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# Primitive Accumulation in the East Africa Groundnut Scheme

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## ABSTRACT

This paper revisits the Groundnut Scheme, a postwar colonial development project in East Africa infamous for its catastrophic failure. It examines the plans made by British state managers and the Scheme's planners at both the United Africa Company and the Overseas Food Corporation to transform African colonial subjects into stabilized wage-labourers. The paper seeks to understand this social transformation in the context of the contradictory nature of capitalist social relations. This is achieved by using Marx's concept of primitive accumulation: the separation of the worker from their means of subsistence. The paper focuses on two aspects of this process. Firstly, the creation of remote villages for the Scheme's workers, physically separating them from traditional support structures. Secondly, the creation of a new gendered division of labour that would have transformed the homelife of the Scheme's workers.

## Introduction

The East Africa Groundnut Scheme stands as a monumental failure to the arrogance of British post-war colonial development. The Scheme was conceived by the Director of the United Africa Company (UAC), Frank Samuel, while flying over Tanganyika and implemented by the British state. Samuel was convinced that the territory could be quickly transformed into a vast area of groundnut farms, ameliorating Britain's political and economic crises while developing East Africa.<sup>1</sup> From the start, it was a fiasco and failed to achieve any of its goals. The Scheme and British colonial development policies have received much scholarly attention.<sup>2</sup> This has generally focused on the failures of the Scheme as a large-scale agricultural project. Major exceptions to this are the works of Rizzo and Bourbonniere, who have sought to understand the Groundnut Scheme as a generative phenomenon.<sup>3</sup> After all, there was more to the Scheme than just its failures.<sup>4</sup> Rizzo's goal is to link 'the socio-economic history of the area and the unintended dynamics generated by the Scheme' for postcolonial Tanzania, while Bourbonniere considers the

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intersections between the Groundnut Scheme and other development projects.<sup>5</sup> Undoubtedly, whether the Scheme achieved its stated objectives or not, it still changed Tanganyika in completely unintended ways.<sup>6</sup>

What has received little scrutiny, however, is the plans made by British state managers to establish wage-labour through the Scheme and to impose a new set of gender relations on the Scheme's workers. In the plans of this colonial development scheme, tens of thousands of East Africans would have been transformed from peasants participating in the migrant labour system into workers entirely reliant on wages. This transformation relied not only on the separation of workers from their means of subsistence but also on a novel gendered division of labour. While many authors focus on the Scheme as a failure, this tends to gloss over the significance of the Scheme's plans. Approaches to colonial development that treat it as a 'rise in average living standards which involves not merely an increase in material goods, but an enlargement of social and cultural opportunities and widespread access to education, health and recreational facilities' ignore the social relations behind this process.<sup>7</sup> Cowen and Shenton characterise the colonial policies of the post-war Labour government as trying to protect 'the colonial subject from the supposed ravages of the market'.<sup>8</sup> However, as this paper argues by looking at the East Africa Groundnut Scheme, it is colonial development itself that makes the colonial subject vulnerable to the ravages of the market, with education and welfare playing a crucial supporting role in achieving this.

By analysing these proposals in concert with Marx's concept of primitive accumulation, the paper reveals the hidden workings of the social transformation planned by British state managers in East Africa. Primitive accumulation allows us to see the importance of separating workers from their means of subsistence. It also reveals, building on the work of Mies and Federici, the essential role that a new gendered division of labour would have played in achieving the Scheme's goals. While analysis of a development scheme's intended consequences can fail to appreciate the long-term consequences of those plans, it can still be useful in understanding the role of the state and class relations. This paper, therefore, follows authors who consider the plans of failed colonial development schemes to understand the motivation behind them.<sup>9</sup> This paper will consider the plans of the Groundnut Scheme drawn up by the British state and UAC from 1946 to 1951. As such, the paper relies heavily on archival material from the British National Archives and the Unilever Archives.

The paper is divided into four sections. Firstly, the paper covers the development goals of the Scheme, which were subordinated to the goals of alleviating a global food shortage, easing the dollar deficit and making a profit for the British state. Secondly, the paper considers the historical origins and peculiar characteristics of the society from which imperialism derives. This section considers primitive accumulation in the context of the organisation of labour

in colonial Southern and East Africa to illustrate the transformation that the Scheme's managers had planned. The next two sections cover the strategies of the Scheme's managers to achieve primitive accumulation in East Africa. The third section covers the plans of Scheme managers to fully separate Africans from their means of subsistence through the creation of villages designed by the Scheme's planners and to educate and socialise workers through welfare provision. The fourth section considers proposals to transform the home life of African workers and establish a novel gendered division of labour through the process of housewifization.

The critical analysis of the Scheme's plans exposes how its planners sought to achieve primitive accumulation in East Africa through the creation of an enormous set of groundnut farms. It further reveals the logic of state action and its foundation in the exploitative and contradictory nature of capitalist society.<sup>10</sup> This process, highly contingent and gendered, was to stabilise wage-labour in East Africa and, therefore, to crystallise capitalist society there. This is not to suggest intentionality on the part of British state managers. On the contrary, to paraphrase Marx, while British state managers were not necessarily aware of the fundamental meaning of the social process they sought to implement, they did it anyway.<sup>11</sup>

### **Colonial development and the East Africa groundnut scheme**

Colonial development had been a notional goal for British state managers since the interwar period, with the growth of Fabian Socialism and the passing of the Colonial Development and Welfare (CD&W) Act in 1940.<sup>12</sup> The CD&W Act 1940 provided £500,000 a year for research and £5 m a year on colonial development and welfare projects.<sup>13</sup> The post-war Labour government was eager to use the British Empire as a means of addressing several pressing issues and committed to the idea of colonial development.<sup>14</sup> The CD&W Act 1945 was passed, greatly increasing the resources available for colonial development, and permitting £120 m to be spent on such projects by 1956.

One project was the East Africa Groundnut Scheme. The Groundnut Scheme stands as one of the key moments in the so-called Second Colonial Occupation, as the British state escalated its direct role in transforming Africa.<sup>15</sup> For Low and Lonsdale, the magnitude of the Scheme, its isolated and uninhabited location, and its governance by the Ministry of Food rather than the Colonial Office mark the Scheme as the epitome of British post-war imperialism in Africa.<sup>16</sup> In this project, colonial development was a subordinate goal.<sup>17</sup> The primary function of the Scheme was easing the world fats shortage, improving rationing and alleviating Britain's dollar deficit.<sup>18</sup> After the Second World War, a global shortage of 2 million tons of oils and fats had developed, equivalent to 5 million tons of oilseed. Britain imported 90% of its fats, of which half was derived from oilseed

crops. Pre-war British consumption had been 66 lb per person, but by the post-war period stood at 51 lb.<sup>19</sup> Since both China and India, the world's major exporters of oilseed, had become importers, developing Africa was, to the official mind, the only solution to this problem.<sup>20</sup> As such, the Scheme was conceived with development goals in mind:

If a project of this kind can be carried out successfully, it cannot fail to confer great economic and social benefits on the people of the territories in which it operates. Higher standards of living and expanded social services will be rendered possible by the increase in national income and in tax revenues which will result from the new activities. . . The health, nutrition, housing, welfare and labour policies which will be developed progressively as an integral part of the scheme, will not only raise the standards of life enjoyed by the employees of the undertaking and their families, but this large scale working-model should serve as an example which other employers must come in course of time to follow.<sup>21</sup>

The Scheme was eventually to be run by the Ministry of Food through the state-owned Overseas Food Corporation (OFC), which would be set up by the Overseas Resources Development Bill in 1948, with £50 m to spend, of which £25.5 m was specifically allocated to the East Africa Groundnut Scheme.<sup>22</sup> The Scheme was managed by the Ministry of Food and not the Colonial Office precisely because colonial development was seen as secondary.<sup>23</sup> Initially, the Scheme would be run by UAC, a Unilever subsidiary. With nearly half of Unilever's oil-crushing mills in Britain standing idle, Frank Samuel wanted to improve the company's profits through an increase in the global supply of fats and oils.<sup>24</sup> Samuel believed that a large-scale mechanised agricultural project could make use of the vast, 'empty' land of the territory.<sup>25</sup> Essential to Unilever's bottom line was the transformation of African land and people.<sup>26</sup>

Colonial administrators, UAC executives and British state managers believed that Africans had ruined the soil they were cultivating and that these practices would eventually 'spell disaster'.<sup>27</sup> This was a common and spurious view of peasant cultivation in the immediate post-war period.<sup>28</sup> Tanganyika's Ten-Year Development and Welfare Plan claimed that the territory's farmland had been depleted because of overwork demanded by the Second World War.<sup>29</sup> In fact, European colonialism had increased the frequency of natural disaster in Tanganyika, beginning with German occupation.<sup>30</sup> Colonial policies diverted labour to export-crop production and government projects at the expense of subsistence cultivation, diminishing the resilience of local peasants to climatic fluctuations and causing dietary decline.<sup>31</sup> Poor harvests did occur prior to European colonialism but African producers would generally have adequate food stores to avoid a famine.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, the Scheme's planners agreed that the only way of addressing this problem and making the most of 'the fertile virgin regions of Central Africa' was by introducing mechanised and modern farming methods to improve export farming.<sup>33</sup>

Samuel wanted to avoid Unilever being financially liable for this project and sought to involve the British state in its implementation, sending a proposal to Ben Smith, the Minister of Food.<sup>34</sup> The Scheme was to cultivate 2.5 m acres of land in East Africa, principally in Tanganyika, to produce 400,000 tons of groundnuts by 1951 using mechanised production.<sup>35</sup> The scale later grew to 3.2 m acres and 600,000 tons.<sup>36</sup> The proposal envisioned a labour force of '400 European/Asiatics and about 20,000 local African artisans and labourers'.<sup>37</sup>

The view held of the local population by UAC executives and British state managers was that their way of life was primitive and precarious, that they were 'inert in spirit and disease-ridden in body'.<sup>38</sup> Colonial administrators and the Scheme's planners saw the transformation of the local population as a necessary step in making the territory more productive. Tanganyika's development plan concluded that the territory required extensive improvements in welfare, education, healthcare and communications in order to raise the standard of living for the population.<sup>39</sup> The Wakefield Report claimed the Scheme would 'not be prejudicial to the African interest' as it would provide 'an economic foundation for social advance'.<sup>40</sup>

Tanganyika was a League of Nations mandate, with Britain taking over as the mandatory power in 1922. This meant that Britain was responsible for the administration of the country and held obligations regarding financial and commercial matters with a view to eventual independence.<sup>41</sup> Britain's key interest in assuming this mandate was strategic rather than commercial: creating a corridor through Africa to consolidate the 'Southern British World' and denying this territory to other powers.<sup>42</sup> At the start of the mandate, colonial authorities saw Tanganyika 'primarily as a black man's country' and sought to avoid the alienation of land to European settlers.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, Tanganyika was presented as the 'ideal home' for the project and not just because of the vast area of 'unused' land.<sup>44</sup> Only 1% of Tanganyika was alienated to non-native use but the Scheme would double this. The 1946 Wakefield Report on the Scheme's viability recommended that the British state lease this land from the colonial government for 25 years.<sup>45</sup> The Scheme's planners were untroubled by alienating land, not wanting African rights to 'impede progress' and it was authorised by the Colonial Office.<sup>46</sup> This led to criticism from Parliament, the Labour Party and the Tanganyikan colonial authorities so the White Paper stated that alienated land would eventually be returned to the colonial government.<sup>47</sup>

Samuel's plan boasted that Tanganyika's exports would increase by over £6 m per annum, tonnage handled through Dar-es-Salaam would quadruple and nearly 4000 sq. miles of bush would be cleared of tsetse infestation. The Scheme would alleviate the world's shortage of vegetable oils in the short- to medium-term and 'constitute a notable achievement in the field of Colonial development'.<sup>48</sup> The draft White Paper emphasised that the enduring value of

the Scheme would be in transforming East African agriculture, improving productivity and social welfare, achieving ‘freedom from want’, and providing a benchmark for future projects.<sup>49</sup> The Scheme was finally approved in late-1946 with work commencing in early 1947.

### Primitive accumulation, imperialism and gender

This section situates the Groundnut Scheme in terms of the nature of capitalist society, focusing on the process of primitive accumulation, the development of the East African migrant labour system and indirect rule, and the significance of the gendered division of labour.

Capitalism is a historically specific set of social relations, characterised by the selling and exploitation of labour-power for the extraction of surplus-value. The essence of work in capitalism derives from what Marx described as the double freedom of workers: freed from the means of production and free to sell their labour-power.<sup>50</sup> As such, the basis of work in capitalist society separates workers from their means of subsistence, requiring them to sell their labour-power for a wage to sustain themselves.<sup>51</sup> This is a process Marx refers to as primitive accumulation, which remains a persistent feature of capitalist society. For Marx, it is the process ‘of divorcing the producer from the means of production’.<sup>52</sup> Primitive accumulation is not, then, the first attempt by capitalism to make a profit in some bygone era but, rather, the moment that capitalist social relations are established.<sup>53</sup>

Primitive accumulation, in the context of this paper and throughout history, has been a process in which the state is fundamentally implicated:

In the colonies . . . the capitalist regime everywhere comes into collision with the resistance of the producer, who, as owner of his own conditions of labour, employs that labour to enrich himself, instead of the capitalist. The contradiction of these two diametrically opposed economic systems, manifests itself here practically in a struggle between them. Where the capitalist has at his back the power of the mother-country, he tries to clear out of his way by force the modes of production and appropriation based on the independent labour of the producer.<sup>54</sup>

This is not the annihilation of the prior society but rather its transformation to exist as part of capitalist society. For Marx, capitalism is not an ideal type that exists only in an abstract form but ‘the result of a past historical development, the product of many economic revolutions, of the extinction of a whole series of older forms of social production’.<sup>55</sup>

Primitive accumulation in the case of Tanganyika, then, should be understood in terms of the historically developed Southern and East African colonial economies.<sup>56</sup> These economies had already been absorbed into global capitalism and, in doing so, created the African peasant, who cultivated for subsistence but was also part of a market, selling labour-power in a migrant labour

system.<sup>57</sup> Tanganyika's economy had three sectors: firstly, production in mines and estates for export; secondly, production of food and the supply of services in support of the export sector; and a peripheral sector that supplied migrant labour.<sup>58</sup> The profitability of the first sector depended on the availability of cheap labour from the third.<sup>59</sup> Controlling the labour of the African producer was key to the management of these economies and this could only be accomplished through extra-economic means by the colonial state.<sup>60</sup>

For Arrighi, primitive accumulation in the Southern African case was a matter of 'stabilising' the population in a fixed location, reducing opportunities for mobility, and severing access to means of subsistence. Peasants who have access to means of subsistence but sell their labour are vulnerable to the process of primitive accumulation.<sup>61</sup> As per Arrighi, they could still be stabilised and then subordinated to the needs of capital accumulation. Stabilisation required a widening of the gap between productivity in the capitalist and non-capitalist sectors so that producers operating in the latter sector would automatically seek to sell their labour not out of convenience but necessity. This process took many forms in which the colonial state was essential, including the alienation of land, increased taxation, vagrancy laws, and forced labour.<sup>62</sup> This peasant population constituted a reserve army of labour for the fluctuating needs of capitalist production in Southern and East Africa.<sup>63</sup> As Bernards notes, the creation of wage-labour 'requires the re-configuration of rural spaces in order to allow the persistence of a fragile but never-quite-fully-dislodged "latent" surplus population'.<sup>64</sup> This process describes a constant cycle between surplus and working populations where the former can be called on to become the latter for the purposes of accumulation and back again.

Native reserves were established throughout Africa to sustain the migrant labour system.<sup>65</sup> These were remote from markets and land was difficult to cultivate.<sup>66</sup> In the Southern African case, the expansion and increase of private farms on alienated land pushed more Africans into these reserves, limiting peasant agriculture and forcing more Africans to participate in migrant wage-labour.<sup>67</sup> However, this was a contradictory process.<sup>68</sup> The peasant producer's ability to grow their own food, whether for sale or consumption, was a subsidy to capitalism (lowering wages, for instance) but this subsidy also conferred autonomy, which could break their link to the labour market.<sup>69</sup> Stabilising the itinerant African peasant was potentially detrimental to the needs of capital accumulation as it could drive up the costs of labour.

The migrant labour system was a delicate balancing act for colonial authorities.<sup>70</sup> The colonial state, despite being the central agent for development, was limited in its autonomy because of the contradictions of its position.<sup>71</sup> It was required to sustain capital accumulation through the coercion of African labour while remaining a 'paternal protector of the African and disinterested agent of social order'.<sup>72</sup> These were contradictory impulses that constantly threatened to undermine governing autonomy and create social



disorder. Consequently, native authorities were created to support colonial power through indirect rule.<sup>73</sup> This strategy was a consequence of the weakness of the colonial state in mobilising land and labour for the purposes of capital accumulation.

The colonial state occupied a uniquely contradictory position, firstly, between metropole and colony and, secondly, between colonial capital and local forms of production.<sup>74</sup> This tension was clear between the Groundnut Scheme and the colonial state but was replicated throughout East Africa as the Second Colonial Occupation intensified in the immediate post-war years.<sup>75</sup> The colonial state relied on the migrant labour system to supply labour where and when it was needed. This was principally to Tanganyika's vast sisal estates, which employed around 140,000 people by the post-war period.<sup>76</sup> As the Scheme expanded, these estates were forced to compete for labour by improving wages and working conditions.<sup>77</sup> This caused a problem for the colonial government, who were petitioned by the estate owners to avoid guaranteeing labour for the Scheme.<sup>78</sup> The colonial government agreed to this but informed the estate owners they would have to improve conditions and wages to achieve an adequate labour supply.<sup>79</sup>

The peasants in the migrant labour system produced food as cash crops and for subsistence. Indirect rule was also premised on the migrant labour system. As such, any attempts to develop the Tanganyikan economy by stabilising a large portion of the workforce were at odds with the delicate balance that enabled colonial rule and sustained the territory's economy.<sup>80</sup> Cheap migrant labour was needed for production in mines and plantations throughout Tanganyika. This labour was largely male, and the wages were low. These men had to rely on existing support networks to provide for families and themselves in sickness, old age, and unemployment.<sup>81</sup> Participating in the labour market meant that the cost of social reproduction fell most heavily on female relatives.<sup>82</sup> What Mbilinyi calls the 'unholy alliance' between African chiefs and European colonial administrators 'created a macho vision of native custom and tradition which was embodied in colonial law, and used to create and sustain patriarchal systems of marriage, divorce, inheritance and property ownership'.<sup>83</sup> For Mbilinyi, 'efforts by chiefs, fathers, husbands, district officers and corporate managers to keep women locked in patriarchal structures in the native reserves reached enormous heights' during the colonial era.<sup>84</sup> Broader social and economic change led to greater reliance on wage-labour for male workers, leading to women becoming the major producers of subsistence food for local consumption.<sup>85</sup> The colonial state then played a crucial role in sustaining the patriarchal organisation of power behind local peasant production and the migrant labour system.<sup>86</sup> New gendered divisions of labour are key in the process of primitive accumulation. Federici offers a tripartite account of primitive accumulation building on gaps in Marx.

(i) the development of a new sexual division of labour subjugating women's labour and women's reproductive function to the reproduction of the work-force; (ii) the construction of a new patriarchal order, based upon the exclusion of women from waged-work and their subordination to men; (iii) the mechanization of the proletarian body and its transformation, in the case of women, into a machine for the production of new workers.<sup>87</sup>

The imposition of the logic of capital accumulation in the case covered by this paper took the form of an attempt to create a large-scale mechanised agricultural scheme in East Africa and to frame it as a colonial development scheme. As we will see in the following sections, this attempt at primitive accumulation sought to separate Africans from their means of subsistence and establish African women as unwaged domestic workers – housewives – to sustain social reproduction and the male wage-labourer. The establishment of the migrant labour system had incorporated Southern and East Africa into global capitalism but the plans of the Groundnut Scheme were to transform tens of thousands of Africans into stabilised wage-labourers.

### Creating workers

UAC had a long-standing commitment to employ Africans wherever possible as part of its commitment to 'Africanisation'. This policy had the proviso that African employment was not 'dependent on their attaining a European standard of capacity'. UAC described this policy as 'a very real' risk to productivity but a necessary one.<sup>88</sup> The Scheme's planners believed that the productivity required to meet their targets would need to be 150 times the average peasant producer. The planners' view, however, was that this efficiency would not be possible 'unless there is improvement in the intelligence and skill of the African'.<sup>89</sup> Here, therefore, was the link between colonial development, the need for profitable production and the transformation of human beings into workers.

The Groundnut Scheme required a vast number of workers to clear, plant and manage the required area of land. Lt. Colonel Tom Woods, the Scheme's Health Officer, was pessimistic about sourcing this labour due to the established and racist ideas of the deficiencies of African workers.

The present lethargy of the African and general lack of interest in his work is deplored throughout East Africa. But as things are it is difficult to see how the African could be roused to endeavour, except by nationalistic fervour, which is apt to get out of hand when people are ignorant as well as emotional. Education and propaganda as to the long-term aim of the groundnut scheme could be made to give the African an immediate incentive to work on the scheme.<sup>90</sup>

The plan was to establish a labour force local to the Scheme's working areas by creating villages for workers and their families. These villages

would have been remote from traditional communities, as well as each other. There would have been 80 villages, spread across three sites, with each village farming an area of 30,000 acres.<sup>91</sup> Each village would have 300 African workers, plus families, and 5 European supervisors.<sup>92</sup> The planned population of each village was 1200–1400 people. The workers and their families would be made up of people ‘displaced from overpopulated areas’ of Tanganyika, Northern Rhodesia and Kenya.<sup>93</sup> On average, then, each village would be separated from another by around 14 miles.<sup>94</sup> These villages would have been permanent settlements and stabilised tens of thousands of workers, removing them from the migrant labour system.

Having spent two months working in Tanganyika in 1947, Woods wrote to John Wakefield, leader of the original mission to assess the viability of the Scheme, that the Scheme in its entirety rested on the transformation of Africans into efficient and capable workers through the process of education.

One of the objects of the Groundnut Project is to raise the general standards of life for the East Africans . . . It would seem quite impossible to attain this particular object unless an excellent system of education is introduced . . . General education and social advancement are not only inherent in the whole project, but it will be essential to its success that all employees should be properly trained to do their work. All members of the family must be educated to assure contentment in the family. When they grow up educated children must be able to obtain employment worthy of their status.<sup>95</sup>

This was clearly not a programme for education in Tanganyika and selection methods were outlined to avoid ‘wasted time, effort and disappointment’.<sup>96</sup> As Walter Rodney notes, education was a tool used by European states in Africa and was only ever instrumentally valuable: ‘those whom the colonialists could not readily exploit were not offered even the crumbs of education’.<sup>97</sup> The availability of education had been subordinated to the needs of British imperialism, and hence to the needs of capital accumulation. The absence of education was deliberate ‘structured incapacity’.<sup>98</sup> Tanganyika’s own development plan made this exact point, by stating that ‘expenditure on education is rightly considered to be a form of capital investment . . . Literacy is one of the elementary techniques for making the factors of labour and production more effective’.<sup>99</sup>

The Scheme undertook to establish a welfare scheme in concert with the Ministry of Education and UNESCO for around 30,000 Africans. A statement from the Ministry of Education echoed the sentiments of Woods by pointing out that ‘the arrangements for the education and social well-being of the East Africans engaged in the venture will develop side-by-side with the groundnuts plan, and the main purpose will be not only to raise the general standard of living of these people, but also to fit them to take an increasingly large part in the plan and, ultimately, completely to control it’.<sup>100</sup>

Prior to a meeting of the OFC Board in January 1948, the only member to work from Tanganyika, Major-General Desmond Harrison, circulated a note for the Board to read. Harrison stressed social development for the success of the Scheme. Harrison argued that it was a priority to provide 'adequate housing, health services, nutrition, welfare and education [for] our employees'.<sup>101</sup> These plans would have to be made, he emphasised, with local colonial governments as there were long-term considerations in employing so many people in a 'modern' way:

We have in view the establishment of settled village communities on our Units, and the term detribalization has been freely used in respect of the employees we propose to house therein. The higher standards of health and nutrition services which we propose result in a higher infant survival rate, in a larger family unit, and a general increase in population. In ten years' time, the problem of employing all the adults will begin to be serious – in time it will be impossible for the Groundnuts enterprise alone.<sup>102</sup>

The plan to cultivate the African worker both for the purposes of the Scheme's immediate goal and the longer-term development of East Africa required a process of transportation into specialised camps. Here Africans would be separated from their means of subsistence and required to work on the land of the Scheme. While the Scheme's managers were conscious of their beneficence in providing higher standards of health and nutrition, Africans were nevertheless placed in a position to be exploited. As Norman Brook, the Cabinet Secretary, informed the Prime Minister in 1948:

There has been general support for the view that the development of Africa's economic resources should be pushed forward rapidly in order to support the political and economic position of the United Kingdom. . . . It could, I suppose, be said to fall within the ordinary definition of 'imperialism'. And, at the level of a political broadcast, it might be represented as a policy of exploiting native peoples in order to support the standards of living of the workers in this country.<sup>103</sup>

An anticipated problem, however, was keeping the local workforce committed to wage-labour. While wages were paid to African workers, and these were of a comparable level to other workers in Tanganyika, absenteeism was very high.<sup>104</sup> It was believed that not only did local labour have a different understanding of stores of value but that, even if they comprehended the significance of money-wealth, they had very little to spend it on.<sup>105</sup> This was the basis behind attempts to introduce luxury goods on which the Scheme's workers could spend their wages.<sup>106</sup>

While the goal of the Scheme was to transform Africans into workers, primitive accumulation does not necessarily mean the *complete* destruction of bonds of prior social relations.<sup>107</sup> The Scheme sought to utilise existing structures of indirect rule to discipline workers into working harder and longer, as well as of the value of the Scheme itself.<sup>108</sup> This was an established strategy by colonial authorities, who had created native authorities for this

very purpose, but had intensified during the immediate post-war years.<sup>109</sup> Colonial authorities would frequently rely on indigenous leaders to drum up available labour. This tactic was used widely in colonial Africa when labour was scarce and drew on pre-existing structures of surplus extraction.<sup>110</sup> This was clear from the organisation of the village communities planned by the OFC. The explicit goal of these was to provide ‘married quarters for . . . African workers, made of indigenous materials . . . built on traditional lines’ and, among other welfare devices, ‘to encourage and assist the development of self-organised African movements’.<sup>111</sup>

As noted above, African tribal organisation by this point was largely a creation of colonial authorities as a means of controlling land and labour.<sup>112</sup> The idea that a pristine pre-colonial Africa survived even the earliest contact with capital has long since been abandoned.<sup>113</sup> Rather, the literature emphasises the relationship between capital accumulation and the requirements of rural peasant producers. The consequence of this relationship was, since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the creation of a migrant labour system throughout Southern and East Africa. This was no less true in Tanganyika. As Malik notes, ‘the social and economic cleavages caused by colonial rule, and the limits of social development imposed by colonial policy, were reread as the fruits of such autonomous cultural development’.<sup>114</sup> The Groundnut Scheme was presented as a solution to an inherently *African* social problem.<sup>115</sup> This was a falsehood and the Scheme was a solution to a problem of colonial origin.

The plans of the Scheme rested on the separation of Africans from their usual means of subsistence, the establishment of isolated farms, and the education of Africans to support these new social relations. As Marx and Engels critiqued the early utopian socialists one can also critique British post-war colonial development: to the British state manager, the African offered ‘the spectacle of a class without any historical initiative or any independent political movement’.<sup>116</sup> Indeed, one can look to the originators of the Scheme to see their view of Africans as existing in an historical limbo, to either fall to their doom or be saved by the British Empire. Through stabilising thousands of African workers and removing them from the migrant labour system and peasant production, the Scheme’s planners were not emancipating Africans. They were attempting to create the permanent foundation for their exploitation.

## Unwaged work

When British administrators took over the Tanganyika mandate, they created native authorities by seeking out older men in local communities.<sup>117</sup> This was part of a Colonial Office policy in Central and East Africa in the 1920s to encourage ‘traditional’ African communities.<sup>118</sup> Colonial authorities then effected indirect rule through the promotion of a novel patriarchal system, subordinating women and

greatly diminishing their political power.<sup>119</sup> This process was intensified by the growth of the migrant labour system. Local gender relations began to transform.<sup>120</sup> Prior to 1940, the expansion of male power over women in Tanganyika was a direct consequence of European imperialism, creating separate private and public spheres and introducing new forms of property relations.<sup>121</sup>

Contemporary literature on the political economy of gender relations in Africa has rejected the distinction between public/productive and private/reproductive spheres.<sup>122</sup> Gender relations and a gendered division of labour were key to the functioning of the migrant labour system. Households were characterised by absences, and this affected roles in production.<sup>123</sup> Men would generally clear land and prepare storage, while women would prepare the land for planting and collect the harvest.<sup>124</sup> While there was a gendered division of labour in the production process, both sexes were still involved in production. The Groundnut Scheme, however, had different plans in mind.

While the Africans required to clear the land for the Scheme would have 'no settled base' and ultimately be disbanded, the policy for permanent workers was 'to develop a stable labour force, and to establish them with their families in model villages with adequate social services'.<sup>125</sup> The village units of the Scheme were to provide a basis for family life. It was the OFC's intention to make these units comfortable communities but this longer-term goal was contingent on increased worker productivity.

Although it is the policy of the Corporation to be good employers ... It is the Corporation's intention to establish a standard of services necessary to the African's welfare and happiness, and this will be increased steadily as the Scheme develops; improvement will be related to the increasing output of the Africans. ... The Africans will enjoy improved conditions as a reward for their efforts, and the Corporation will devote from its earned surpluses each year a sum ... for the development of social services.<sup>126</sup>

The units serving the areas of the Groundnut Scheme would be crucial for the transformation undertaken in Tanganyika. A process of establishing a new sexual division of labour and excluding women from productive work was outlined by the Scheme's planners. Major Orde-Browne, a former Labour Commissioner in Tanganyika but by 1946 a Labour Advisor for the Colonial Office, observed that the workers needed for the Scheme were only a small portion of the labour needed to support it.<sup>127</sup> He argued that the workforce be organised around communal lines since it would be the best means of managing labour, as well as beneficial for the African and his family life.<sup>128</sup> The radical transformation of the African into a worker was to be eased by including familiar aspects of home life. Lt. Col. Woods, in a letter to Wakefield, noted that most residents in these villages would be women and children and that their education would be vital in establishing the Scheme.

When the units are developed, there will be three times as many women and children as men living within the project. To exclude one generation or one sex from education leads to unhappiness and discontent in the home. At the best the educated members lose interest in all they have learnt and revert to their previous state; at the worst the educated members of the family, finding they have nothing in common with the others, leave and home life is broken up. It is apparent that an education scheme to cover children and, in the early years of the project, the adults, is necessary. The adult starts with the handicap of having had no education, but if he can be educated at the same time as he is learning his particular trade, this handicap might be overcome. The adult women, the wives and mothers, must not be neglected, and must, to a certain extent, be able to progress with their husbands.<sup>129</sup>

The establishment of contemporary gender roles and the advent of capitalism went hand in hand. European imperialism and the ‘housewifization’ of women, both in Europe and the colonies, were closely linked phenomena.<sup>130</sup> Mies describes housewifization as ‘the total atomization and disorganization of these hidden workers. This is not only the reason for the lack of women’s political power, but also for their lack of bargaining power. As the housewife is linked to the wage-earning breadwinner, to the “free” proletarian as a non-free worker, the “freedom” of the proletarian to sell his labour power is based on the non-freedom of the housewife. Proletarianization of men is based on the housewifization of women’.<sup>131</sup> This had already been achieved somewhat through the establishment of indirect rule and the migrant labour system. However, the Scheme offered a much more profound change to gender relations.

The role women would have played in the Scheme has been missed by most scholars. However, as the managers of the Scheme realised, it would have been impossible without this gendered division of labour. Women were seen as crucial in sustaining the village communities upon which the Scheme itself would rest. The role women would play in the future of the Scheme becomes apparent from the planning documents surrounding welfare and education. Women’s roles would be to create a home, to clean, cook and raise the next generation of Groundnut workers.<sup>132</sup> Not only was housework to be imposed on the women of the village units and treated as a natural attribute of the female character and body but the Scheme’s planners realised that this required training and socialisation: ‘Special simple education should be provided for women including hygiene, home making, sewing and other hand-work, and maternity and child welfare. Special instruction should be provided for women, as it is the intention of the scheme to produce food as well as groundnuts’.<sup>133</sup> As Mies notes,

The housewifization of women, however, had not only the objective of ensuring that there were enough workers and soldiers for capital and the state ... Not only was the housewife called on to reduce the labour power costs, she was also mobilized to use her energies to create new needs. A virtual war for cleanliness and hygiene – a war against dirt, germs, bacteria and so on – was started ... Scientific home-making was also

advocated as a means of lowering the man's wage, because the wage would last longer if the housewife used it economically.<sup>134</sup>

The Scheme's planners advocated this point almost to the letter:

Women are the corner-stones of the home and the biggest influence in the lives of the children, and therefore that women's welfare work must receive A1 priority. Economies made this side mean wasted effort on the men's and children's sides. Money spent on this side alone will benefit both men and children . . . It is as easy to draft a balanced ration for an African as it is for a dairy cow, but he can only be made to eat it through the technique of his own kitchen, and this will not be achieved through lectures and films, but by intimate personal contact with the cook and her cooking pot.<sup>135</sup>

The Scheme's planners anticipated that the maternal role of women in the units would have limits. The presence of children was not unproblematic for the Scheme's planners. The organisation of the units would lead to a growing and spatially-fixed population, separated by some distance from nearby settlements.

So long as the units are used primarily for the commercial production of groundnuts, and the world shortage of fats is likely to persist for a generation, only a relatively small proportion of the children can be absorbed on the groundnut units. Even if secondary industries and ancillary farming operations to groundnut production become well-established, the greater part of the first generation of children will have to look outside the units for their livelihood; some form of settlement scheme will undoubtedly be required. In any event, the adolescent children cannot be left to grow wild after leaving school, without their becoming a serious social problem on the units.<sup>136</sup>

Plans were therefore drawn up to manage the multiple and manifold problems of social reproduction that would emerge in the isolated villages: young farmers clubs, football and cricket facilities, women's institutes and study groups were all considered to counter this anticipated problem.<sup>137</sup> The Scheme's planners reacted with horror at the growing number of prostitutes who had established themselves in Kongwa by June 1947.<sup>138</sup> Little did they realise that this was a consequence of changing gender relations caused by global capital and instigated by the state, of which they themselves were agents. As Federici notes, the turn to prostitution is premised on the exclusion of women from waged-work and the creation of the housewife.<sup>139</sup>

As in the transformation from feudalism to capitalism in Europe, the creation of the male worker for the Groundnut Scheme required the simultaneous creation of the housewife. The plan for the Scheme's women differed considerably from the role women played in Tanganyikan society. Firstly, the Scheme's plan was to stabilise the workers on the Scheme, separating them from support networks and, effectively, to end the migrant labour system for tens of thousands of Tanganyikans. Given the role of women in this system, their roles would necessarily



have changed. Secondly, the role that the Scheme envisioned was entirely domestic. Unlike other colonial development schemes of the period, the Groundnut Scheme did not feature large-scale subsistence food production.<sup>140</sup> Moreover, the plan was for women to be relegated entirely to the home and would receive training to that effect. They would no longer have been the producers and growers required by the migrant labour system but solely cooks, cleaners, mothers: in a word, housewives. Thirdly, the Scheme's planners saw these changes as instrumental to disciplining workers to settling, or stabilising, labourers. As per Federici's argument, women's labour and reproductive role would have been subordinated to the needs of waged workers. This was made possible by the creation of a new gendered division of labour and changes to the previous patriarchal system. These planned changes to gender relations were essential to the process of primitive accumulation.<sup>141</sup>

## Conclusion

This paper has analysed the plans of the Groundnut Scheme using the concept of primitive accumulation to shed light on the social transformation designed by the Scheme's managers. The paper considered two key aspects of this process. Firstly, the establishment of permanent settlements where workers would have been separated from their established support networks by long distances. Secondly, the creation of a new gendered division of labour in which women would no longer have been producers but housewives. The paper placed these plans in the context of African peasant production and the migrant labour system in Southern and East Africa to highlight the transformation that the Scheme's planners had in mind. The emergence of wage-labour is not teleological.<sup>142</sup> As such, post-war Tanganyika could not be at an early stage of commodity relations, nor can peasant production be considered intermediate and destined to disappear.<sup>143</sup> Capitalist social relations are characterised by contradiction and class struggle and the outcome of these struggles is not predetermined but fundamentally open in character.

Rural Tanganyika, as was evident from the organisation of its labour supply, was integrated into global commodity production. However, this does not mean that primitive accumulation had been systematically imposed on its people. The paper argues that, through close scrutiny of its plans, the Groundnut Scheme was an attempt to achieve this. These plans required what Arrighi termed the stabilisation of peasant producers. This was an extra-economic process that would have removed tens of thousands of peasants from the migrant labour system and peasant production, and settled them in permanent villages where they would have been reliant on wage-labour for their subsistence.

The paper has argued that critical analysis of these plans reveals the logic and limits of state action. As part of the so-called Second Colonial Occupation, the British state, pursuing colonial development, intensified its activities in East Africa as an attempt to solve its crises at home and so sought to transform social relations in Tanganyika.<sup>144</sup> The British state, as the OFC, compelled East Africans to sell their capacity to work for ‘a mess of pottage’.<sup>145</sup> The scope of these plans reveals how disastrous this Scheme was that it could never have been successfully implemented. The Scheme would have permanently withdrawn tens of thousands of men and women from peasant production, severely diminishing food production in East Africa and undermining indirect rule. In doing so, the limits of state action would have been laid bare. The colonial state relied on indirect rule to govern the territory as it had little autonomy, as a result of its contradictory relationships internally and externally. The workers recruited by this Scheme displayed their own agency, by continuing to participate in the migrant labour system and produce their own food. Battling against the agency of these workers was one of the key struggles of the whole Groundnut Scheme.

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6. Rizzo *Groundnut Revisited*, 32, What was Left? 236; Bourbonniere Ripple Effects, 367–68
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90. UA UAC/1/15/4/2/1, 16<sup>th</sup> June 1947, Education and Training – Economic and Social Problems; TNA ED 157/105, 16<sup>th</sup> June 1947, Woods to Wakefield. The number of units varied across the various iterations of the Scheme. There were plans for 73 units in 1946, 107 in 1947, and 20 by 1949.
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## Disclosure statement

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