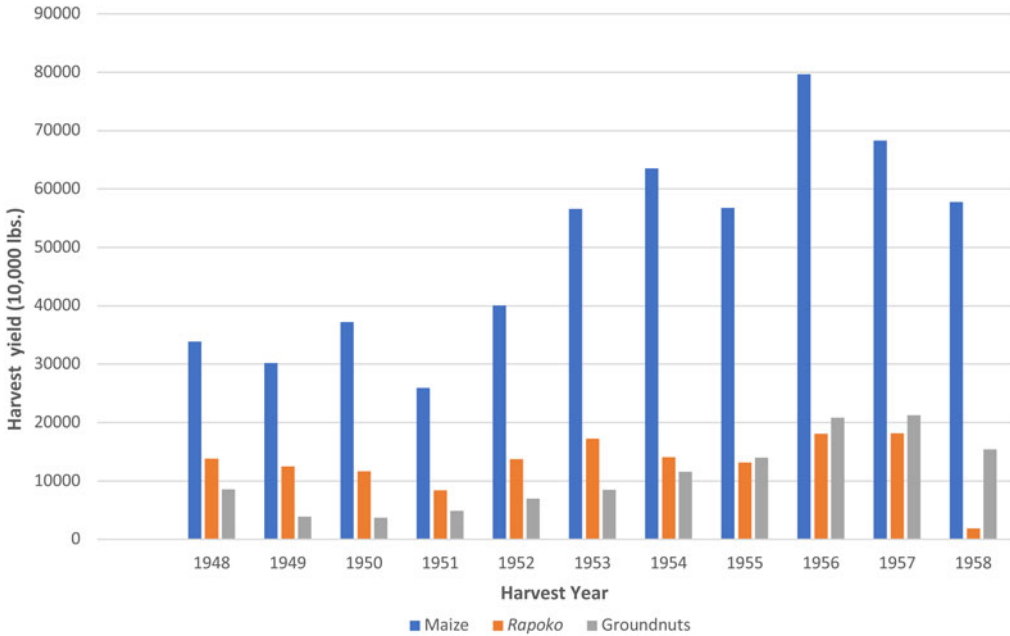


Fig. 2. Crop production in African areas of Southern Rhodesia, 1948-58. Source: Yudelman, *Africans on the Land*, 241.

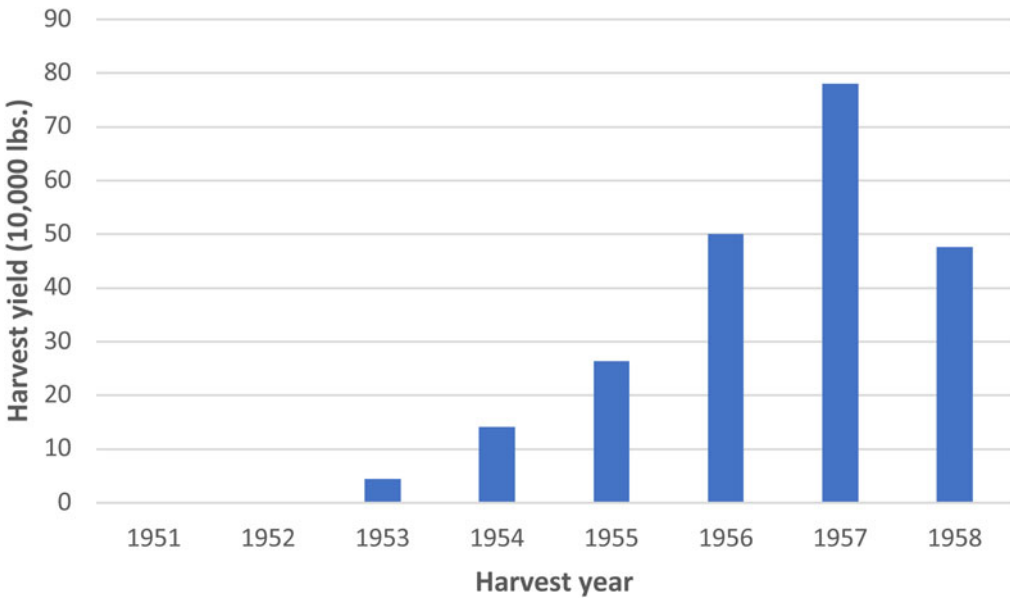


Fig. 3. African production of Turkish tobacco, 1951-8. Source: Yudelman, *Africans on the Land*, 241.

contributed 56 per cent, maize 13.8 per cent, beef 12.4 per cent, and all other crops a combined 18.1 per cent.⁶⁴

⁶⁴P. Mosley, *The Settler Economies: Studies in the Economic History of Kenya and Southern Rhodesia: 1900-1963* (New York, 1983), 171.

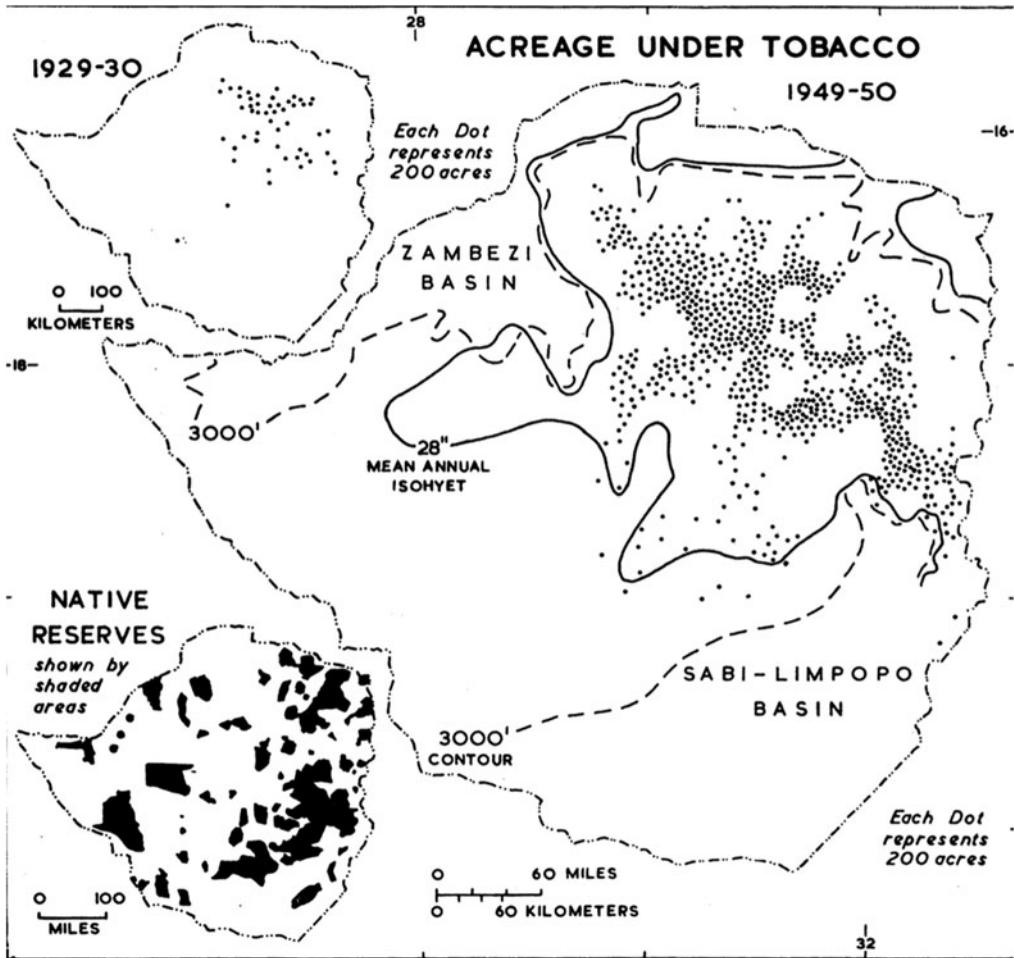


Fig. 4. Tobacco acreages in white settler farms in Southern Rhodesia, 1930 and 1950.
Source: Scott, 'The tobacco industry', 190.

The significantly higher export value of tobacco compared to other crops prompted the state to be more ruthless in curbing Africa peasant participation, through systematic marketing and production regulations, to ensure white settler production hegemony. The state reckoned that the global export market could only be secured by an unsullied reputation of the quality of Rhodesian tobacco to overseas manufacturers to ward off competition from American producers. Entry of Africans was believed to compromise the export market through production of poor quality tobacco. So to preempt this 'catastrophe', the state legislated against African production.⁶⁵ In 1933, the Tobacco Pest Suppression Act compelled all tobacco farmers to 'clean their lands' by uprooting stalks by the first of August of each year to control the spread of diseases.⁶⁶ Although this law had universal application to all farmers irrespective of race, it was used to target Africans' tobacco crops which were considered a risk to white growers because ostensibly they spread diseases and pests.⁶⁷ Police patrolled 'native areas' and were ordered to uproot and destroy all 'native crops' not grown in

⁶⁵Clements and Harben, *Leaf of Gold*, 165.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 118.

⁶⁷H. Storey, 'Leaf curl of tobacco in Southern Rhodesia', *Rhodesia Agricultural Journal*, 29:3 (1932), 186-92.

accordance with the law.⁶⁸ In Nyasaland, similar methods were used during the 1930s when the Department of Agriculture hired gangs to uproot African tobacco gardens to prevent overproduction.⁶⁹ Also, in Kenya the supposed threat of pests and diseases in African-grown coffee, endangering European-grown coffee and ruining the global credibility of Kenyan coffee, was used to justify the marginalisation of Africans from coffee production until the mid-1930s.⁷⁰

Another statute that restricted African peasants' entry into tobacco production in Southern Rhodesia was the Tobacco Market and Stabilisation Act of 1936. Although touted as a panacea for the production and marketing chaos within the tobacco industry, this law actually forestalled the entry of Africans into commercial production of tobacco through a byzantine regulative regime. The act gave power to the Tobacco Marketing Board (TMB) to licence tobacco farmers, auction floors, and buyers, and centralised controlled sales.⁷¹ The regulative framework established by this act discouraged Africans from getting into commercial export production by making it impossible for them to get growers' licences. The act was so antithetical to the interests of 'native' tobacco producers that one native commissioner described it as 'class legislation' that was solely crafted to marginalise African growers to stop them from raising taxes by selling their tobacco.⁷² Although the law could not interfere with Africans as long as they did not enter commercial export production of European tobaccos, it was framed as a dormant deterrent to the existential threat of African competition in the production of European tobacco.⁷³ The restrictions to African participation in production of certain high value cash crops informed state policy in settler colonies and this was sometimes done through registration licences and administrative arrangements. In Kenya, for example, African production of pyrethrum and coffee was curtailed until the 1950s through levying of an expensive annual licence fee.⁷⁴

The state in Southern Rhodesia was also always wary of the detrimental effects of 'native' production on the labour demands of settler tobacco producers but couched their anxieties in terms of black disease and white purity.⁷⁵ The labour crisis hit the mining and agricultural sectors in Southern Rhodesia severely during the 1930s, compounded by competition from South African gold mines offering higher wages.⁷⁶ Labour shortages and the 'labour question' had a significant impact: labour deficits of between 15 to 85 per cent were recorded in most farming districts of the colony during the 1930s.⁷⁷ By the war years, the state had to assuage the labour crisis in the white settler farms through coercive recruitment and compulsory conscription of African labour, since peasants were unwilling to abandon independent farming in the reserves. Similar concerns preoccupied the colonial state in Nyasaland, where land concentration by white tobacco estates' owners in the Southern region beginning in 1920 was used as a tool to control and coerce African labour through the notorious labour exploitation regime known as *thangata*.⁷⁸ The role

⁶⁸NAZ S1542/A4, Office of the Superintendent Fort Victoria to Staff police office, 3 Sep. 1935; NAZ S1542/A4, Chief Entomologist to acting CNC, 18 Sep. 1935.

⁶⁹T. Woods, 'Why not persuade them to grow tobacco? Planters, tenants, and the political economy of central Malawi, 1920–40', *African Economic History*, 21 (1993), 131–50.

⁷⁰C. Barnes, 'An experiment with African coffee growing in Kenya: the Gusii, 1933–1950' (unpublished PhD thesis, Michigan State University, 1976), 38.

⁷¹Clements and Harben, *Leaf of Gold*, 20.

⁷²NAZ S1542/A4, NC Murehwa to CNC, 9 Jan. 1936.

⁷³NAZ S1542/A4, Secretary of the Department of Agriculture and Lands to CNC, 13 Feb. 1936.

⁷⁴Mosley, *The Settler Economies*, 40. For further reading on colonial measures to restrict African cultivation of high value export crops in Kenya, see, T. West, 'The history of the African pyrethrum industry', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, 107:5034 (1959): 423–41.

⁷⁵G. Hove and S. Swart, "'Dairying is a white man's industry": the dairy produce act and the segregation debate in colonial Zimbabwe, c. 1920–37', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 45:5 (2019), 911–25.

⁷⁶D. Johnson, 'Settler farmers and coerced African labour in Southern Rhodesia, 1936–46', *The Journal of African History*, 33:1 (1992), 111–28.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*

⁷⁸*Thangata* in Malawi has shifted: its pre-colonial meaning was linked to mutual aid in neighbours' fields. But after 1890 it came to mean exploitative unpaid agricultural labour in place of a cash rent on white-owned land. *Thangata* was formally

of land tenure regimes and control over access to land for the prosperity of peasant tobacco production has been highlighted in Latin American historical literature.⁷⁹ Abundance of land and low population densities in Latin American tobacco producing areas meant that the state was unable to compel peasants to consolidate tobacco production or reform production techniques. This led to the emergence of a strong, independent, and prosperous peasantry who could not be coerced into the wage labour economy, as was the case in Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland.

Production of tobacco by Africans in Nyasaland had in fact jeopardised the smooth flow of migrant labour to Southern Rhodesia in the 1920s. In 1926, colonial labour recruitment officials announced worriedly that there had been a dramatic drop in the numbers of African migrant labourers crossing into Southern Rhodesia.⁸⁰ This was attributed directly to the cultivation of tobacco by Africans in Nyasaland, who were earning enough money to pay their taxes.⁸¹ In Nyasaland, the state created the Native Tobacco Board in 1927 to regulate African production and save the European growers.⁸² However, unlike in Southern Rhodesia (where regulations prevented Africans from growing European tobacco), in Nyasaland independent producers were able to flourish and obviate the Native Tobacco Board.⁸³ These disparities can be accounted for by the different institutional arrangements in tobacco production and marketing. In Nyasaland much of the settler tobacco production and marketing was controlled by companies. These companies would often buy African tobacco outside the Native Tobacco Board at cheaper and more exploitative prices to resell at a bigger profit.⁸⁴ From the early 1930s white growers in Southern Rhodesia were wary of how company-controlled production and marketing had ruined European growers and handed production to Africans.⁸⁵

Another unique feature of African production in Nyasaland, was the rise of visiting African tenancy and sharecropping in the central province from the late 1920s, as estate owners contracted landless Africans to produce tobacco on their farms.⁸⁶ Whether this system encouraged the rise of a more prosperous group of peasant growers than in the crown lands is debated.⁸⁷ However, it was still based on exploitative extraction of labour and was excoriated by African nationalists during the 1950s. It must also be remembered that the visiting African tenancy system in Nyasaland arose out of the collapse of settler plantation agriculture during the 1930s and the fractured nature of white settler tobacco farming due to lack of private technical assistance and state support. However, in Southern Rhodesia, the existence of economically stronger, better organised white settler tobacco farmers, actively supported by the state and controlling production and marketing, precluded the emergence of sharecropping and African tenancy. Meanwhile, in Northern Rhodesia from 1900 to 1937, Africans were simply banned from growing tobacco — although they were

abolished in 1962, but is sometimes still used for unfair labour on tobacco estates: see, J. A. K. Kandaŵire, 'Thangata in pre-colonial and colonial systems of land tenure in southern Malawi with special reference to Chingale', *Journal of the International African Institute*, 47:2 (1977), 185–91. For readings on land concentration and tobacco production by white farmers in colonial Malawi, see: E. Green, 'Land concentration, institutional control and African agency: growth and stagnation of European tobacco farming in Shire highlands c. 1900–1940', in E. Hillbom and P. Svensson (eds.), *Agricultural Transformation in a Global History Perspective* (New York, 2013), 229–52; and Prowse, 'A history of tobacco production', 681–712.

⁷⁹Baud and Koonings, 'A lavoura dos pobres', 287–329.

⁸⁰NAZ, S238/49, Annual Report of the Supervisor of Facilities for Passage of Northern Natives, 1926.

⁸¹*Ibid.*

⁸²McCracken, 'Planters, peasants and the colonial state', 172–92. For more reading on the work of the Native Tobacco Board in colonial Malawi, see, J. Smith and K. Lee, 'From colonisation to globalisation: A history of state capture by the tobacco industry in Malawi', *Review of African Political Economy*, 45:156 (2018), 186–202.

⁸³McCracken, 'Planters, peasants and the colonial state', 172–92.

⁸⁴Woods, 'Why not persuade them', 131–50.

⁸⁵*The New Rhodesia* (Salisbury [Harare]), 29 Sep. 1933.

⁸⁶J. McCracken, 'Sharecropping in Malawi: the visiting tenant system in the central province, c. 1920–68' in J. McCracken (ed.), *Malawi: An Alternative Pattern of Development* (Edinburgh, 1984), 157–74.

⁸⁷Woods, 'Why not persuade them', 131–50.

allowed to grow maize and other crops.⁸⁸ The Macdonell Reserves Commission of 1924 pointed out that flue-cured tobacco was ‘beyond the scope of the native’, as Africans had neither the capital nor the training for it.⁸⁹

Therefore, state policy on tobacco production was predicated on creating a relationship of white planters as producers and Africans as labourers and consumers. A small thriving white planter community and a viable capitalist sector was established at the expense of the African peasantry. In Southern Rhodesia, this curtailment resulted in the collapse of African commercial production of ‘indigenous’ tobacco or, indeed, *any* tobacco from around 1938. The anomaly presented by tobacco compared to other agricultural commodities is striking. The curtailment of African cash crop production by colonial officials from the 1930s was usually framed around the imperative not to completely vanquish or annihilate African production but to nurture enclaves of peasant production that were too weak to compete with the established white capitalist sector. This, as the economic historian Paul Mosley contends, was the cornerstone of the settler state policy for maize and beef production in Southern Rhodesia (and Kenya): the European producer was supposed to be protected against the competition of the African *without hitting the African producer too hard* since there were influential sectors of the European economic sectors that benefitted from African cheap supplies of grain and beef.⁹⁰ With other cash crops such as tobacco that occupied a higher value in the colonial export hierarchy, the state adopted a much more sustained and systematic curtailment policy, with the result that the African tobacco economy in Southern Rhodesia collapsed from the late 1930s. The integration of African tobacco producers into the export economy only began in 1952, at the behest of the colonial state during a time when the British imperial government was emphasising high modernism and state planning. But, even then, Africans could produce only those types of tobacco which least interested European farmers.

From curtailment to assistance? African Turkish tobacco production and the state in Southern Rhodesia, 1952–80.

During the 1940s and 1950s British colonial Africa initiated a series of programs emphasising the merits of modernism, state planning, and increasing productivity through technical innovation.⁹¹ Western science and top-down technical programs became the fulcrum of state intervention in the agrarian landscape in most parts of British colonial Africa, tied to the desire to increase production for postwar reconstruction.⁹² Beyond the rhetoric of development, high modernism and state planning had an international political aim of controlling rural populations in the countryside through market-led developmentalism and land tenure reform.⁹³ This was largely placatory within the context of the spread of communism, the rise of nationalism, and peasant unrest in most parts of Africa, Latin America, and Asia.⁹⁴ Thus, during the 1940s and 1950s, colonial officials’ position on peasant communities began to change, as the interests of white settlers shifted from demand for

⁸⁸Kanduzi, ‘The tobacco industry’, 201–29.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*

⁹⁰Mosley, *The Settler Economies*, 41.

⁹¹J. C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, 1998).

⁹²H. Tilley, *Empire, Development and the Problem of Scientific Knowledge, 1870–1950: Africa as a Living Laboratory* (Chicago, 2011), 115–68.

⁹³F. Araghi, ‘The invisible hand and the visible foot: peasants, dispossession and globalization’, in A. Haroon Akram-Lodhi and C. Kay (eds.), *Peasants and Globalization – Political Economy, Rural Transformation and the Agrarian Question* (London, 2009), 124.

⁹⁴During the 1950s and 1960s the US government grappled with the problem of peasant societies because of the communist threats in Asia and Latin America. Their solution was to placate peasantries by co-opting them into national development programs, import substitution industrial policies, and land reform programs. See: N. Cullather, *The Hungry World: America’s Cold War Battle Against Poverty in Asia* (London, 2010).

agricultural labour to the desirability of a settled industrial labour force, rural security, and a stable and productive but ultimately uncompetitive African peasantry.

Although much of the modernism rhetoric was expressed in the colonial jargon of 'rural development', 'peasant cash crop production', and soil conservation, the corresponding projects were tools for political control of rural populations. In Kenya, the Swynnerton Plan was launched in 1953, ostensibly to transform the African peasantry through land consolidation, soil conservation, and the encouragement of cash crop production.⁹⁵ It was espoused as the end of racial discrimination in agriculture, a joint enterprise of all races in the development of productive capitalist agriculture.⁹⁶ However, in reality, the political pressures brought by the Mau Mau uprisings and the state of emergency had compelled the colonial state on the expedient path of modernism. The colonial state implemented perfunctory and piecemeal rural reforms, aimed to consolidate a class of technologically progressive but politically conservative and quiescent African yeomen who might act as a buffer against subversive rural elements.⁹⁷ In 1944, the Native Trade and Production Commission in Southern Rhodesia recommended coercive enforcement of good husbandry methods in the native reserves to prevent land degradation, overstocking, and 'ruinous farming practices'.⁹⁸ These recommendations were later codified by the Land Husbandry Act (NLHA) in 1951, reconfiguring land tenure in African areas both spatially and politically.⁹⁹

The implementation of modernisation meant that the colonial state had to find suitable agricultural commodities and cash crops that could be promoted in African areas, with the potential to generate capital investments and raise the standard of living. Peter Wagner conceived of the promotion of this policy as 'organised modernity' meant for the dual role of servicing post-war imperial self-sufficiency and metropolitan markets.¹⁰⁰ Ultimately, this new thrust in colonial agricultural policy realigned cash crop relations of production, as the colonial state became more amenable to Africans' participation in the agricultural export economy. As the apathy of the 1930s thawed, colonial governments started to encourage peasant cultivation of such crops as coffee, pyrethrum, tobacco, and tea to transform rural areas. On the other hand, export revenue from cash cropping would also conveniently pay for the coercive superstructure of post-war African administration. It was within this context that the state in Southern Rhodesia also altered its attitude to African production of tobacco. Suddenly, tobacco became the right crop for African peasants to encourage new patterns of rural accumulations, land development, and soil conservation.

However, beyond the modernisation and technical side there were other factors that compelled the state in Southern Rhodesia to change its policy: global market forces and local production dynamics. During the 1950s there was a huge demand for Turkish tobacco on the international tobacco market, caused by the rising popularity of blended cigarettes such as Camels, Lucky Strikes, and Chesterfields. Concurrently, the postwar boom in flue-cured tobacco prices caused a

⁹⁵N. E. Makana, 'Peasant response to agricultural innovations: land consolidation, agrarian diversification and technical change: the case of Bungoma district in western Kenya, 1954–1960', *Journal of Third World Studies*, 27:1 (2010), 155–70.

⁹⁶R. Van Zwanenberg, *The Agricultural History of Kenya to 1939* (Nairobi, 1972), 8–10.

⁹⁷For readings on land reform and rural development in colonial Kenya, see: J. Harbeson, 'Land reforms and politics in Kenya, 1954–70', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 9:2 (1971), 231–51; A. Thurston, *Smallholder Agriculture in Colonial Kenya: The Official Mind and the Swynnerton Plan* (Cambridge, 1987); and B. Berman, *Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya: The Dialectic of Domination* (London, 1990), 366.

⁹⁸NAZ ZBJ 1/1/1, Report of the Native Production and Trade Commission, 1944.

⁹⁹For comprehensive historical literature on the Native Land Husbandry Act, see: V. Machingaidze, 'Agrarian change from above: the Southern Rhodesia native land husbandry act and African response', *The International Journal of Historical Studies*, 24:3 (1991), 557–88; I. Phimister, 'Rethinking the reserves: Southern Rhodesia's land husbandry act reviewed', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 19:2 (1993), 225–39; and W. R. Duggan, 'The native land husbandry act of 1951 and the rural African middle class of Southern Rhodesia', *African Affairs*, 79:315 (1980), 227–40.

¹⁰⁰P. Wagner, *A sociology of Modernity: Liberty and Discipline* (London, 1993).

significant decline in Turkish production amongst white growers.¹⁰¹ Facing an uncertain future but still guaranteed a viable global market, the Turkish tobacco industry was rescued by encouraging African peasant production. Even then, the Rhodesia Tobacco Association (RTA), a body of exclusively white growers, was perturbed by the initiative to encourage Turkish production in African areas and noted with concern that ‘the great inflow of cash to the reserves would deplete the already scanty labour supply’.¹⁰²

So, in 1952, the state launched a pilot scheme for Turkish tobacco production in the Musengezi Native Purchase Area (NPA) with twenty pioneer African farmers growing the crop on half-acre plots.¹⁰³ NPAs, set up in 1931 under the LAA to encourage ‘progressive African farming’, had better land and were less congested than native reserves.¹⁰⁴ In 1954 the scheme was further extended to cover seventy African farmers in four other purchase areas.¹⁰⁵ Predictably, there was no attempt to encourage African production of Virginia flue-cured tobacco, ostensibly because ‘the capital costs involved would be a big deterrent to the farmer’.¹⁰⁶ The 1962 report on African agriculture pointed out that Virginia flue-cured tobacco was grown almost entirely by white farmers (with the exception of just three African farmers) because of the high fixed and working capital required, and the large area of suitable soil needed for rotations.¹⁰⁷ Confronted with the high cost of production, poverty, lack of credit facilities, tobacco curing barns, and technical assistance, Africans could not venture into production of flue-cured Virginia tobacco, and instead grew lower value tobaccos such as Turkish and Burley.

The Turkish tobacco scheme was a colonial initiative to harness cash crop production despite ecological marginalisation and land scarcity in African areas. The Turkish crop could thrive in the drier parts of the country with poor sandy soils, into which Africans had been forced by racist land segregation policies. Turkish tobacco was also ecologically ideal for the African farmer in the Native Reserves, as it did not denude natural resources like woodlands and did not require firewood for curing like flue-cured Virginia.¹⁰⁸ Officials also felt that Turkish tobacco fit within the NLHA template of soil conservation and cash crop production.¹⁰⁹ Experiments growing Turkish tobacco on overworked and poor soils in rotation with other crops such as maize, sunn hemp, and *rapoko*, in an effort to improve soil fertility, were initiated by the Department of Native Agriculture in the Native Reserves (later called Tribal Trust Lands, or TTLs, when the NLHA was repealed in 1962) of Chinhamhora.¹¹⁰ In 1956, production extended to other native reserves. During the 1959–60 season, out of a total Turkish harvest of 1,878,000 lbs in Southern Rhodesia, 618,000 lbs were produced by 4,444 African growers.¹¹¹ By 1958, production by Africans spanned 150 acres.¹¹² Between 1957 and 1960, the average gross output value from Turkish tobacco ranged from £38.12s per acre to

¹⁰¹In 1947 London tobacco manufacturers assured Southern Rhodesia that they would absorb two thirds of their total flue-cured tobacco production each year for five years. As a result, Turkish production fell from 11,811 acres in 1946 to 326 acres in 1951.

¹⁰²‘Turkish for Africans’, *Rhodesian Tobacco Grower and Food Producer* (Salisbury [Harare]), Sep. 1952.

¹⁰³‘Growing of tobacco by natives’, *Rhodesia Herald*, 11 Nov. 1954.

¹⁰⁴G. Kay, *Rhodesia: A Human Geography* (London, 1970), 93.

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷J. Phillips et al., *Report of the Advisory Committee of the Economic Resources of Southern Rhodesia with Particular Reference to the Role of African agriculture* (Salisbury [Harare], 1962), 193.

¹⁰⁸Tobacco Export Promotion Council of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (TERPCORN), *The Tobacco Industry of Rhodesia and Nyasaland* (Salisbury [Harare], 1963), 58.

¹⁰⁹Phimister, ‘Rethinking the Reserves’, 225–39.

¹¹⁰‘Government helps natives to grow tobacco’, *Rhodesia Herald*, 19 Oct. 1955. The Department of Native Agriculture had been set up in 1926 under agriculturalist E. D. Alvord to oversee the implementation of good husbandry methods in African areas. In 1969 it was changed to the Department of Agricultural Development to provide extension advice to communal farmers.

¹¹¹‘Oriental tobacco: a crop with a promising future’, *Tobacco Forum of Rhodesia*, May 1965.

¹¹²NAZ 42-13-3R, Box 126958, ‘Record of a meeting on the marketing of Turkish tobacco held on Friday 27 January 1961’.

£58.12s.11d. per acre, a figure between five and six times the yield of low unit value crops in the African areas.¹¹³ However, the adoption of Turkish tobacco production amongst African farmers was slowed by high transportation costs, high labour costs, and limited capital investments for farm expansion, all of which made the crop too costly to grow.¹¹⁴ In the end, Turkish tobacco production by African peasants remained marginal in the 1950s.

Turkish tobacco production generated class differentiation amongst peasants as some accumulated capital and investments that altered the agricultural landscape in African areas. This was most conspicuous in the NPAs and, particularly, in Musengezi NPA, which became one of the 'most progressive farming areas in the country'.¹¹⁵ By 1965, 53 farms in Musengezi NPA were fully fenced and subdivided into paddocks enclosing 18,000 acres of rotational grazing.¹¹⁶ These developments on African farms were now possible as the average income of each NPA farmer from tobacco was estimated to be around £300–400 gross, with a few individuals earning £1,000 or more. One of the model African farmers, Mr Griston Mungofa, practiced intensive farming, putting under twenty acres of tobacco and twenty acres of maize a year while practising rotation to integrate grazing.¹¹⁷

The income and class differentiation precipitated by Turkish tobacco in the NPAs prompted the state to integrate the crop within its new native administration outlook during the 1960s, as it abandoned the coercive approach of high modernism in pursuit of the much more integrative policy of community development.¹¹⁸ Community development was predicated on the integration of African systems into colonial administration and encouraging Africans to stay on the land at a time of simmering nationalism and rampant urban protest. Expanding cash crop production to TTLs and raising rural incomes could forestall rural political discontent.¹¹⁹ Thus, from the 1960s, the state expanded the Turkish tobacco endeavour to most poor and dry TTLs in Fort Victoria province (Gutu, Zimuto, and Bikita TTLs), the Midlands, and Manicaland provinces. African Turkish tobacco farmers were given seedlings from the African Loan Fund, set up in 1958 to grant loans to peasants.¹²⁰ Technical assistance was deployed using state-trained tobacco officers to help and encourage participation and cooperation of peasants in arable conservation, maintenance of contours, soil fertility, and grazing management.¹²¹

However, despite this, the gross returns in most of the TTLs were poor, amounting to a mere £5 per acre, while production costs hovered around £18 to £20 per acre.¹²² The poor remuneration saw the acreage planted fall drastically between the 1967–8 and 1968–9 seasons, from 1,100 to 213 acres, respectively. Reservations began to be expressed on the commercial value of the enterprise particularly in the poor sand soils of the TTLs. The Secretary for Internal Affairs pointed out that the extremely low profit margins of the crop in the TTLs made it impossible to continue with government support. In fact, he recommended the abandonment of the project:

It seems to me that with the possible exception of very few Purchase Area Farmers who may be making something out of the crop. There is no attraction in the crop at the present price of

¹¹³Yudelman, *Africans on the Land*, 173.

¹¹⁴A. Shutt, 'Squatters, land sales and intensification in Marirangwe purchase area', *The Journal of African History*, 43:3 (2002), 473–98.

¹¹⁵'African farmers turn to modern methods', *Rhodesia Herald*, 18 Jan. 1965.

¹¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹¹⁸For a comprehensive discussion on 'community development' policy, see, J. Alexander, *The Unsettled Land: State Making and the Politics of Land in Zimbabwe, 1893–2003* (Oxford, 2006), 65–72.

¹¹⁹NAZ 42-13-3R, Box 126958, 'Minutes of the meeting of members of the Tobacco Marketing Board held on 13 June 1967'.

¹²⁰A. Weinrich, *African Farmers in Rhodesia: Old and New Peasant Communities in Karangaland* (London, 1975), 27.

¹²¹NAZ S3700/29, Secretary External Affairs to all provincial agricultural officers, 14 Aug. 1973.

¹²²NAZ 42-13-3R, Box 126958, Secretary of Internal Affairs to Secretary for Agriculture, 8 July 1969.

25d. . . . In the circumstances I must support the recommendation that government support for the crop be dropped.¹²³

When the state decided to withdraw support for the Turkish tobacco production, new entities emerged to fill the void. The Tribal Trust Lands Development Cooperation (TTLDCOR), formed in 1968 to develop TTLs with European private capital, stepped in underwrite the production of 150,000 lbs to 200,000 lbs of Turkish tobacco during the 1969–70 season and ensuing years. This was a result of a steady increase in local consumer demand for the Turkish tobacco used in toasted cigarette brands, such as Gunston and Texas.¹²⁴ As a result, Turkish tobacco prices rose from under R\$1 to R\$1.35 (Rhodesian dollars) per kilogram over three years beginning in 1974.¹²⁵ The rise in prices nevertheless failed to raise production of Turkish tobacco in African areas, as acreages under cultivation decreased. In Victoria district, the number of growers had declined because of lack of watering facilities for seedlings and poor financial returns from the crop.¹²⁶ In the Midlands, Turkish tobacco was overtaken by cotton.¹²⁷ The Turkish tobacco interim survey of 1975 concluded that under the prevailing standards of management, tobacco production in the TTLs was not sufficiently profitable to encourage significant further expansion.¹²⁸ The survey noted that the only way yields — and concomitantly profits — could be raised would be through an effective extension system and field management involving fumigation, adequate pest control, and fertilisation of soils.¹²⁹

The collapse of commercialised production of Turkish tobacco within the TTLs created new opportunities for cultivation by women. From 1975, there was an interesting shift in the gender of the farmers — as much of the tobacco farming was now being done by women, or so-called ‘farmers’ wives’ — in their backyards.¹³⁰ This was possible because the processes of Turkish cultivation such as reaping, curing, and cultivation required less physical strength and were therefore deemed more suited to women and children.¹³¹ However, the district commissioner¹³² of Inyanga noted that these women growers could not even be qualified as real tobacco growers because they did not see the crop as a cash crop, but just as a trivial effort to make ‘pocket money’.¹³³

Tobacco production: a model for conservation and development in African areas or a political tool?

The African Turkish tobacco initiative in Southern Rhodesia reveals how crop hierarchies — a pyramid based not only on economic rationale but on the political ideology of control — helped institutionalise patterns of white settler dominance in the countryside and agrarian economy. White settler cash crop hegemonic ideologies shaped colonial development paradigms in African areas and the nature of African participation in the agricultural economy. Even within the new colonial development narratives of modernisation and technical intervention during the late 1940s and 1950s, African cash crop production remained pigeon-holed within the hegemonic imperatives of servicing white settler interests and agricultural export growth for administrative and political

¹²³*Ibid.*

¹²⁴NAZ 42-13-3R, Box 126958, G. D. Cox for Secretary Agriculture to Secretary Internal Affairs, 1 Oct. 1969.

¹²⁵*Ibid.*

¹²⁶NAZ S3700/22, Promotion of oriental tobacco policy meeting, Victoria district report, Mar. 1975.

¹²⁷NAZ S3700/22, Senior agricultural officer to Secretary Internal Affairs, 18 Oct. 1974.

¹²⁸NAZ S3700/22, Oriental tobacco survey, 1975.

¹²⁹*Ibid.*

¹³⁰*Ibid.*

¹³¹‘Turkish tobacco is a good crop for African farmers’, *Rhodesia Herald*, 15 Nov. 1956.

¹³²In 1969, the control of African agriculture in Southern Rhodesia passed to district commissioners.

¹³³NAZ S3700/22, C. des Tombe (District Commissioner, Inyanga), Oriental Production in Inyanga, 5 Mar. 1975.

expediency. Predictably, the Turkish tobacco drive failed to have a significant positive impact on improving the physical environment and African accumulation patterns — with limited success in the NPAs and less still in the TTLs. This was because postwar policy intervention in the rural areas had a much broader political objective than the much-touted modernist and technical rationale of transforming African export agriculture through encouraging cash crop production. The rise of nationalism and the tide of decolonisation imperilled most settler colonies and threatened the status quo of white farmers in the countryside, precipitating the need for rural reforms. Within this context, it is important to note that the crop hegemonic status quo that had hitherto impinged on African peasants and the structural constraints to their participation in the global export production were not dismantled but, instead, shifted to accommodate new colonial priorities and new idioms of control and authority. Notably, the postwar imperial project of encouraging cash crop production by African peasants was foisted upon a settler state that implemented piecemeal rural reforms. These reforms were not intended to create a real rural bourgeoisie, but rather a quiescent class of African farmers who might serve as a political buffer. The overwhelming logic was to construct a Black farmer with a stake in the political economy and make him an ally against subversive rural elements.¹³⁴ In the end, the state's drive to encourage African cultivation of Turkish tobacco was part of a political project to impose political control and extend colonial authority in a way that could not lead to the emergence of a strong African agrarian bourgeoisie to disrupt white settler farmer privilege.¹³⁵ Tobacco was still, therefore, a hegemonic crop, as its cultivation was used to control patterns of accumulation in African areas in ways that could contain rural discontent and preserve white settler dominance. While tobacco was a high value crop which transformed rural livelihoods and created a strong agricultural middle class in Latin America, the colonial state to preclude the same from happening for Africans in Southern Rhodesia. The cultivation of tobacco was limited to a containment strategy for threats to rural stability. During the late 1970s, at the height of the War of Liberation, the Rhodesian state conscripted African farmers to grow Burley tobacco in abandoned white farms under the guise of combating land denudation and soil erosion as well as raising rural incomes.¹³⁶ However, this measure was part of a broader counter-insurgency strategy to create buffer zones against guerrilla incursions as vacant farms were becoming breeding grounds for African nationalist fighters and tobacco farms were seen as the first line of defence.¹³⁷ The enduring objective and design of state policy on tobacco production remained to relegate African producers to second-class farmers in a white-dominated tobacco farming sector, producing those low-profit tobacco types unwanted by white farmers and sustaining the domestic demands for Turkish tobacco.

In the long run, the colonial project failed at tackling the glaring problems of the African rural economy such as lack of capital, poor soils, and inability to invest in technical services and infrastructure. This became more conspicuous in the years after the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) in 1965, as state expenditure for African agriculture fell from 2.8 per cent of total spending between 1966 and 1969 to a mere 1.2 per cent in the years 1975 to 1976.¹³⁸ The economic sanctions imposed by the United Kingdom on Rhodesia in 1966, in response to the UDI, severely crippled white settler agriculture and hit tobacco farming hardest. Tobacco export receipts dwindled by a massive 82 per cent from 93.9 million to 16.7 million Rhodesian dollars

¹³⁴Berman, *Control and Crisis*, 366.

¹³⁵For more on the making of the black bourgeoisie, see: A. Shutt, 'Purchase area farmers and the middle class of Southern Rhodesia, c. 1931–1952', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 30:3 (1997); and M. West, *The Rise of an African Middle Class: Colonial Zimbabwe, 1898–1965* (Bloomington, IN, 2002).

¹³⁶Many white-owned tobacco farms were abandoned at the height of the Liberation War during the late 1970s creating the problem of vacant farms. The Rhodesia Tobacco Association (RTA) began promoting the settlement of African small holder tobacco producers in these vacant farms deserted by Europeans because of the war.

¹³⁷Ncube, 'Colonial Zimbabwe tobacco industry', 127–8.

¹³⁸A. Shutt, 'We are the best of the poor farmers' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of California, 1995), 198.

between 1965 and 1966.¹³⁹ The state had to intervene with the tobacco support program to subsidise white tobacco farmers, with this assistance amounting to 22 million Rhodesian dollars in 1970. Thus, much of the state funding for African agriculture was withdrawn in order to subsidise white farmers during the UDI.¹⁴⁰ This affected African Turkish production as government technical support went down, amid falling tobacco prices induced by the tobacco embargo. Bereft of subsidies (unlike white tobacco farmers), and confronted by a drastic cut in funding, African Turkish tobacco farmers were unable to remain competitive producers and their enterprises inevitably collapsed. This case was different to Kenya where African coffee producers were relatively more successful and even outcompeted European growers. This was because unlike in Southern Rhodesia, the colonial state in Kenya was obliged to sacrifice incompetent European producers to support competitive African farmers to ensure the survival of the coffee export sector.¹⁴¹ In Kenya, the state actually reduced its financial assistance to white farmers and, when coffee prices plummeted, settler farmers could not compete with low cost African cultivators.¹⁴² The role of 'off-farm incomes' in the success of rural cash cropping in colonial Africa has also been emphasised by Mary Tiffen, Francis Gichuki, and Michael Mortimore in their work on Kenya.¹⁴³ In Southern Rhodesia, restrictions on black urban employment meant that there was limited off-farm investments to supplement meagre capital resources from cash-cropping.¹⁴⁴

Indeed, there were very few African farmers who were success stories in these state programs — mostly those in the NPAs with access to relatively better land and capital opportunities.¹⁴⁵ Amongst African farmers state initiatives did little to stimulate positive change in the environmental and economic landscapes. State financial assistance was very little, African plots too small, and the soils so poor that tobacco cultivation accelerated erosion.¹⁴⁶ A state agricultural official highlighted in 1978 that the efforts made in the TTLs had not succeeded in raising the standard of living for the so-called 'tribesman', or in slowing down the rate of deterioration in the country's natural resources.¹⁴⁷ Even the state's own Five Year Plan in 1979 admitted that land pressure in most TTLs caused livelihood insecurity and poverty amongst Africans and was destroying the land.¹⁴⁸

In the final analysis, peasant agency and autonomy in tobacco production by Africans in Southern Rhodesia was severely limited by the state and white growers, so that there was never a truly independent peasant producer class during the colonial period. Even during episodes of so-called booms in rural commodity production, the pervasive precarity of African peasant economies was evident in their subordination to larger forces such as the interests of settler agrarian capitalism and global commodity market dynamics. Within this colonial leviathan, the agency of the peasant tobacco producers was hamstrung by the broader colonial objectives: to maintain labour supplies, create a domestic market for settler tobaccos, and preserve security in the countryside through piecemeal encouragement of cash crop production and guided rural accumulation. Thus, the hegemonic value of tobacco as an important export crop for white settler power and survival

¹³⁹D. Rowe, *Manipulating the Market; Understanding Economic Sanctions, Institutional Change and the Political Unity of White Rhodesia* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2001), 74.

¹⁴⁰A. Astrow, *Zimbabwe: A Revolution that Lost Its Way?* (London, 1983), 65.

¹⁴¹D. Hyde, 'Paying for the emergency by displacing the settlers: global coffee and rural restructuring in late colonial Kenya', *Journal of Global History*, 4:1 (2009), 81–103.

¹⁴²*Ibid.*

¹⁴³M. Tiffen, M. Mortimore, and F. Gichuki, *Population Growth and Environmental Recovery: Policy lessons from Kenya* (Chichester, 1994).

¹⁴⁴For statistics on African urban employment in Southern Rhodesia from 1904–74, see: M. Smout, 'Urbanization of the Rhodesian population', *Zambezia*, 4:2 (1975), 79–91.

¹⁴⁵*The Rhodesian Financial Gazette* (Salisbury [Harare]), 18 July 1975.

¹⁴⁶This is based on interviews carried out in December 2017 with Africans who grew tobacco during the late colonial period in the Chiveshe Tribal Trust Lands.

¹⁴⁷'TTL development a failure', *The Rhodesian Financial Gazette*, 19 May 1978.

¹⁴⁸'TTLs reform a priority', *The Rhodesian Financial Gazette*, 30 Mar. 1979.

in Southern Rhodesia constructed the narrow and constricted ‘tight corners’ within which peasant agency and autonomy was negotiated and navigated under shifting structural factors. While there were complex variables at play like global market forces, political contexts, and social demographics, the constant was the hegemonic imperative to control and curtail African participation in the export economy. The aim was to confine Africans to modes of agrarian development amenable to coercive political and economic control without disrupting the hegemonic centres of white power.

Conclusion

African tobacco production in Southern Rhodesia, just like colonial peasant production elsewhere, must be understood within the context of shifting colonial state priorities constructed around power relations revolving around commodity production, the global export forces, and the changing dynamics of the commodity value chain. The hierarchy of commodities was instrumentalised in various ways to control African peasantries depending on the changing patterns of global economic and political pressures. But eventually, it was the colonial state that structured not only factors of production, but also relations of production amongst producers on the land. And the imperative to prop up settler capital always defined the state’s response to peasant production.

We have joined the debate on the impact of colonial state policy on African peasant producers. We have argued that while there was certainly evidence of peasant initiative in circumnavigating the restrictive colonial regulations, as much recent scholarship has shown, it is imperative to move beyond agency and locate other centres of historical change in colonial peasantries, which involve subtle but important political processes constructed over international commodity networks, local economic processes, and power relations. These of course were not stagnant but shifted over time. They evoked colonial revisionist programmatic interventions in African agriculture, but essentially the colonial project on African peasantries was to create a malleable and tractable class of African producers. We have contended that each crop and agricultural commodity produced by Africans had a unique colonial encounter and context. These encounters and contexts were shaped by how colonialists viewed the crops *themselves*, their value to the basis of white settler economic power, and how native cultivation of such crops would impinge on and challenge that power and, with it, the whole institution of colonial hegemony. Tobacco in Southern Rhodesia was thus a hegemonic crop, solidifying the precincts of white economic dominance and, for that reason, African production had to be more significantly curtailed than in other commodities, like maize, beef, small grains, and cotton. Even when the state encouraged such production, as from 1952 to 1980, it was with the condescending benevolence that only allowed Africans to cultivate the ‘inferior tobaccos’, while flue-cured tobacco remained a preserve of Europeans until independence. Finally, we argue that the value of a specific crop in the hierarchy of power hegemonies in the colonial state determined the extent and level of peasant curtailment, control, and decline. Thus, while agency has palpable conceptual utility in colonial African peasant studies, moving beyond it to engage power asymmetries and disparities amongst agricultural commodities within the colonial economy affords a new understanding of the pervasive and enduring constraints of white settler power on peasant autonomy and independence.

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