Finally, it is difficult to praise highly enough the care that was expended in producing the marvelously helpful 21 page index. It makes an interesting book into a useful reference tool.

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Often, macro-level studies of the "Third World" offer sweeping generalizations which obscure an understanding of real people and places. For this reason, the fine-tuned micro-level study by Dr. Victoria Bernal offers both traditional anthropology and the links to the wider context. Dr. Bernal fills a gap in our consciousness and in the ethnographic literature as she adds data which may be usefully compared to the recent work in the same area, by Fruzzetti and Ostor, Culture and Change along the Blue Nile.

Her poignant, in-depth view of the rural community of Wad al Abbas, just north of Sennar, in Blue Nile Province in the Sudan, explores such matters as the rural side of migration, subsistence patterns, capital accumulation, and the impact of wage labor upon the traditional practices of subsistence cultivation. These are the variables in which the people of Wad Al Abbas are seen as struggling to sustain themselves.

Her central question is to study how the "peasants" participate in "wage and informal" economy, and, in turn how this affects rural production. There are those who question whether true "peasants" even exist in Africa; and increasingly the cash-based "informal sector" is seen as a part of the world capitalist system which is not dualistically opposed to the wage sector, but only a part of it. Indeed, Bernal repeatedly observes that rural production at the household level is composed of a diversity of economic activities, and it is far from an autonomous unit. Yet I believe that this is so well known that it perhaps not needing such careful documentation to prove it. One would be hard-pressed around the world to locate any community which is totally self-sufficient on their own agriculture and having no tie to the cash economy. Bernal admits that in fact they are not unique, but typical of the Third World.

In a similar way she discovers that the household is not a bounded unit of production, but she says that they are sometimes treated that way in peasant studies without giving an example. Certainly the anthropological investigation of peasant societies always links the "little" tradition to the "great" tradition. I would be surprised if she discovered anything else; since the rise of the ancient state in the Nile valley there has been a highly interconnected division of labor and socio-economic stratification. In the case of the Sudan, livestock, labor, and animal and plant products have been produced and exported to Egypt for millenia.

Likewise she says that farmers are often analyzed in abstract, yet the study of agriculture in antiquity or in modern times has always seen farming in its relationship to world and local markets. In various places we learn that "peasants" are not "precapitalist remnants" nor are they "penny capitalists" but are instead workers who have experienced "incomplete proletarianization." This is a world process which leads to the development of the "informal sector," or a "peasant-worker" class which will, given enough time, "eventuate in a full-fledged proletariat severed from its peasant roots." As a statement of fact or faith I should think that this is still a long way off.

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I am not sure I could agree with Dr. Bernal that “most” anthropological studies of the Sudan have focused on the “less powerful, non-Arabic speaking groups.” There are, after all, important ethnographies of such northerners as the Shayqiya, Kabbabish, Beja, and Baggara, and a variety of Nubians. In addition such southern peoples as the Azande were quite powerful in their own terms, and the present grouping of the Dinka and Nuer under the SPLA has confined the “powerful” Arabic-speakers to a few garrisons towns in the south!

Dr. Bernal is certainly correct in noting the debate about the questionable role of slavery in agricultural production in the Sudan. Since large-scale cash market agricultural schemes were generally absent before the huge Gezira development, one can agree that they were not too important in this respect. On the other hand, slaves were a “natural resource” like ivory, ebony, animal skins, and ostrich feathers. Up to 10,000 slaves were exported annually through much of the 19th century, and considerable fortunes were made by Turkish, Nubian, and Ja’aliyin members of the merchant class as a result.

It is equally clear and correct that there was a labor shortage in the early days of British colonialism as a result of the abolition of slavery and the synthesis of clerical, transport, and construction workers to create the colonial administration.

Her ethnographic data are very rich with fascinating detail. For example, she observes that even though the percentage of women in cash-earning activities is only 46% (and many of these gain rather little), this is in sharp contrast to many studies which fail to see women at all. I am convinced that she is right, and the role of the female anthropologist allows us to see the situation more deeply and accurately.

Her data on kinship, marriage, divorce, and residence are all precise and consistent with central Sudanese patterns favoring endogamy and community solidarity. I was interested to learn that there are fariiqs in Wad al Abbas, but I believe they are better understood as “patrilineages” rather than “neighborhoods,” which are properly known as ahya. This is a better way to account for the presence of large patrilineal descent groups, rather than say that because there is no formal group termed a khasm bayt, that patrilineages don’t exist. The Ja’aliyin, who dominate in Wad al Abbas certainly reckon kinship patrilineally; elsewhere on the Blue Nile in Eilafun, Gereif, and Burri the fariiq is the norm. Perhaps my own work, which was largely with men, gave me this perspective more clearly.

Similarly her chapter on social inequality confirms the nascent process of class formation and stratification. Her precise descriptions and creative wealth scale give this important documentation, especially in showing the linkages to the national and urban merchant class. Given the centrality of labor migration and class formation to this study, the work of A.S. Oberai (1977), and especially the very important history of the Sudanese labor movement by Saad Ed Din Fawzi (1957), seem to have been overlooked.

The appendix of quantitative data is very helpful and honest in its methodological self-criticism. Other research on the Sudan has been likewise frustrated by small-sample sizes, and dubious demographic bases. I think that Bernal has pushed her statistical analysis to just the right degree; further statistical treatment is not merited.

Her central conclusion that rural farming is no longer self-sufficient and is on one hand linked to the national economy, and on the other, is part of a mixed economic survival mechanism in the context of class formation and wage labor migration is solidly illustrated. Certainly this work will be of great interest to all Sudanists, but even more, it has significance to a wide range of disciplines in Third World studies. While she has carefully defined her term of “peasant-worker” I suppose that other social scientists