Rethinking Bundy: Land and the black middle class – accumulation beyond the peasantry

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Based on an assessment of historical data on the black middle class in Mthatha, this article argues that South Africa’s black middle class has considerable time depth. It originated in Bundy’s ‘peasantry’, when African farmers started producing for the market and used their surpluses to educate their children. After being educated, these children continued to accumulate land for farming. Income from the land supplemented their salaries, which allowed them to further the education of their own children and accumulate additional land and, thus, wealth. Hence the black middle class in South Africa is arguably not a post-1994 phenomenon, but is rather the result of intra-generational transmission dating back to the mid-nineteenth century.

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