



AGRARIAN SOUTH NETWORK SHORT BOOK SERIES

**THE AGRARIAN QUESTION
BEYOND NEOLIBERALISM:
ESSAYS ON THE PEASANTRY,
SOVEREIGNTY AND SOCIALISM**

Samir Amin

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Agrarian South Network Short Book Series

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Preface

For over sixty years, Samir Amin was a towering left intellectual on the African intellectual scene. He was a prolific writer and over the years retained his intellectual purpose. For him what mattered was revolutionary politics, not erudite scholarship. I have described elsewhere the metamorphosis of some of our revolutionary intellectuals to celebrated ‘public intellectuals’ (Shivji, 2018). Amin never submitted to such a metamorphosis. For Amin revolutionary politics was primary, scholarly erudition was secondary, though, it must be added, he never underrated works of great scholarship. There have been and are quite a few prolific writers in the African intellectual community who could easily be described as scholars or public intellectuals and would be proud to wear that mantle, but not Samir Amin. The subtitle of his *Memoirs* ‘an Independent Marxist’ (Amin, 2006) probably describes him best. And instead of the now fashionable but vacuous ‘activist’ – scholar-activist or even Marxist-activist – I would describe Amin as an independent Marxist thinker wholly and unreservedly committed to the social emancipation of the working people. I am sure he would have felt proud of being so affiliated to Marxism and the working people of the world. He never made secret of his Marxist credentials, nor his emancipatory project.

Thanks to Samir Amin we can today talk of an African intellectual community, albeit with some hesitancy. He founded the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA). For almost fifty years the Pan-African CODESRIA has been a home and platform for African intellectuals. With ups and downs, it has survived as an institution. Generations of African intellectuals, including mine, have been brought up in the CODESRIA community. Its innocuous title as a research organisation notwithstanding, for Amin CODESRIA was a political project to develop a community of African intellectuals delinked (to use one of his familiar concepts) from the intellectual and epistemic hegemony of Europe and America. The development of the African intellectual community owes a lot to the nurturing it received from CODESRIA. CODESRIA was close to Amin’s heart. When CODESRIA awarded Amin with a ‘golden baobab’ on its twentieth anniversary in recognition of his role as the founder, it touched his heart. He writes thus in his *Memoirs* (ibid., p. 208): ‘I am very appreciative of this recognition’.

Thandika Mkandawire, the longest serving Executive Secretary of CODESRIA, describes Samir Amin somewhere as a nationalist. But Amin was an internationalist *par excellence*. Nationalism, internationalism, and Marxism all sat together comfortably in Samir Amin, yet he compromised with none of them. He was consistently critical of narrow nationalisms and populisms, Atlantic-American hegemonic internationalism, and dogmatic Marxism of both the Trotskyist and Stalinist varieties. His nationalism, internationalism, and Marxism were firmly rooted, socially in class and methodologically in historical materialism. Taking up cudgels against liberalism, neo-liberalism, post-modernism, post-colonialism and a variety of other ‘posts’, he steadfastly remained a Marxist until his last breath.

Samir Amin had a radically different meaning of ‘national’ and ‘international’. In his later years, Amin frequently talked about what he called ‘sovereign popular national project for Africa’. In an interview in Roape.net, he elaborated (Amin, 2017):

[n]ational, not in the sense of nationalist, but with the meaning that political power must be changed, and political power can only be changed in the frame of the countries and states as they exist today. It cannot be changed at global level or even at a regional level before being changed at national country level. It will be popular in the sense that this is not a bourgeois, capitalist project, yet these steps cannot be achieved while accepting the pattern of globalisation and capitalism.

His meaning of ‘international’ again radically differs from the hegemonic Eurocentric view for which international has almost the same meaning as globalisation. And it also differs from the social democratic and Euro-leftist view for which the centre of the revolution is the Centre. For Amin, revolutionary changes and advances will come from the peripheries not from the Centre, that is, from the weak parts of the capitalist system. In the Leninist language, it will be the weak links which will break first. He gave his position a *longue durée* historical illustration and justification. Even the transition from feudalism to capitalism, he averred, started in the weak parts of the system, Europe, not in China which was a strong tributary system. And so he expected that the transition from capitalism to socialism will come from the periphery as we witnessed in Russia (1917), China (1947), Cuba (1959) and Vietnam (1975), all of them being either in the semi-periphery (Russia) or peripheries (China, Cuba, Vietnam). By the same token, his meaning of sovereign was not referring to the sovereignty of the state; rather it implied an independent project of popular power which does not submit to the



logic of capitalist and imperialist expansion but one that adjusts and changes to the internal logic of development.

In the light of the co-optation and compromises of a significant number of Marxist intellectuals in the CODESRIA community over the last three decades of neo-liberalism, one lingering question in many of us has been and continues to be: how did Samir Amin survive in a hostile system as a Marxist thinker and unabashed communist until his last breath? In the immediate decades of post-independence, many of us found ‘refuge’, so to speak, in the universities which provided relatively freer spaces for debates, discussions, and publication of left literature. But with the neo-liberal ideological assault, freedom of thinking has been extremely constricted on campuses, as the universities have carried out their own structural adjustment programmes which have entailed devaluation of basic research in favour of policy and consultancy work; undermining of humanities and social sciences in favour of professional faculties (law, engineering, hard sciences, etc.); vocationalization of courses; termination of tenured positions in favour of short-term contracts; and general surveillance of staff and students of the content and delivery of courses under the guise of quality assurance. In many cases, for the radical faculty it has become an existential question. How do you make a living in the system to which you are resolutely opposed? Amin was relatively lucky. In his own words (Amin, 2006, p. 159):

I am not very docile. I have never found acceptable, for myself, the compromises that ‘making a career’ often involves. I certainly do not look down on those whose life obliges to follow certain well-worn tracks, whether they accept or criticize them. But, perhaps because of my temperament, it has been very difficult for me to act in this way, and I have waged one battle after another to be allowed to make independent choices. No doubt I am very lucky to have won the decisive battles that allowed me to live as I wished, without having to suffer for my intransigence. I have reached retirement without ever experiencing either the agonies of capitulation or acute material want.

How many of us in the same camp as Amin can confidently say the same, I wonder!

Comrades and colleagues in the Agrarian South Network (ASN), whose prime founder and mover was our dear friend and comrade Sam Moyo, has launched



a series of small e-books collecting articles and writings of leading intellectuals in an accessible form. The aim is to introduce younger generations of the Global South to the writings of their preceding generation. Hopefully, it will make younger intellectuals and activists reflect critically and thence chart out their own mission and vision for a new world. Samir Amin had a soft heart for Sam Moyo. We are therefore inaugurating the e-book series with a book of writings of Amin. Besides these writings, I strongly recommend to readers Amin's autobiography, *A Life looking Forward: Memoirs of an Independent Marxist* (2006). This serves as an excellent introduction to the life and political positions of Samir Amin on many burning issues of his time which are still the burning issues of our time. My generation did not have the privilege of being so introduced to Samir Amin. I recall that the first book by Samir Amin that I read was his PhD thesis, *Accumulation on a World Scale* (1974). I cannot claim to have understood it, but I read it from cover to cover. During my time, some of us thought it was an insult to knowledge to abandon a book midway. No, it had to be read from cover to cover for there is no 'bad' and 'good' knowledge. There is only stupendous knowledge which tickles your imagination and arouses your commitment, or there is stupid propaganda which is presented as profound knowledge. The motto of my generation was 'read everything and question everything good or bad'.

The three chapters of this book appeared in *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy* and are reprinted here with permission. The first chapter, entitled 'Contemporary Imperialism and the Agrarian Question', was published in the inaugural issue of *Agrarian South* in 2012 (Vol. 1, No. 1). Amin argued that the ongoing integration of the peasantry in the South into the monopoly-controlled global agro-food system can only produce mass marginalization and pauperization. On the basis of the global competitiveness promoted by the World Trade Organization (WTO), increases in productivity can only imply labour-saving technologies, without the possibility of absorbing the marginalized into other economic activities, or of outmigration, as was practised by the West in the course of its own industrialization. Thus, Amin argued, an alternative policy is necessary to maintain both peasant producers in the countryside and promote technological change at a rate consistent with non-rural, non-agricultural employment.

The second chapter is entitled 'To the Memory of Sam Moyo' and was published in 2016 after brother Sam's untimely passing, in a special issue on the theme of 'Remembering Sam Moyo: Intellectual Formation and Contributions' (Vol. 5, Nos. 2–3). Amin here referred to their shared understanding that the deployment of contemporary imperialism simply produces the savage destruction of peasant



societies in Africa and Asia. Amin elaborated various dimensions of the challenge related to the so-called ‘emergence’ of the South. He argued that conventional patterns of economic growth in the South, associated today with relocation and subcontracting industries, produce nothing but ‘lumpen development’, that is, accelerated social disintegration and, in particular, destruction of rural societies. ‘Emergence’ of nations, distinct from that of markets, implies the formulation of sovereign projects standing on two feet, engaging in the consolidation of an integrated industrial production system, on the one hand, and promoting the renewal of family-based peasant agriculture, on the other. Amin also offered a critical assessment of the African experiences and identifies alternative strategies beyond the blind alley of neoliberal re-colonization.

The third chapter, ‘The Agrarian Question a Century after October 1917: Capitalist Agriculture and Agricultures in Capitalism’, was published in 2017, in the special issue on ‘Revolution and Liberation: 100 Years since the October Revolution, 50 Years since the Arusha Declaration’ (Vol. 6, No. 2). In this commemorative article, Amin addressed one of the key dimensions confronting the Russian and Chinese revolutions, that of the agrarian question for the peasantry which constituted popular majorities in each of these countries at the time of their revolutions. Amin presented two challenges. The first concerns the manner by which historical capitalism has ‘settled’ the (agrarian) question in favour of minorities comprising the populations of the developed capitalist economies of the centre (about 15 percent of the total world population). Is the reproduction of this model of ‘development’ feasible or achievable for the populations of contemporary Asia, Africa and South America? Amin argued that the agrarian question of the peoples of the South can only be solved by a bold vision of socialism. The second challenge concerns the strategy of stages which Amin proposed as a longer-term process of constructing a socialist alternative for the populations of these three continents. As it must, the new agrarian question is the key issue to be addressed in the processes of building socialism in the twenty-first century.

Issa Shivji

August 2021

Dar es Salaam



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Contemporary Imperialism and the Agrarian Question¹

The Ongoing Attack of Monopoly Capital on Peasants in the South

All societies before modern (capitalist) time were peasant societies. Their production processes were ruled by various specific systems and logics, which nonetheless shared the fact that these were not those which rule capitalism (that is, the maximization of the return on capital in a market society).

Modern capitalist agriculture, represented by both rich family farming and/or by agribusiness corporations, is now looking forward to a massive attack on Third World peasant production. The project did get the green light from the World Trade Organization (WTO) in its Doha session. Yet, the peasantry still occupies half of humankind. Agricultural production is shared between two sectors enormously unequal in size, with a clearly distinct economic and social character and levels of efficiency.

Capitalist agriculture governed by the principle of return on capital, which is localized almost exclusively in North America, Europe, the

1. I am indeed honoured to contribute to the inaugural issue of *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy*. The journal comes at the right moment. Contemporary imperialism is conducting an attack on three billion peasants in the South, which condemns them to the most dramatic pauperization. Obsolete capitalism of generalized monopolies has entered a phase whereby the pursuit of its deployment is synonymous to quasi-genocide. Analyzing these criminal processes with a view to reinforcing the capacity of our societies to develop an effective alternative is now due more than ever.

Southern cone of Latin America and Australia, employs only a few tens of millions of farmers who are no longer 'peasants'. Their productivity, which depends on mechanization, and of which they have monopoly worldwide, ranges between 10,000 and 20,000 quintals of equivalent cereals per worker annually (Mazoyer and Roudart 2007).

On the other hand, peasant farming systems still constitute the occupation of nearly half of humanity, that is, three billion human beings. These farming systems are, in turn, shared between those who benefited from the green revolution (fertilizers, pesticides and selected seeds), but are nevertheless poorly mechanized, with production ranging between 100 and 500 quintals per farmer, and the other group which remains excluded from this revolution, whose production is estimated around 10 quintals per farmer.

The ratio of productivity of the most advanced segment of world agriculture to the poorest, which was around 10:1 before 1940, is now approaching 2000:1 (Mazoyer and Roudart 2007)! This means that productivity has progressed much more unequally in the area of agriculture–food production than in any other area. Simultaneously, this evolution has led to the reduction of relative prices of food products (in relation to other industrial and service products) to one-fifth of what they were fifty years ago.²

2. The data provided for the volumes of production of different categories of agricultural producers, measured in equivalent wheat, are borrowed from Mazoyer and Roudart (2007). The production range per worker/year is very wide, from 1 to 2,000 for the extremes and from 1 to 100 for the compared averages. These indexes are not equal to those measuring the differences in the productivities of social labour needed for the same production. The direct producer, be it the modern agriculturalist in the North or the peasant in the South, utilizes inputs provided by others. The peasant of the South utilizes not only simple tools (the value of which could be eventually neglected) but also seeds, fertilizers and other inputs provided by modern industries. Agriculturalists in the North, not only utilize more of those inputs per cultivated acre, but also make use of heavy equipment (almost all the tractors and other machines utilized are in the

Contd.



The new agrarian question is the result of that unequal development. Indeed, modernization had always combined constructive dimensions (accumulation of capital and the advance of productivity) with destructive aspects (reducing labour to the status of a commodity sold on the market, often destroying the natural ecological basis needed for the reproduction of life and production, polarizing wealth on a global level). Modernization had always simultaneously 'integrated' those for whom employment was created by the very expansion of markets, and 'excluded' those who, having lost their positions in the previous systems, were not integrated in the new labour force. In its ascending phase, capitalist expansion did integrate the world market, alongside the processes of exclusion. But now, with respect to the peasant societies of the Third World, it is massively excluding them, and integrating only insignificant minorities.

The question raised here is precisely whether this trend will continue to operate with respect to the three billion human beings still producing and living in the framework of peasant societies, in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Indeed, what would happen henceforth, should 'agriculture and food production' be treated as any other form of production submitted to the rules of competition in an open-deregulated market, as decided in principle at the Doha conference (November 2001)? Would such principles foster the acceleration of production?

Indeed, one can imagine some 20 million new additional modern farmers producing whatever the three billion present peasants can offer

Contd.

North). The range of productivities of social labour is, therefore, less wide than that which concerns the production per worker/year. But it remains very wide. Mazoyer and Roudart (2007) calculate the relative prices of agricultural products compared to those of other activities, and conclude that the growth in the productivity of agriculture has been quicker than in other activities, since those relative prices have fallen from 5 to 1 during the second half of the twentieth century. The conclusion is correct, even if its measure is controversial. The agriculturalist in the North, even more than the peasant in the South, is integrated in a network of economic relations dominated by oligopolies upstream, which provide the equipment, the inputs and credit, and oligopolies downstream which control the commercialization. Prices diverge from values as a result of the transfer of value produced in agriculture to the benefit of oligopolistic rents.



on the market beyond their own (poor) subsistence. The conditions for the success of such an alternative would necessitate the transfer of important pieces of good land to the new agricultural producers (and these lands have to be taken out of the hands of present peasant societies), access to capital markets (to buy equipment) and access to the consumer markets. Such agriculturalists would indeed 'compete' successfully with the billions of present peasants. But what would happen to these peasants?

Under the circumstances, admitting the general principle of competition for agricultural products and foodstuff, as imposed by the WTO, means accepting that billions of 'non-competitive' producers be eliminated within the short historic time of a few decades. What would become of these billions of human beings, the majority of whom are already the poorest among the poor, but who feed themselves with great difficulty? Worse still, what would be the plight of one-third of this population (since three-quarters of the underfed population of the world are rural dwellers)? In 50 years' time, no relatively competitive industrial development, even in the fanciful hypothesis of a continued growth of 7 per cent annually for three-quarters of humanity, could absorb even one-third of this reserve.

The major argument presented to legitimate the WTO competition doctrine is that such development did happen in nineteenth century Europe, to finally produce a modern, wealthy, urban, industrial and post-industrial society, as well as a modern agriculture able to feed the nation and even to export. Why should this pattern not be repeated in the contemporary Third World, in particular for the emerging nations?

The argument fails to consider two major factors which make the reproduction of the pattern almost impossible now in Third World countries. The first is that the European model developed, throughout a century and a half, along with industrial technologies which were labour intensive. Modern technologies are far less. Therefore, if the newcomers of the Third World have to be competitive on global markets for their industrial exports, they have to adopt labour-saving technologies. The second is that



Europe benefited during that long transition from the possibility of massive outmigration of their ‘surplus’ population to the Americas.

That argument—that is, that capitalism has ‘solved’ the agrarian question in its developed centres—has always been admitted by large sections of the Left, including within historical Marxism, as testified by the famous book of Karl Kautsky on ‘the agrarian question’, written before First World War. Leninism itself inherited that view and on this basis, undertook a modernization of agriculture through the Stalinist collectivization, with doubtful results. What was always overlooked was that capitalism, while it solved the question in its centres, did so by creating a gigantic agrarian question in the peripheries, which it cannot solve but through the genocide of half of humankind. Within historical Marxism, only Maoism understood the size of the challenge. Therefore, those who charge Maoism with a so-called ‘peasant deviation’ show by this very criticism that they do not have the analytical capacity for an understanding of what is actually existing imperialist capitalism, which they reduce to an abstract discourse on capitalism in general.

Modernization through market liberalization, as suggested by the WTO and its supporters, finally aligns two components side by side, without even necessarily combining them: (a) the production of food on a global scale by modern competitive agricultural producers mostly based in the North, but also possibly in the future in some pockets of the South; and (b) the marginalization—exclusion—and further impoverishment of the majority of the three billion peasants of the present Third World, and eventually their seclusion in some kind of ‘reserves’. It therefore combines (a) the dominant pro-modernization—efficiency discourse with (b) a set of policies for ecological—cultural reserves which would make it possible for the victims to ‘survive’. These two components might therefore complement one another rather than ‘conflict’.

Can we imagine other alternatives and have them widely debated? An alternative framework would imply that peasant agriculture should be maintained throughout the visible future of the twenty-first century, but



simultaneously engaged in a process of continuous technological/social change and progress, at a rate which would allow a progressive transfer to non-rural, non-agricultural employment.

Such a strategic set of targets involves complex policy mixes at national, regional and global levels. At the national levels, it implies macro policies protecting peasant food production from the unequal competition of modernized agricultural producers, that is, agribusiness, local and international, with a view to guarantee acceptable internal food prices, eventually disconnected from the so-called international market prices (in fact, also markets biased by subsidies of the wealthy North, the United States, Canada and Europe).

Such policy targets also question the patterns of industrial–urban developments, which should be based less on export-oriented priorities, themselves taking advantage of low wages (implying, in their turn, low prices for food), and be more attentive to a socially balanced internal market expansion. Simultaneously, such a choice of principle facilitates the integration, in the overall scheme patterns, of policies ensuring national food security, an indispensable condition for a country to be an active member of the global community and enjoy the indispensable margin of autonomy and negotiating capacity.

At regional and global levels, it implies international agreements and policies that would move away from the doctrinaire liberal principles of the WTO, which would be imaginative and specific to different areas, since they would have to take into consideration concrete historical and social conditions.

Family Farming in the North and the Peasantry in the South

Peasant agriculture in the countries of the Global South, like its Northern counterpart, is also well integrated into world capitalism.



However, closer study immediately reveals both the convergences and differences in these two types of ‘family’ economy.

Modern family agriculture in Western Europe and the US is highly labour productive. Producing 1,000–2,000 tons of cereal equivalents annually per worker, it has no equal and has enabled less than 5 per cent of the population to supply whole countries abundantly and produce exportable surpluses. Although it may not necessarily be the most productive form of agriculture measured in tons per hectare, modern family farming has an exceptional capacity for absorbing innovations and adapting to both environmental conditions and market demand.

Yet, family agriculture in the Global North is different from industrial agriculture in that it does not share that specific characteristic of capitalist production: industrially organized labour. In the factory, the number of workers enables an advanced division of labour, which is at the origin of the modern leap in productivity. On family farms, labour supply is reduced to one or two individuals (the farming couple), sometimes helped by one, two or three family members, associates or permanent labourers, but also in certain cases, a larger number of seasonal workers (particularly for the harvesting of fruit and vegetables). Generally speaking, there is not a definitively fixed division of labour, the tasks being complex, polyvalent and variable. In this sense, family farming is not capitalist. Nevertheless, modern family agriculture in the Global North is an inseparable, integrated part of the capitalist economy, and its combined productivity and labour efficiency brings tremendous productivity and resiliency to the global agro-food system.

The labour efficiency of the modern family farm is due primarily to its modern equipment, possessing 90 per cent of the tractors and agricultural equipment in use in the world. In the logic of capitalism, the farmer is both a worker and a capitalist, and his/her income should correspond to the sum of their wages for work and profit from ownership of the capital being used. But it is not so. The net income of farmers is



comparable to the average (low) wage earned in industry in the same country. State intervention and regulatory policies in Europe and the US favouring overproduction (followed by subsidies) ensure that profits are collected not by the farmers, but by segments of industrial, financial and commercial capital further up and down the food value chain.

Despite its efficiency, the agricultural family unit is only a subcontractor, caught between upstream and downstream activities: on the one hand, agro-industry (which imposes genetically modified organisms [GMOs] and supplies the equipment and chemical products) and finance (which provides the necessary credits); and on the other, the traders, processors and commercial supermarkets. Self-consumption has become practically irrelevant to the business of family farming, because the family economy depends entirely on its market production. Thus, the logic that commands the production options of the family is no longer the same as that of the agricultural peasants of Third World countries, past or present. Because of their absolute subjugation to market forces, family farmers in the North are victims of the capitalist system of mass production—both as producers and consumers. This reality links them to peasant producers in the Global South and to the growing underclass of consumers of ‘mass food’ worldwide.

The Third World counterparts of Northern family farmers are the peasant cultivators who constitute nearly half of humanity. The types of agriculture here vary, from the unmechanized use of so-called green revolution products (fertilizers, pesticides and hybrid seeds), which has helped production to rise to 100–500 quintals per labourer, to those caught in the negative spiral of ‘involution’, ushered in by the green revolution, whose production has dropped to around 10 quintals per labourer and continues to fall, despite costly increases in inputs. Another growing category of productive peasant farmers are the ‘agro-ecological’ producers managing farm and watershed-scale ecosystem functions to maintain productivity, resilience and lower production costs, and whose productivity—when measured in kilogrammes per hectare—rivals both industrial and family farming. Nonetheless, the gap between the



average production of a farmer in the North and that of southern peasant agriculture, which was 10:1 before 1940, is now 100:1. In other words, the rate of progress in agricultural productivity has largely outstripped that of other activities, which, when combined with global overproduction, results in a drop in real price from five to one.

There are huge differences, which are visible and undeniable. They include: the importance of subsistence food for survival in the peasant economies; the low labour efficiency of this non-mechanized agriculture; the impossibly small land parcels and their systematic dispossession and destruction by urbanization, agrofuels and industrial agriculture; vast poverty (three-quarters of the victims of global undernourishment are rural); and the sheer immensity of the agrarian problem (the peasantry is not a tiny sector of a larger, industrialized society, but makes up nearly half of humanity).

In spite of these differences, peasant agriculture in the Global South is part of the dominant global capitalist system. Peasants often depend on purchased inputs and are increasingly preyed upon by the oligopolies that sell them. Furthermore, these farmers feed nearly half of the world's population (including themselves). For green revolution farmers (approximately half of the peasantry of the South), the siphoning off of profits by dominant capital is severe, keeping them desperately poor (as evidenced, for example, by the epidemic of bankruptcies and farmer suicides in India). The other half of the peasantry in the South, despite the weakness of its production, has a combined annual income of US\$ 2.3 trillion and is growing at a rate of 8 per cent a year (and is therefore seen as a US\$ 1.3 trillion per year potential market) (Mazoyer and Roudart 2007).

The Imperialist Aggression on Peasant and Family Food Systems

In response to the global food crisis, the corporate food regime—made up of Northern governments, multilateral institutions, agro-food oligopolies and big philanthropy capital—propose using public tax



revenues to modernize areas in the Global South of high agricultural potential (that is, 'breadbasket' regions with good land and access to irrigation) to integrate them into global markets. This, we are invited to believe, will eradicate rural poverty and lead to national economic development for poor countries in the Third World, thus bringing an end to world hunger.

This strategy is supported by the 'absolute and superior rationale' of economic management based on the private and exclusive ownership of the means of production. According to conventional economics, the unregulated market (that is, the transferability of ownership of capital, land and labour) determines the optimal use of these factors of production. According to this principle, land and labour become merchandize, and like any other commodity, is transferable at market prices in order to guarantee its best use for its owner and society as a whole. This is nothing but mere tautology, yet it is that on which all acritical economic discourse is based.

The global system of private landownership required for the free movement (and concentration) of capital is justified in social terms with the argument that private property alone guarantees that the farmer will not suddenly be dispossessed of the fruit of his or her labour. Obviously, for most of the world's farmers, this is not the case. Other forms of land use can ensure that farmers (as well as workers and consumers) benefit equitably from production, but the private property discourse uses the conclusions that it sees fit in order to propose them as the only possible 'rules' for the advancement of all people. To subjugate land, labour and consumption everywhere to private property, as currently practised in capitalist centres, is to spread the policy of monopoly 'enclosures' the world over, to hasten the dispossession of peasants and to ensure the food insecurity of vast poor communities.

This course of action is not new; it began during the global expansion of capitalism in the context of colonial systems. What current dominant discourse understands by 'reform of the land tenure system' and 'new



investments in agriculture' is quite the opposite of what the construction of a real alternative based on a prosperous peasant economy requires. This discourse, promoted by the propaganda instruments of collective imperialism (the World Bank, numerous cooperation agencies) and also a growing number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with financial backing from governments and philanthropy capital, understands land reform to mean the acceleration of the privatization of land, and nothing more. The aim is clear: to create the conditions that would allow modern islands of agribusiness to take possession of the land they need in order to expand.

But is the North's capitalist modernization of Southern agricultures really desirable? Is it even possible? Capitalism, by its nature, cannot solve the global hunger crisis, because it cannot resolve the historical agrarian question of how to mobilize the surplus from peasant agriculture to industry without eliminating that same peasantry from agriculture. Although capitalism did accomplish this transition for the industrial societies of the Global North, this proposition does not hold true for the 85 per cent of the world's population in the Global South. Capitalist modernization has now reached a stage where its continued expansion requires the implementation of enclosure policies on a world scale similar to those at the beginning of capitalist development in England, except that today, the destruction on a world scale of the 'peasant reserves' of cheap labour will be nothing less than synonymous with genocide: on one hand, the destruction of the peasant societies of Asia, Africa and Latin America; and on the other, billions in windfall profits for global capital, derived from a socially useless production unable to cover the needs of billions of hungry people in the South, even as it increases the number of sick and obese people in the North.

We have reached the point that, to open up a new area for capital expansion, it would be necessary to destroy entire societies. Imagine 50 million new 'efficient' modern farms (200 million human beings with their families) on the one hand, and two billion excluded people on the other. The profitable aspect of this capitalist transition would be a



pitiful drop of water in a vast ocean of destruction. The effect of increased outmigration from the countryside will shift capital's social misery to new and existing urban communities of poor and underserved 'surplus people'. The breakdown of the global food system reflects the fact that, despite its neoliberal bravado, capitalism has entered into its phase of senility, because the logic of the system is no longer able to ensure the simple survival of humanity. Capitalism's continued expansion into Southern agricultures will result in a planet full of hungry slums. Once a creative force sweeping away the bonds of feudalism, capitalism has now become barbaric, leading directly to genocide. It is necessary to replace it—now more than ever before—by other development logics, which would be more rational and humane.

No Alternative to Food Sovereignty

Resistance by peasants, small family farmers and the poor consumers most affected by the dysfunctional global food system is essential in order to build a real and genuinely human alternative. We must ensure the functionality and resilience of family and peasant agriculture for the visible future of the twenty-first century, quite simply because they allow us to resolve the agrarian question underlying world hunger and poverty. Peasant, family and improved, agro-ecological agriculture—along with a new relation with consumers and labour—are essential to overcome the destructive logic of capitalism.

I personally believe this operation will entail a long, secular transition to socialism. The initial weight of this transition will be primarily in the South, but will also need to address both rural and urban food systems in the North. We need to work out regulatory policies for new relationships between the market and family agriculture, between producers and consumers, between the North and South, and between the rural and the urban.

This is a historically large, multifaceted task that must address the structural rules governing capitalist food systems. To begin, the agenda



of the WTO and its attendant global market model must quite simply be refused. At the national, regional and sub-regional levels, regulations adapted to local food systems must protect national, smallholder production and ensure food sovereignty—in other words, the delinking of internal food prices and the rents of the food value chain from those of the so-called world market.

A gradual increase in the productivity of peasant agriculture based on different combinations of agro-ecological and input-mediated strategies will doubtless be slow but continuous, and would make it possible to control the exodus of the rural populations to the towns (in the North and South), as well as provide opportunities to construct mutually beneficial autonomous food systems in underserved communities with regards to local economies, food supply and diet. At the level of what is called the world market, the desirable regulation can probably be done through inter-regional and rural–urban agreements that meet the requirements of a kind of sustainable development that integrates people rather than excludes them.

Currently, food consumption worldwide is already realized by local production, through competition for 85 per cent of it. Nevertheless, this production corresponds to very different levels of satisfaction of food needs: generally good for North America and West and Central Europe; acceptable in China; mediocre for the rest of Asia and Latin America; and disastrous for Africa. The US and Europe have understood the importance of national food sovereignty very well, and have successfully implemented it by systematic economic policies. But, apparently, what is good for them is not good for the others! The World Bank, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the European Union aim to impose an alternative, which is ‘food security’; in fact, a prescription which is similar to that applied by national governments of the Global North to their own slums, where the food security of low-income communities is achieved through the industrial production of low-quality ‘mass food’.



Accordingly, Third World countries do not need food sovereignty and should rely on industrial agriculture, mass food and international trade to cover the deficit—however large—in their food requirements. This may seem easy for those countries which are large exporters of natural resources like oil or uranium, or to affluent consumers who can afford to eat outside the circuits of mass consumption. For the others, the advice of the Western powers is maximum specialization of agricultural commodities for export, such as cotton, tropical drinks, oils and increasingly, agrofuels. The defenders of ‘food security’ for others—not for themselves—do not consider the fact that this specialization, which has been practised since colonization, has not improved the miserable food rations of the peoples concerned and has resulted in a global epidemic of diet-related diseases.

On top of this, the economic crisis initiated by the financial collapse of 2008 is already aggravating the situation and will continue to do so. It is sad to note how, at the very moment when the crisis illustrates the failure of so-called food security policies, the partners of the OECD cling to them. It is not that government leaders do not ‘understand’ the problem. This would be to deny them the intelligence that they certainly possess. But we cannot dismiss the hypothesis that ‘food insecurity’ is a consciously adopted objective, and that food is being used as a weapon. Without food sovereignty, no political sovereignty is possible. Without food sovereignty, no sustainable food security or food justice—national or local—is possible.

While there is no alternative to food sovereignty, its efficient implementation does, in fact, require a commitment to the construction of deeply diversified economies in terms of production, processing, manufacturing and distribution.

New peasant organizations exist in Asia, Africa and Latin America that support the current visible struggles. In Europe and the US, farmer, worker and consumer organizations are forming alliances for more equitable and sustainable food systems. Often, when political systems make it impossible for formal organizations to form (or to have any



significant impact), social struggles take the form of ‘movements’ with no apparent direction. Where they do exist, these actions and programmes must be more closely examined. What social forces do they represent? whose interests do they defend? How do they struggle to find their place under the expansion of dominant global capitalism?

We should be wary of hasty replies to these complex and difficult questions. We should not condemn or dismiss many organizations and movements under the pretext that they do not have the support of the majority of peasants or consumers for their radical programmes. That would be to ignore the formation of large alliances and strategies in stages. Neither should we subscribe to the discourse of ‘naive alterglobalism’ that often sets the tone of forums and which fuels the illusion that the world would be set on the right track only by the work of disperse social movements.

The Struggle for an Alternative

Whether it is growing pauperization, growing inequality, growing unemployment or growing precariousness, it is only normal that people would start resisting, protesting and organizing around the world. People are struggling for rights, for justice. Social movements are, by and large, still on the defensive, facing the offensive of capital to dismantle whatever they had conquered in the previous decades, trying to maintain whatever could be maintained. But even if perfectly legitimate social movements of protest are growing everywhere, they remain extremely fragmented. What is needed is to move beyond fragmentation and beyond a defensive position into building a wide progressive alliance emboldened with the force of a positive alternative.

The balance of forces cannot be changed unless those fragmented movements—such as the movements for food sovereignty, food justice and food democracy—forge a common platform based on some common grounds. I call this ‘convergence with diversity’, that is, recognizing the diversity, not only of movements which are fragmented, but of political



forces which are operating with them, of ideologies and even of visions of the future proposed by such political forces. This has to be accepted and respected. We are not in a situation where a leading party alone can create a common front. It is very difficult to build convergence in diversity, but unless this is achieved, I do not think the balance of forces will shift in favour of the popular classes.

There is no blueprint for convergence in diversity. Forms of organization and action are always invented by the people in struggle—not preconceived by some intellectuals, to then be put into practice by people. If we look at the previous long crisis of capitalism in the twentieth century, people invented efficient ways of organizing and of acting that worked well at the time: for example, the trade unions, political parties and wars of national liberation, all produced gigantic progressive change in the history of humankind. But they have all run out of steam because the system has itself changed and moved into a new phase. And now, as Antonio Gramsci said, the first wave has come to an end. The second wave of action to change the system is just starting. The night has not yet completely disappeared; the day has not yet completely appeared and in this crisis, there are still a lot of monsters who appear in the shadows... To move from that fragmented and defensive position into some kind of unity and to build convergence with respect for diversity with strategic targets requires the *re-politicization* of social movements. Social movements have chosen to be depoliticized because the old politics—the politics of the first wave—has come to an end. It is now up to the social movements to create new forms of politicisation.

It is the responsibility, first, of activists in the grassroots movements to see that, however legitimate their action, its efficiency is limited by the fact that it does not move beyond a fragmented struggle. But it is also the responsibility of the intellectuals. Not the academics, but those thinkers and others operating in politics, who must realize that there is no possibility of changing the balance of power without joining the struggles being carried forward by the social movements—not to dominate them



or seek their own fame, but to integrate the activity of grassroots social movements into their political thinking and strategies of change.

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Chapter 2

To the Memory of Sam Moyo

Introduction

The brutal disappearance of Sam Moyo has left us without a voice. Sam was a very dear personal friend. Sam was one of the key founders of the activities we developed within the Third World Forum (TWF) and the World Forum for Alternatives (WFA) over the past 10 years. From our first meeting, it was clear that beyond his qualities as a cultivated and intelligent scientific researcher, he was also a courageous and determined activist who pursued the cause of peoples and nations—his own (Zimbabwe), of Africa and of the Global South—with conviction. With every passing day, our collaboration brought us closer.

Sam's major works addressed the agrarian question. Sam had understood that the deployment of imperialist strategies could produce nothing other than the savage and tragic destruction of the rural sphere and the decimation of peasants in Africa and Asia.

Drawing on his own country's experiences, where millions of peasants were expropriated from the land of their ancestors to make way for a few thousand colonists, Sam had rigorously examined the systematic application of such criminal policies. He had grasped the dramatic realities of the situation and placed himself firmly in support of the agrarian reform programme undertaken by President Mugabe. In spite of its limitations—which Sam also measured—he denounced the hypocrisy displayed by the United Kingdom in its refusal to honour its engagements in this area.

Sam did not content himself with analyzing reality and denouncing its tragic nature. He made major contributions to the formulation of humane alternatives to these challenges—elaborating options for sovereign, genuine, national and people-orientated development projects—which would have the capacity to promote real democracy within the context of reinvigorated peasant production and renewal in the countryside. He could locate the struggle for the pursuit of such alternatives in his own national political context, as well as in the broader international situation. He knew that this struggle was inseparable from popular struggles against contemporary forms of imperialism. He had the courage to analyze its manifestations and its outcomes and to use the conclusions he drew from this work to confront the tenuous debates advanced by the proponents of so-called ‘neoliberalism’.

Sam had become a pillar of our discussion circles dedicated to addressing the agrarian question in Africa and in the Global South. In this respect, he was a central figure in organizing highly successful roundtable discussions—notably for our interventions at the African and World Social Forums. These enabled thousands of experts from the three continents in which popular and peasant social struggles were taking place to come together to examine the peculiarities and similarities of their experiences and to gain a better understanding of their collective struggles for the social and political emancipation of each respective nation.

Sam was the Vice President of the WFA (for the Southern African region). He was the Executive Director of the African Institute for Agrarian Studies, an important institution which was one of the most active members of the ‘network of networks’ which constitutes the TWF and the WFA.

The prolific works authored by Sam and his colleagues were featured in major publications. Two such collective works which appeared only months before Sam’s tragic death—*The Struggle for Food Sovereignty: Alternative Development and the Renewal of Peasant Society Today*, edited by Remy Herrera and Kin Chi Lau (London: World Forum for



Alternatives and Pluto Press, 2015) and *Réponses radicales aux crises agraires et rurales africaines*, edited by Bernard Founou-Tchuigoua and Abdourahmane Ndiaye (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2014)—embody his powerful contribution to the debates. One of the authors of the latter title, our friend Issaka Bagayogo, also passed away in 2015. The texts produced by Sam are, and will remain, central to all those engaged in the struggles for Africa and its peasants.

Historically, the development of capitalism in Europe, the United States and in Japan reduced the active population engaged in agriculture to 5 per cent in each of its regions, without compromising the capacity of the new capitalist modernized agriculture to meet demands for expanded food production. Why then should it not be possible for the countries of the periphery to be set on an accelerated course down this same path—even if somewhat belatedly? This proposition is unsustainable because it ignores the specific conditions which allowed the West to prosper and which, in themselves, preclude their own reproduction elsewhere. Its success, for instance, was only made possible because the industries established at the time, during the nineteenth century, were able to absorb a large proportion of rural populations expelled from the countryside. In addition, surplus populations had the option of mass migration to the Americas (considering that the European population made up 15 per cent of the world's population in the 1500s and that combined with the European descendants in America, it made up 36 per cent of the population in 1900, emigration abroad allowed for the development of a 'second Europe'). In the contemporary situation, the demands that industries in the peripheries should be 'competitive' on world markets justify the use of modern technologies which reduce the level of labour-intensive work. At the same time, there are no new Americas to open for mass migrations from Asia or Africa. In such conditions, the pursuit of a model based on historical capitalism produces nothing other than migration from devastated countrysides to squalid urban slums.

The conclusion that emerges from these facts is that another trajectory of development is required for today's periphery. It is necessary to



imagine and to articulate a new model of industrialization shaped by the renewal of non-capitalist forms of peasant agriculture, which in turn implies delinking from the imperatives of globalized capitalism.

Firmly anchored in this perspective, Sam Moyo's works provide us not only with the best analyses of rural disaster in Africa but also with the frameworks for an alternative. I need say no more—Sam's work speaks for itself and the analysis here converges with his contributions to the publications cited above.

In this context, I will elaborate on a few reflections concerning other dimensions of the challenges which have been at the centre of debates between myself, Sam and others, during our frequent meetings (Amin, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2015a).

What Is the 'Emergence' of States and Nations?

This term is and has frequently been employed to characterize radically different contexts, often without specifying which particular meaning is implied or attributed to it. I take this opportunity to specify the meaning I would attribute to the collective processes of economic, social, political and cultural transformations which make it possible to speak of the 'emergence' of a state, a nation or a people which have been placed in a peripheral position (in the sense I have personally attributed to this term) at the heart of the globalized capitalist system.

Emergence is not measured by high levels of GDP growth rates (nor exports) over a long period (exceeding a decade), nor, in fact, by society having achieved a high level of GDP per capita, as the World Bank would have it. Rather, emergence implies sustained growth of industrial production in the country concerned and an increase in the capacity of local industry to be competitive on a global scale. It is, however, still necessary to specify the relevant industries and to define what is meant by competitiveness.



Extractive industries (minerals and fuels) must be excluded from the analysis, since they alone can generate accelerated growth without making any significant change to the overall productive capacity of the country in question. An extreme example of such ‘non-emerging’ countries is that of the Gulf States, Gabon and others. The competitiveness of productive activities must also be considered as part of the economy’s production system as a whole and not by measuring the performance of a number of units of production on their own.

Through the relocation of production, or subcontracting, multinationals operating in countries of the South can establish local production units (either as branches of multinationals or as independent productive units) capable of exporting to external markets. In the language of conventional economics, this qualifies them as competitive. This truncated concept of competitiveness—which proceeds from an empiricist methodology of the first order—does not correspond to our way of seeing things.

Competitiveness relates to the productive system as a whole. A productive system should exist—which is to say that the economy under analysis should be made up of productive establishments and branches which are sufficiently interdependent to justify the term ‘system’. The competitiveness of this system then depends on various economic and social factors, amongst them, the general level of education and of technical training of workers across sectors, as well as the efficiency of institutions responsible for executing national policies (fiscal, the regulatory environment for business, employment, credit, public services, etc.).

Nor is a country’s productive system reducible to the industries dealing with transformative processes for manufactured goods destined to either production or consumption (although their absence makes it impossible to consider the existence of a productive system worthy of its name). Rather, it integrates food and agricultural production as essential services for the normal operation of the system.



The concept of emergence implies an approach which is both political and holistic. A country can be considered to be emergent only to the extent that the logic of those in power prioritizes the construction of a strong nationally focused economy (albeit open towards the exterior) and its national economic sovereignty. This complex objective implies the affirmation of sovereignty in all aspects of economic life. Notably, it implies policies that promote the consolidation of food sovereignty, and sovereignty in the control of its own natural resources, as well as access to this outside of its own territory. These multiple and complementary objectives stand in stark contrast with those of a comprador political authority which contents itself with subjugating the country's growth model to the demands of the dominant liberalized global system and to the possibilities it offers.

The relationship between policies concerned with a country's emergence, on the one hand, and the social transformations which accompany them, on the other, do not depend exclusively on the internal coherence of such policies. Instead, they depend on the degree of complementarity to (or contradiction with) the social transformations they engender.

Social struggles—class struggles and political conflicts—do not 'adjust' themselves to the outcomes produced by the logics underlying the deployment of projects ostensibly aimed at a state's emergence. On the contrary, they are shaped by these outcomes. Experiences from such transformations currently under way illustrate the diversity and fluctuations in the relationships between policy logics, policy outcomes and social transformations: 'emergence' is often accompanied by increased inequality.

It is necessary to specify the exact nature of these inequalities, namely, inequalities which benefit a small minority or a strong minority (such as the middle classes) and which occur in a framework that brings about the pauperization of the working-class majorities; or on the contrary,



if it does bring about an improvement in the conditions of the working class, this framework nonetheless fails to bring about increases in rates of remuneration of labour which are commensurate to the level of increases in income accruing to the system's beneficiaries. In other words, the implementation of policies aimed at a state's emergence is capable of bringing about pauperization, with or without emergence. Emergence does not constitute a definitive or immovable condition for a state; it occurs in successive stages, the earlier stages successfully laying the groundwork for what follows, or conversely, moving towards deadlock. Similarly, the relations between the emerging economy and the globalized economy are themselves in a state of continuous transformation and are influenced by changing rationales and perspectives. They may favour the consolidation of sovereignty, or promote its weakening, and they may support the consolidation of national social solidarity, or promote its weakening. Measured in this manner, we can see that emergence is neither synonymous with export growth nor with economic consolidation for the country concerned. Growth in exports occurs at the expense of domestic/internal markets (specifically, popular, middle class), and can, in fact, become an obstacle to national economic consolidation. Growth in exports can weaken or reinforce the relative autonomy of emerging economies in their relationships to the world system.

Thus, emergence is a political project, not simply an economic one. The measure of its success relates to its capacity to reduce the means through which the currently existing dominant capitalist centres reproduce their domination, despite the success achieved by emerging countries measured in conventional economic terms. I define these means in terms of the control exerted by the dominant powers over technological development, natural resources, the globalized financial and monetary system, information systems and arsenals of weapons of mass destruction. I subscribe to the thesis concerning the existence of a collective form of imperialism exercised by the Triad (United States, Europe and Japan) whose aim is to maintain, at all cost, its privileged position of domination over the entire planet and to preclude any questioning of this order by



emerging countries. I have concluded from this that the ambitions of emerging countries are in conflict with the strategic objectives of this imperialist Triad. The levels of this conflict are themselves determined by the degree of radicalization with which attempts to question the dominant order are pursued by individual countries (and by their place in the present ordering of the system), on the one hand, and the status of individual countries in the present economic order on the other hand, considering that the economy of emerging countries is inseparable from their foreign policies. Are they aligned to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) political and military complex? Do they accept NATO strategies? Or do they attempt to resist them?

There can be no emergence without the policy of a state, which derives its legitimacy from a progressive relationship with society. Such a state should possess the capacity to coherently construct and implement a project of production geared primarily to serve national requirements. Its effectiveness is also complemented by policies to ensure that the majority of popular classes are also able to benefit from growth.

At the opposite end of the scale from the positive evolution of a project geared towards genuine emergence of the type described above, there stand states which unilaterally submit to the imperatives of globalized capitalist deployment through generalized monopolies which produces 'lumpen development'. I borrow this term freely from Andre Gunder Frank who used it to analyze similar changes under other conditions. Today, lumpen development is produced by accelerated social disintegration associated with the model of 'development' (which is not in fact worthy of its name), imposed by monopolies in the imperialist centres on the societies of the periphery which they dominate. It manifests itself by the dizzying growth of survival strategies (the so-called informal sphere), or, in other words, pauperization, which is inherent in the unilateral logics of capital accumulation.



Amongst the experiences of emergence, certain instances appear fully to deserve the qualification because they are not associated with the process of lumpen development; there is no occurrence of pauperization of the popular classes, but on the contrary, there occurs progress in their conditions of life. Two of these experiences are visibly and entirely capitalist—those of Korea and Taiwan (I will not, here, discuss the particular historical conditions which enabled the deployment of this project to succeed in both countries). Two others inherited their aspirations to revolutions in the name of socialism—China and Vietnam. Cuba could join this group if it succeeds in managing the contradictions it is currently experiencing. But we know other cases of emergence associated with the deployment of a process of lumpen development on a massive scale. India is perhaps the best example in this category as its reality displays characteristics which correspond with the conditions for ‘emergence’. State policy promotes the consolidation of a strong system of industrial production associated with a significant expansion of the middle classes. There is also significant development of technological and educational capacities and an autonomous foreign policy approach capable of standing independently on the world stage. But there is simultaneously a great majority—two-thirds of society—trapped in accelerated pauperization. This is a hybrid system that simultaneously connects ‘emergence’ and lumpen development. It is even possible to highlight the complementarity of relations between these two faces of reality. I believe, without suggesting an abusive generalization, that all other country cases considered as emergent actually belongs to this hybrid family, be they Brazil, South Africa or others.

But there are also many countries of the South in which elements of ‘emergence’ do not appear at all. In such countries, the processes of lumpen development, virtually on their own, characterize almost the entire developmental process. African countries in a general manner can be organized into this unfortunate category.



The Question of Emergence under Contemporary Conditions in Sub-Saharan Africa

Flattering accolades have been delivered by the World Bank over the past few years to African economies: ‘Africa Emerging’ and ‘Africa: Continent of the Future’. The objective, however, has certainly not been to support the establishment of sovereign African projects. Quite the opposite; by purporting to set African countries on the path of emergence, the objective has been to lock the continent’s economies into the dead-end path of neoliberalism, which is in fact likely to preclude any likelihood of emergence. The type of ‘emergence’ conceived by the World Bank and its cohorts (notably the European Union) never speaks of the continent’s industrialization, which is considered to be contrary to ‘Africa’s vocation’ (with all its racist implications). Papers published by US politicians and journalists on this point are highly instructive. The shining future of Africa rests on its abundant natural resources, oil, minerals, agricultural land, sun and water. Future advancement is simply a matter of paving the way for the entrance of Western multinationals to pillage these resources, nothing more.

At a general level, independent Africa has not broken with the modes of its insertion into the world system shaped under colonization. The term ‘neo-colonial’, previously in vogue among left-wing national liberation movements, was entirely justified. I personally found such a qualification ‘moderate’; in my estimation, the reality would be better described as ‘paleo-colonial’ in view of structural adjustment plans which were imposed from the 1980s. Since then, all governments on the continent have—in spite of themselves—accepted the dictates of this form of globalization. Worse still, popular resistance movements do not appear to be conscious of the fact that economic neo-liberalization lies at the root of the problem.



Viewed from this perspective, the situation can be considered desperate. In my opinion, it is, in fact, less so than it appears. The history of the past 50 years shows that people, and to a certain degree even African states, have never considered their submission as necessarily being final. Attempts to exit the neo-colonial impasse through projects of national and popular sovereignty have been rapidly increasing throughout the continent; the substantive analysis of these is, in fact, the subject of my book entitled *L'Éveil du Sud* [Awakening of the South] (Paris: Le Temps des Cerises, 2008).

I recently reread what I wrote at the end of the first decade of independence: *Trois expériences africaines: le Mali, le Ghana, Guinée* (1965), *Le développement du capitalisme en Côte d'Ivoire* (1967) and *L'Histoire économique du Congo* (1969). My conclusions could appear pessimistic; but history has—in the interim—confirmed my predictions, that is, my thesis of ‘miracles without a future’, such as the one in the Ivory Coast (to which the World Bank saw fit to respond with a report ‘proving’ that in 1985 Ivory Coast would have overtaken South Korea— which is utterly laughable). My rigorous examination of attempts at emergence, highlighting their original conceptual and practical weaknesses, has also been confirmed by subsequent developments. Advances have always been followed by predictable regressions (reference here to *L'Éveil du Sud*). The general thesis that I formulated in *L'Afrique de l'Ouest bloquée* always appears to me as essential to understand Africa's history over the past 60 years. The potential of the colonial model of development was already redundant well before political independence had been achieved by the peoples of the African continent. Colonies that had been ‘valorized’ (the term ‘valorized’, which was utilized by the colonial powers themselves is, in fact, more accurate than the term ‘developed’) before others, such as Senegal, Gold Coast (now Ghana), Dahomey (now Benin) or Togo, became suffocated and trapped in an impasse. These offered an instructive picture of the fate awaiting the new arrivals to this model of ‘development’ (Ivory Coast, Kenya and Malawi), which in their turn were to become trapped in the same impasse.



The diagnosis I make today of the causes underlying the impasses to development in Africa would not be different from the assessment I made 40 years ago in *L'Afrique de l'Ouest bloquée* (which is also why I also subtitled this book 'the political economy of colonization, 1880–1970'). Africa has persisted on this path beyond 1970, to this day, in spite of the somersaults associated with attempts to extricate itself from this rut. This discouraging observation is a sorry reminder that Africa has lost 60 years as a result of following the advice of the World Bank and Europe.

So is there no hope? Is Africa condemned forever? Such an idea is not only unthinkable to me, as it is to all Africans; it actually also appears quite baseless, both theoretically and empirically. Certainly, evidence abounds of the dramatic involutions and total disintegration of societies and states which have resulted from the crisis of the exhausted/redundant colonial and post-colonial model: the spread of criminal delusions carried by politically reactionary forms of Islam in the Sahel countries (Mali, Niger and Chad)—launching from new bases created by the planned disintegration of Libya (now bases for Qaïda and Daesh)—Boko Haram in Nigeria, the Shebabs in Somalia and others; ethnic wars without end (Congo, Rwanda and Central African Republic) and similar threats elsewhere.

These involutions are not only the predictable outcomes of the senseless pursuit of neoliberal policies, often supported by the poison of 'aid' (see the analysis of Tandon [2008]). They are also openly or surreptitiously supported by political strategies deployed regionally by the United States and Europe. The Sahelistan project pursued by the Islamists from the area needs to be analyzed from the perspective I have elaborated here. The realization of the Saharo-Sahelian project, similar to that of Daesh in the Middle East, would be extremely useful in the systematic pillaging of the region's natural resources for the greatest benefit of imperialist monopolies. This is a model inspired and embodied by Saudi Arabia, which, as we know, represents an endless source of unconditional supply of oil for the West to squander, and for this reason of course, it is also a favoured ally of the West. Predictably, terrorist abuses are of little



consequence in the face of the benefits to be gained from the West from this system (Amin 2013b).

But this saddening image is only half the real story. The proliferation of organized and unorganized social movements engaged in social and political struggles which unequivocally formulate legitimate demands (sometimes fragmented and at other times coherent and lucid) bears testimony to a real potential or the radicalization of progressive visions of the future. New initiatives could equally be undertaken by governments on the continent—these should not be dismissed lightly because of their timid ambitions or the ambiguities of their initial formulations. Associated with this is the opening of new paths for international co-operation with China and other countries of the South, to the practice of a more democratic tolerance of popular movements. These initiatives must be supported. The African peoples concerned have the right and duty to discuss such initiatives freely with their governments. It is also incumbent on popular movements to propose alternatives to enable the effective participation of the popular classes in the formulation and implementation of projects aiming to contribute to their development.

I need say no more. The concrete formulation of sovereign projects and of the objectives driving their initial phases makes sense only if they are serious, realistic and adapted to local conditions and the actual options open to the states and peoples concerned. One can do little more here than formulate broad strokes of the objectives which would characterize desirable forms of emergence, standing on one's own two feet, in other words, engaging a process of industrialization, on the one hand, and promoting the renewal of family-based peasant agriculture on the other; opening up to new partners in the Global South (China and others) and to the best options that regional co-operation can offer; connecting advances in national sovereignty to policies promoting genuine social progress for the popular classes; and opening new channels to the democratization of politics and society. 'Experts' from the World Bank and the European Union are poorly equipped to contribute to such formulations. In the first



instance, the task of defining appropriate paths towards these objectives has to be taken up by the best intellectual minds and militants from the national sphere—and later extended to encompass voices from the Global South whose knowledge and experiences can usefully contribute to the debates.

The End of the Debate About Emergence?

The term ‘emergent’ was put into common usage by the World Bank a few years ago. It has been used by the historical powers of imperialism (the United States and its junior allies in Europe and Japan) as their Ministry of Propaganda. Orchestrating successive campaigns of ideological intoxication to give an appearance of legitimacy to the deployment of their strategies for globalized and financialized monopolies (the ‘great’ multinationals), it has allowed the United States, Europe and Japan to assume the control over these processes. By imposing a ‘fashion’ of always using the same name to designate—and hide—the same thing, in successive discourses (which always fail to deliver on their promises), the term ‘emergent’ has become meaningless.

The World Bank’s response has been to launch the idea of ‘emerging markets’, where the choice of the word ‘markets’ is far from neutral. For the past four decades (since 1975, to be precise), growth levels amongst the imperialist Triad have collapsed. In other words, the expansion of markets in these economies has only slowed down. To acknowledge this would be to accept that the long and profound crisis affecting these economies risks raising questions about the capitalist system’s ability to meet the simple popular expectations for an improvement in the living conditions of the majority. The World Bank has drawn attention to the fact that outside of the Triad (the ‘old countries’), growth rates have been acceptable and, in some cases, exceptionally high (as in China). The expansion of markets equals GDP growth—at least according to the simplistic economic dogmas which feed World Bank thinking (or



rather, non-thinking). According to this logic, the world system is not in crisis, only the 'old countries' are momentarily affected. The presence of 'emerging markets' provides opportunities to extract profits, in the first place, for 'old country' multinationals.

'Stages of growth', 'emerging markets', all originate in the same overly simplistic economic para-theory, which neither can nor wants to distinguish between concepts synonymous with growth and market expansion, on the one hand, and the concept of progressive development of society, on the other. Thinking in terms of development of society necessarily implies the articulation of a holistic and coherent theory of growth (measured by GDP, for want of a better indicator), of social progress, of the affirmation of national autonomy in its relation with others and of the transformation of its modes of governance over political power. The commonly used term 'development' itself is only meaningful if it produces an improvement in the living conditions of all, irrespective of class or social strata, or other distinctions (i.e., between men and women, nationals and immigrants, youth and adults, etc.). Growth which benefits only a minority, or even a majority whilst still excluding a significant number of the underprivileged, is not development. One can even be more demanding and consider that the improvement in the general conditions affecting all people is only valid if it actually aspires to the reduction of inequalities.

The analysis must also go beyond the purely economic aspect of the problem. The world is made up of nations and states, and is likely to continue on this foundation for a long time to come. It is, therefore, essential for development to enable 'emergent' nations (and not markets) to establish themselves in a way which allows them to grow stronger within the world system of nations and states. This will permit them to take an active role in shaping the operation of globalization; putting an end to the differentiation which opposes active states and shapes the world in which condemned states are compelled to adjust unilaterally, asymmetrically and passively.



Going further still, one can demand that material development (of productive capacity) should constitute the foundation stone of political progress, defined as active and increasingly decisive participation of people, particularly the majoritarian popular classes, in the decision-making processes at every level of social and political life. A good definition of democracy suggests a continuous process, probably endless. Defining the concept of development in this way clearly calls for intellectual, political and ideological debates of major proportions, which in any case move away from the false discourses of 'growth', as advanced by conventional economists. It is in this context too that Marxist thought and the historical writings which inspired its elaboration in the area of global transformation need to be relocated. This is equally true of other thoughts/actions which have animated the workers' struggles in the West (such as historical social democracy), or those which have provided the building blocks for national liberation struggles in countries of Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. Sam's remarkable work inscribes itself firmly in this defence of an innovative vision of an alternative for the countries of the South.

The World Bank not only evades the questions of the emergence of nations and their ambitions to become active protagonists in the world but also considers the questions of social justice which are of concern to the popular classes but damaging to the project of 'growth'. The consolidation of political power and the achievement of social advancement and autonomy of emergent nations undoubtedly constitute obstacles to the dominance of the Triad's multinationals and would, in this sense, certainly be 'damaging' to the World Bank's real objectives.

The World Bank is only interested in the expansion of 'solvent' markets. Its concept of 'development' congratulates itself on the development of a class system and the accession of the middle classes in the contemporary South, even if this comes at the expense and pauperization of the majority of the popular classes. Compelled to acknowledge the pauperization which occurs, the Bank contents itself with proposing 'plans for poverty



reduction' which disregard the actual causes of poverty in the neoliberal policies it imposes.

A good example illustrating this contradiction is found in the neoliberal support of policies aiming at the systematic destruction of peasant agriculture in the South. These policies work for the benefit of international agribusiness and result in the consolidation of a minority of rich farmers and large landowners. These policies indisputably lead to the accelerated pauperization of hundreds of millions of peasants. On this topic, I refer the reader back to what I have written on the subject, with a few others, first amongst whom was Sam Moyo.

The underlying objective of the neoliberal project is to exploit the opportunity inherent in the expansion of markets in the South to reengage the process of accumulation in the historical centres of imperialism—in other words, the emergence of markets through the submersion of peoples and nations.

The emergence of nations is another question altogether, which has little to do with the emergence of World Bank-style markets. The global expansion of capitalism has always been, and remains, polarizing and imperialist in nature. The peoples and nations compelled to submit to the demands of accelerated capital accumulation imposed by the centres of the system have been quick to react. They have attempted to participate as independent partners in shaping this part of modern history, through 'emergence' projects, in the serious sense of the word, of nations. Not all of them are 'new'—amongst them are some of the 'oldest', such as China, Egypt, Iran and others.

Egypt's 'emergence' project proceeded successfully in the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century, from Mohamed Ali (1805) until the middle of Khedive Ismail's reign (1875). The project was defeated by the financial and military interventions of Great Britain, the major imperialist power of the time. In China, transformations brought about through



the Taipings revolution (1855–1865) and the reforms implemented by the imperialist Tseu Hi, Sun Yat Sen and the Kuo Min Tang and, later, the Chinese Communists constitute important and successive stages in the struggle for re-emergence of modern China. Confrontations with Western and Japanese Imperialism continue today in different forms. Atatürk, Reza Shah and Arab nationalisms (Nasserism, the Ba'ath Party, the Algerian FLN) also embody projects of national reconstruction and emergence. The Russian socialist revolution must also be placed in the wider frame of liberation struggles of peoples and nations on the peripheries of the system of globalized capitalism. I analyze the period of Bandung (1955–1985) precisely as an expression of a large alliance of peoples, nations and states in Asia and Africa, engaged in a struggle for liberation from the forms of globalization of their time. An alliance which quite naturally found the favourable ear and support of the Soviet Union; an alliance of East and South not against the North but against a globalization dominated by the forces of historical imperialism in the North. The analysis I have made of the global expansion of capitalism elevates the struggles of people and nations in the peripheries to the ranks of a major factor in the transformation of the modern world (Amin, 2015b).

As always in the history of humanity, the successes—not the failures—were remarkable, even though they were limited and relative. But progress has always been uneven and followed by regression. Undermined by their internal contradictions which generally opposed popular and potentially socialist aspirations ('emerging by withdrawing from capitalism') to the ambitions of local existing or aspiring bourgeoisies ('to avoid socialism'), these successes were provisionally derailed, at the end of the twentieth century.

The successes of Bandung benefitted all the nations involved: sub-Saharan Africa would probably not have gained its independence so quickly without Bandung; Gabon could not have collected its own incomes from oil without Bandung. The proof of this is in the counter-scenario of Niger, third largest producer of uranium in the world, which



is prevented from benefitting from a large part of its mining income due to the triumph of neoliberal imperialism.

Do these sad contemporary realities express an absolute and final impossibility of meeting the outrageous ambitions of the peoples of the three continents? I do not believe so, because new waves of struggle by the nations of the South and the former East against the forms of globalization now in place, which assume the form of sovereign projects of emergence, are already visible. The World Bank conceived its ideological campaign under the name of ‘emerging markets’ precisely to constrain the entrenchment or advancement of projects of national sovereignty. Intended to play on major internal contradictions which characterize the major emancipatory struggles of yesterday and today, it aims to counter these projects by stoking illusions about the possibility of emergence into contemporary global capitalism.

There is a need for an interim assessment of the advances (and regressions) of the first years since the deployment of the second wave of resistance. Along with others, I am associated with these movements. I draw the following initial conclusions. China is at the heart of these debates (Amin, 2013a). This is no coincidence, since the options currently at its disposal have their roots in the establishment of a uniquely daring project of national sovereignty whilst simultaneously remaining anchored in a fundamental contradiction which can be expressed in two complementary ways.

One way of addressing this dichotomy is as follows. Is the project aimed at emergence into the world system as it is, using the traditional capitalist methods/paths (private property, free enterprise, etc.), with at best a few mitigations (close negotiations with the dominant powers, the United States in the first instance; social concessions to the popular classes)? Or is it rather a project of emergence progressing in spite of its conscious conflict with logics underpinning the deployment of contemporary imperialistic capitalism?



The second way of considering the issue is to question the underlying reasons driving the state's active intervention in this project: whether its objective is transformation into a bourgeois project. In other words, would this imply Communist Party evolution in the direction of a successful Kuo Min Tang? Or, alternatively, a project based on genuine popular concerns? Policies that have been implemented to promote renewal of the peasant economy would point towards the latter hypothesis. The case of China provides perhaps the best illustration of the tensions between the project's social dimensions and the class struggles which inherently develop in its framework, on the one hand, and the international dimension, on the other. I will not develop this point further but would refer the reader back to the suggestions which I, along with Sam and some others, have put forward in debates we have had on China.

The BRICS countries—Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa — make up another special group in contemporary debates. One could also add a few other country examples of apparent economic success: Mexico, Turkey, Thailand and Malaysia. In these cases, success is primarily defined in terms of the neoliberal ideology, as an example of the success of 'happy globalization'. My analysis of the experiences currently underway in these countries offers more nuanced conclusions. Russia hesitates between (destructive) submission to the contemporary form of globalization (a perspective which is defended by the country's comprador oligarchies) and a project of national renewal through the reconstruction of sovereign state capitalism. India and Brazil's projects are truncated and devoid of substance. South Africa is not engaged in any ordinary project of emergence.

The crisis currently taking place in Brazil actually signals the unravelling of the World Bank discourse on 'emerging markets'. As usual, propositions orchestrated by the World Bank, and rapidly contradicted by reality, have been short lived. They have necessitated constant reformulations of their actual objectives, without being able to elude what constitutes the Bank's exclusive and permanent objective: the protection of finance capital and the interests of imperialist powers.



Brazil's emergence was from the outset established on a fundamental contradiction. On the one hand, the PT governments have undertaken important progressive reforms which have enabled growth to take place by opening up new internal markets. But, on the other hand, these governments did not challenge the dominant positions occupied by private Brazilian capital, which is both monopolistic and comprador in character. The type of growth engaged by these capitalist forces was established primarily on the back of natural resource exports (oil, minerals and capitalist agribusiness production) and integration into financial globalization. This odd couple worked as long as circumstances allowed it. However, under conditions where the offensive launched by financialized global monopolies led to a collapse in raw material prices, the balance of payments deficit compounded by the Brazilian currency's devaluation put an end to the much-vaunted Brazilian miracle. Growth rates have collapsed and the public purse is no longer able to finance social programmes. Under conditions which are undoubtedly different, though for the same reasons, India's emergence remains vulnerable.

A new financial crisis, more serious than that of 2008, is currently taking shape on the horizon. Even though financial monopolies have been able to extract considerable profits from the opening up of markets in the South, and the pillaging of their natural resources, these profits have not been reinvested in the expansion of productive systems in the North. On the contrary, they have been accumulated as income by highly financially solvent monopolies to feed an infinitely spiralling growth in speculation. The inevitable financial demise of this system will put a term to illusions of emergence.

China is in a better position than others to face up to these financial troubles, precisely because to date, its financial system remains outside the system of globalized finance, and the country continues to pursue a model of non-capitalist agricultural renewal, as I have discussed elsewhere. This specificity has allowed China to better resist a reversal of fortunes by investing directly in the development of domestic markets, with the result that its growth rate has only dropped from 10 to 7 per



cent per annum. If China is still outside the globalized financial system when the crisis hits, it will be in a position to reinforce its positions in the world—the yuan will represent an important refuge to capital fleeing the devaluation of both the US dollar and euro. But if, in the interim, China has entered into the system of globalized finance, it will pay the exorbitant price of this decision and suffer a similar fate to that of the countries of the South. The imperial powers will be placed in a position to threaten its detractors with their superior weapon: military intervention.

The discourse about ‘emerging markets’ is already in decline. In view of the approaching financial catastrophe, the World Bank considers it more important to redirect its propaganda efforts and to exercise all its pressures to ensure the entrance of countries which have to date been recalcitrant to do so, namely, China, Russia and, to a lesser extent, India. The argument presented to convince them of such a path is that their entrance would purportedly reduce the risks of catastrophe. This is untrue. It would only enable the costs of repairing and rebuilding the system to be more easily transferred to the South; this is, in fact, the real objective of new discourses. Brazil only provides a tragic illustration of what others can expect.

Sovereign Projects are Needed for African Countries to Restore Hope for Development

Engagement is necessary with what we call sovereign projects—in other words, projects which are conceived of by us, for us and which are to the greatest extent independent of the tendencies and pressures exerted by the global capitalist system. Industrialization must be the goal of sovereign projects. There can be no development without industrialization. Even agricultural development, through efficient modernization, is impossible without industries to support it. It is necessary to walk on one’s own two feet.



What goes by the name ‘international aid’, notably in African countries—in other words, aid extended by the World Bank, or by development agencies from Western imperialist countries, the United States or the European Union—is not genuine development aid. It is a financial support intended to maintain our position as subordinate countries, and thus to reproduce underdevelopment.

The only solution is to forget all this and think differently. We must start thinking in terms of sovereign projects. Is this possible? Yes. The African continent is often dismissed as ‘handicapped’ by virtue of having generally small countries. This is not true of all African countries: Egypt has a population of 92 million, Ethiopia of 90 million and Nigeria of 180 million—these are not small countries. Nonetheless, the main structures of Nigeria’s economy are not significantly different from those of a small country like Benin. One could say that in spite of its population of 180 million, Nigeria is just like 15 Benins, nothing more. The advantage of size is not put to good use, even by large African countries.

Becoming engaged on the path of autonomous development, based on sovereign projects, is not easy for anyone, even China. For smaller countries of average size, the challenges are obviously greater. But there is always a margin, even though this margin may be very limited at the outset. If certain countries were to initiate autonomous development, independently and on the basis of sovereign projects (even modest ones to start off with), this could quickly snowball into something much greater. It would create favourable conditions for closer links, political solidarity, and, no doubt, for economic and possibly financial co-operation between African countries and the Global South more generally. We could, in this manner, become active in shaping the world and be in a position to impose ourselves as such. Even though this may not be easy, we can also approach China which has now become financially powerful. We have witnessed the articulation of various proposals for co-operation during the meetings between China and African states in Johannesburg. The ball is in our court. We now have the prerogative to seize it and to



open negotiations. But one can only open negotiations if one knows what one wants.

The constraint lies with the ruling classes. The ruling classes in African countries, such as those in Asian and Latin American countries, have largely been produced and shaped by the integration of their own countries as subaltern and dominated partners into the system of globalized capitalism. To describe these, I use the term ‘comprador bourgeoisie’—which was first coined by Chinese communists, a long time ago, in the 1920s. The word comes from Portuguese and means ‘traders, buyers, intermediaries’ between the dominant imperialist world and the local world of notably peasant producers.

Our dominant classes are comprador classes. I would even say that state bureaucracies, which are neither entrepreneurial classes nor property owners in the capitalist sense, also constitute largely ‘comprador’ bureaucratic classes. The challenge, then, effectively exists in our own environment, at home with us; it is to be found in the actual nature of the dominant and political classes. But the deployment of social movements can modify these givens and thus create the conditions for coming out of the impasse.

It is in this framework that the contribution made by Sam Moyo’s work has been of the greatest significance.

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Chapter 3

The Agrarian Question a Century after October 1917: Capitalist Agriculture and Agricultures in Capitalism

Introduction

Authored in commemoration of 1917, this article addresses one of the key dimensions confronting the Russian and Chinese revolutions, that of the agrarian question for the peasantry which constituted popular majorities in each of these countries at the time of their revolutions.

These two great revolutions were confronted by three other major challenges. The first challenge originated in the fact that these revolutions with socialist goals had triumphed in ‘single countries’—albeit the size of continents; two countries, moreover, situated in the peripheries of the global system of capitalism. An important issue concerned the question of how to progress towards a perspective with a universal reach, under conditions of permanent hostility and violence characterizing the intrinsically imperialist processes of capitalist globalization.

The second challenge concerned the question of democracy. How to construct practices capable of promoting the democratization of society? How to create institutions for a new participative democracy, which would guarantee a role for all workers in the decision-making processes at all levels of economic and social governance? How was this to be achieved without sacrificing personal rights, but, instead, integrating individual

emancipation, through the deployment of personal liberty and creativity, as a key dynamic in the development of society?

The third challenge concerns the ecological dimension which twenty-first-century socialism must boldly address as a fundamental point of departure in shaping a vision of a socialist future and the concrete policies required to achieve it. Establishing a harmonious relationship between society and nature demands a radical break with the dominant logics of capitalism predicated on the essential destruction of the material basis of society and the reproduction of life on the planet.

My book entitled *October 1917 Revolution, A Century Later* (Amin, 2017) proposes a comprehensive analysis of these challenges, organized around the central theme of Soviet isolation imposed by imperialist globalization. This work places the focus on the particular challenge posed by the peasant question. I emphasize the examination of this issue primarily because contemporary and largely urban social movements generally ignore it, thereby constraining the formulation of a coherent strategy for socialism in the twenty-first century.

In this respect, this work is situated alongside publications inspired by the works of Sam Moyo, whose authors recognize the importance of the new agrarian question.

The first issue presented here concerns the manner through which historical capitalism has ‘settled’ the (agrarian) question, in favour of minorities comprising the populations of the developed capitalist economies of the centre (about 15 per cent of the total world population). Is the reproduction of this model of ‘development’ feasible or achievable for the populations of contemporary Asia, Africa and South America? My response to this question is negative, and as a result, the contemporary world is confronted with a challenge which, I argue, can only be solved by a bold vision of socialism.



The second issue concerns the strategy of stages which I propose as a longer-term process of constructing a socialist alternative for the populations of these three continents. As it must, the new agrarian question is the key issue to be addressed in the processes of building socialism in the twenty-first century.

Historical capitalism provided its own types of solutions to the agrarian problem in Europe and the USA. Theorists and ideologists of capitalism all imagined that this same solution would result from the transfer and application of organizational models derived from large-scale industry to agriculture. History has proved them wrong. The solution has actually operated in a very different manner; notably, through the emergence of new strata of the bourgeoisie, made up of ‘agriculturalists’ (who are no longer peasants). Today, the capture of agriculture by large-scale corporate capital in the financial monopolies places the future of family farming in jeopardy while new strategies deployed by the agro-industrial complex aim to substitute family farms with agri-business.

Soviet socialism inherited the dominant conception of the nineteenth century, transmitted by Kautsky and inspired by the model of Soviet collectivization. In my book cited above, I articulate the reasons why I consider this as the fundamental mistake underlying the rupture of the worker-peasant alliance—which had itself assured the success of the October Revolution. By avoiding this mistake, Maoism, on the other hand, opened up to a different path for the resolution of the peasant question founded in the principal of equal access to land for all rural peoples. This continues to be relevant for the future of the populations of Asia, Africa and South America. The distinction I make between capitalist agriculture and agriculture under capitalism constitutes, in my humble opinion, a new contribution which historical Marxism and, *a fortiori*, bourgeois theories, have ignored (Kautsky, [1899]1988).



In the North: An Efficient Family Agriculture Perfectly Integrated into Dominant Capitalism

Modern family agriculture, dominant in Western Europe and in the USA, has clearly shown its superiority when compared to other forms of agricultural production. Annual production per worker (the equivalent of 1000–2000 tons of cereal) has no equal, and it has enabled a minimum proportion of the active population (about 5 per cent) to supply the whole country abundantly and even produce exportable surpluses. Modern family agriculture has also shown an exceptional capacity for absorbing innovations and much flexibility in adapting to demand.

This agriculture does not share the specific characteristic of capitalism, its main mode of labour organization. In the factory, the number of workers enables an advanced division of labour, which is at the origin of the leap in productivity. In the agricultural family business, labour supply is reduced to one or two individuals (the farming couple), sometimes helped by one, two, or three associates or permanent labourers, but also, in certain cases, a larger number of seasonal workers (particularly for the harvesting of fruit and vegetables). Generally speaking, there is not a definitively fixed division of labour, the tasks being polyvalent and variable. In this sense, family agriculture is not capitalist.

However, this modern family agriculture constituted an inseparable part of the capitalist economy into which it is totally integrated. In this family agricultural business, its self-consumption no longer counts. It depends entirely for its economic legitimacy on its production for the market. Thus, the logic that commands the production options is no longer the same as that of the agricultural peasants of yesterday (analysed by Chayanov, 1996), or of today in Third World countries.

The efficiency of the agricultural family business is due to its modern equipment. They possess 90 per cent of the tractors and other agricultural equipment in use in the world. These machines are 'bought' (often on



credit) by the farmers and are therefore their 'property'. In the logic of capitalism, the farmer is both a worker and a capitalist and the income earned should correspond to the sum of the wages for the work and the profit from the ownership of the capital being used. But it is not so. The net income of farmers is comparable to the average wage earned in industry in the same country. The state intervention and regulation policies in Europe and in the USA, where this form of agriculture dominates, have as their declared objective the aim of ensuring (through subsidies) the equality of 'peasant' and 'worker' incomes. The profits from the capital used by farmers are therefore collected by segments of industrial and financial capital further up the food chain.

In the family agriculture of Europe and the USA, the component of the land rent, itself meant to constitute, in conventional economics, the remuneration of the productivity of the land, does not figure in the remuneration of the farmer/owner, or the owner (when not the farmer). The French model of 'anaesthetizing the owner' is very telling: in law, the rights of the farmer are given priority over those of the owner. In the USA, where 'respect for property' always has the absolute priority, the same result is obtained by forcing, *de facto*, almost all the family businesses to be owners of the land that they farm. The rent of ownership thus disappears from the remuneration of the farmers.

The efficiency of this family agriculture is also due to the fact that it farms (as owner or not) enough good land: neither too small nor pointlessly large. The surface farmed corresponds, for each stage of the development of mechanized equipment, to what a farmer alone (or a small family unit) can work. It has gradually expanded, as Marcel Mazoyer has extremely well demonstrated (by the facts) and illustrated (as an efficiency requirement) (Mazoyer & Roudard, 1997).

Control over agricultural production also operates down the food chain by modern commerce, particularly the supermarkets. In actual fact, the agricultural family unit, efficient as it is (and it is), is only a sub-contractor, caught in the pincers between upstream agribusiness



(which imposes selected seeds today, Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) tomorrow), industry (which supplies the equipment and chemical products), finance (which provides the necessary credits), and downstream in the commercialization of the supermarkets. The status of the farmer is more like that of the artisan (individual producer) who used to work in the ‘putting out’ system (the weaver dominated by the merchant that supplied the thread and sold the material produced).

It is true that this is not the only form of agriculture in the modern capitalist world. There are also large agribusiness enterprises, sometimes big owners who employ many waged labourers (when these estates are not leased out to tenant family farmers). This was generally the case with land in the colonies and still is the case in South Africa (this form of *latifundia* having been abolished by the agrarian reform of Zimbabwe). There are various forms in Latin America, sometimes not very ‘modernized’ and sometimes very ‘modernized’ (i.e., mechanized), as in the Southern Cone. But family agriculture remains dominant in Europe and the USA.

‘Really existing socialism’ carried out various experiences in ‘industrial’ forms of agricultural production. The ‘Marxism’ underlying this option was that of Karl Kautsky who, at the end of the nineteenth century, had ‘predicted’, not the modernization of the agricultural family business (its equipment and its specialization), but its disappearance altogether in favour of large production units, like factories, believed to benefit from the advantages of a thoroughgoing internal division of labour. This prediction did not materialize in Europe and the USA. But the myth that it transmitted was believed in the Soviet Union, in Eastern Europe (with some nuances), in China, in Vietnam (in the modalities specific to that country) and, at one time, in Cuba. Independently of the other reasons that led to the failure of these experiences (bureaucratic management, bad macroeconomic planning, reduction of responsibilities due to lack of democracy, etc.), there were also errors of judgement about the advantages of the division of labour and specialization, extrapolated—without justification—from certain forms of industry and applied to other fields of production and social activity.



While if the reasons for this failure are now recognized, this cannot be said for the forms of capitalist agriculture in the regions of Latin America and Southern Africa mentioned above. And yet, the failure is also obvious, despite the profitability and the competitiveness of these modernized forms of latifundia. For this, profitability is obtained through horrific ecological wastage (irreversible destruction of productive potential and of arable land), as well as social exploitation (miserable wages).

In the South: Poor Peasant Cultivators as Part of a Dominated Peripheral Capitalism

Peasant cultivators in the South constitute almost half of humanity—three billion human beings. The types of agriculture vary, from those that have benefited from the green revolution (fertilizers, pesticides and selected seeds)—although they are not very mechanized, their production has risen to between 100 and 500 quintals per labourer—to those which are the same as before this revolution whose production is only around 10 quintals per labourer. The gap between the average production of a farmer in the North and that of peasant agriculture, which was from 10 to 1 before 1940 is now from 100 to 1. In other words, the rate of progress in agricultural productivity has largely outstripped that of other activities, bringing about a lowering of the real price from 5 to 1.

This peasant agriculture in the countries of the South is also well and truly integrated into local and world capitalism. However, closer study reveals immediately both the convergences and differences in the two types of ‘family’ economy.

There are huge differences, which are visible and undeniable: the importance of subsistence food in the peasant economies, the only way of survival for those rural populations; the low efficiency of this agriculture, not equipped with tractors or other materials and often highly parcellized; the poverty of the rural world (three-quarters of the victims of under-nourishment are rural); the growing incapacity of these systems to ensure



food supplies for their towns; the sheer immensity of the problems, as the peasant economy affects nearly half of humanity.

In spite of these differences, peasant agriculture is already integrated into the dominant global capitalist system. To the extent of its contribution to the market, it depends on purchased inputs (at least chemical products and selected seeds) and is the victim of the oligopolies that control the marketing of these products. For the regions having ‘benefited’ from the ‘green revolution’ (half of the peasantry of the South) upstream and downstream, the siphoning off of profits on the products by dominant capital are very great. But they are also, in relative terms, for the other half of the peasantry of the South, taking into account the weakness of their production.

Is the Modernization of the Agriculture of the South by Capitalism Possible and Desirable?

Let us use the hypothesis of a strategy for the development of agriculture that tries to reproduce systematically in the South the course of modern family agriculture in the North. One could easily imagine that some 50 million more modern farms, if given access to the large areas of land which would be necessary (taking it from the peasant economy and, of course, choosing the best soils) and access to the capital markets enabling them to equip themselves, they could produce the essential of what the creditworthy urban consumers still currently obtain from peasant agriculture. But what would happen to the billions of non-competitive peasant producers? They would be inexorably eliminated in a short period of time, a few decades. What would happen to these billions of human beings, most of them already the poorest of the poor, but who feed themselves, for better and/or for worse—and for a third of them, for worse? Within a time horizon of 50 years, no industrial development, more or less competitive, even in a farfetched hypothesis of a continual annual growth of 7 per cent for three-quarters of humanity, could absorb even a third of this labour reserve. Capitalism, by its nature, cannot



resolve the peasant question: the only prospects it can offer are a planet full of slums and billions of ‘too many’ human beings.

We have therefore reached the point where, to open up a new field for the expansion of capital (‘the modernization of agricultural production’), it is necessary to destroy—in human terms—entire societies. Fifty million new efficient producers (200 million human beings with their families), on the one hand, and three billion of excluded people, on the other. The creative aspect of the operation would be only a drop of water in the ocean of destruction that it requires. I thus conclude that capitalism has entered its phase of declining senility: the logic of the system is no longer able to ensure the simple survival of humanity. Capitalism is becoming barbaric and leads directly to genocide. It is more than ever necessary to replace it by other development logics which are more rational.

So, what is to be done?

It is necessary to accept the maintenance of peasant agriculture for all the foreseeable future of the twenty-first century. Not for reasons of romantic nostalgia for the past, but quite simply because the solution of the problem is to overtake the logics that drive capitalism and to participate in the long, secular transition to world socialism. It is, therefore, necessary to work out regulation policies for the relationships between the ‘market’ and peasant agriculture. At the national and regional levels, these regulations, specific and adapted to local conditions, must protect national production, thus ensuring the indispensable food sovereignty of nations—in other words, delinking the internal prices from those of the so-called world market—as they must do. A gradual increase in the productivity of peasant agriculture, which will doubtless be slow but continuous, would make it possible to control the exodus of the rural populations to the towns. At the level of what is called the world market, the desirable regulation can probably be done through interregional agreements that meet the requirements of a development that integrates people rather than excludes them.



There is No Alternative to Food Sovereignty

At the world level, food consumption is assured, through competition for 85 per cent of it, by local production. Nevertheless, this production corresponds to very different levels of satisfaction of food needs: excellent for North American and West and Central Europe, acceptable in China, mediocre for the rest of Asia and Latin America, disastrous for Africa. One can also see a strong correlation between the quality and the levels of industrialization of the various regions: countries and regions that are more industrialized are able to feed their populations well from their own agricultural produce.

The USA and Europe have understood the importance of food sovereignty very well and have successfully implemented it by systematic economic policies. But, apparently, what is good for them is not so for the others! The World Bank, the OECD and the European Union try to impose an alternative, which is 'food security'. According to them, Third World countries do not need food sovereignty and should rely on international trade to cover the deficit in their food requirements, however large. This may seem easy for those countries which are large exporters of natural resources (oil, uranium, etc.). For the others, the 'advice' of the Western powers is to specialize their agriculture, as much as possible, in the production of agricultural commodities for export (cotton, tropical drinks and oils, agrofuels in the future). The defenders of 'food security' (for others, not for themselves) do not consider the fact that this specialization, which has been practiced since colonialism, has not made it possible to improve the miserable food rations of the peoples concerned, especially the peasants. Nor is the above-mentioned correlation taken into account.

Thus, the advice to peasants who have not yet entered the industrial era (as in Africa) is not to engage in 'insane' industrialization projects. These are the very terms utilized by Sylvie Brunel, who goes so far as attributing the failure of agricultural development in Africa to this 'insane' option of their governments! It is precisely those countries that have



taken this option (Korea, Taiwan, China) that have become ‘emerging countries’, as well as able to feed their population better (or less badly). And it is precisely those who have not done so (Africa) that are sunk into chronic malnutrition and famine. This would not appear to embarrass the defenders of the so-called principle of ‘food security’ (more accurately, ‘food insecurity’). There is little doubt that, underneath this obstinacy against Africa committing itself to paths inspired by the success of Asia, lies more than a touch of contempt (if not racism) towards the peoples concerned. It is regrettable that such nonsense is to be found in many of Western circles and organizations with good intentions—NGOs and even research centres!

Bruno Parmentier (2007) has clearly demonstrated the total failure of the ‘food security’ option. Governments who thought they could cover the needs of their poor urban populations through their exports (oil, among others) have found themselves trapped by the food deficit that is growing at an alarming rate as a result of these policies. For the other countries—particularly in Africa—the situation is even more disastrous.

On top of this, the economic crisis initiated by the financial collapse of 2008 is already aggravating the situation—and will continue to do so. It is sadly amusing to note how, at the very moment when the crisis underway illustrates the failure of the so-called food security policies, the partners of the OECD (such as the EU institutions) cling to them. It is not that the governments of the Triad (the USA, Europe and Japan) do not ‘understand’ the problem. This would be to deny them the intelligence that they certainly possess. So can one dismiss the hypothesis that ‘food insecurity’ is a consciously adopted objective? Has the ‘food weapon’ not already been implemented? Thus, there is an extra reason for insisting that without food sovereignty, no political sovereignty is possible.

But while there is no alternative to food sovereignty, its efficient implementation does, in fact, require the commitment to the construction of a diversified economy and, hence, industrialization.



Land Tenure Reform Is at the Heart of the Choices Concerning the Future of Peasant Societies

The main issue of the debate on the future of peasant agricultures concerns the question of the rules governing the access to land. The necessary reforms of land tenure systems in Africa and Asia must be made with the perspective of a development that benefits the whole of society, in particular the working and popular classes, including, of course, the peasants. It must be oriented towards reducing inequalities and radically eliminating ‘poverty’. This development paradigm involves a combination of a mixed macroeconomy (associating private enterprise and public planning) based on the double democratization of the management of the market and of the state and its interventions, and the option for a development of an agricultural system based on peasant family cultivation.

Implementing this set of fundamental principles—the special ways and means of each country and phase of development having to be worked out—constitutes, in itself, the construction of the ‘alternative’ in its national dimensions. This must, of course, be accompanied by evolutions that can support it, both at the required regional levels and at the world level, through the construction of an alternative globalization, negotiated and no longer imposed unilaterally by dominant transnational capital, the collective imperialism of the Triad and the hegemony of the USA.

The regulations governing access to the use of agricultural land must be conceived in a perspective that ‘integrates and does not exclude’, that is to say, which enables cultivators as a whole to have access to the land, a prior condition for the reproduction of a ‘peasant society’. This fundamental right is certainly not enough. It has also to be accompanied by policies that help the peasant family units to produce in conditions that help maintain the growth of national production (guaranteeing, in turn, the food sovereignty of the country) and a parallel improvement in the real income of the peasants involved as a whole. A collection of



macroeconomic proposals and forms for appropriate policy in managing them has to be implemented, and negotiations concerning the organization of international trade must be subordinated to them.

Access to land must be regulated by the status of its ownership. The terminology utilized in this field is often imprecise, because of a lack of conceptualization. In English, the words 'land tenure' and 'land system' are often used interchangeably.

First of all, it is necessary to distinguish two families of land tenure systems: those that are based on the private ownership of land and those that are not.

Land Tenure Systems Based on the Private Ownership of Land

In this case, the owner disposes of, to use the terms of Roman law, the *usus* (right to develop), the *fructus* (ownership of the products of this exploitation) and the *abusus* (the right to transfer ownership). This right is 'absolute' in that the owner can cultivate his/her own land, rent it out, or even keep it out of cultivation. Ownership can be given or sold, it is part of a collection of assets deriving from the rights of inheritance.

This right is no doubt often less absolute than it appears. In all cases, usage is subordinated to laws governing the public order (prohibiting its illegal use for growing drug-producing crops, for example) and increasing numbers of regulations concerned with preserving the environment. In certain countries that have made an agrarian reform, there is a fixed ceiling to the size of the property of an individual or a family.

The rights of tenant farmers (length and guarantee of lease, the amount of land rent) limit the rights of the owners in different degrees, to the point of giving the tenant farmer the greater benefit of protection by the state and its agricultural policies (as is the case for France). The freedom to choose crops is not always the rule. In Egypt, the state agricultural



services have always imposed the size of the plots of land allocated to the different crops in accordance with their irrigation requirements.

This land tenure system is modern in the sense that it is the result of the constitution of ‘really existing’ capitalism, starting from Western Europe (first in England) and from the colonies of European extraction in America. It was set up through the destruction of the ‘customary’ systems of regulating access to the land in Europe itself. The statutes of feudal Europe were founded on the superimposing of rights on the same land: those of the peasant concerned and other members of the village community (serfs or freedmen), those of the feudal lord and those of the king. The assault on these rights took the form of the Enclosures in England, imitated in various ways in all the European countries during the nineteenth century. Marx very soon denounced this radical transformation that excluded most of the peasants from access to the use of land—and who were destined to become emigrant proletarians in the town, or remain where they were as agricultural labourers (or sharecroppers)—and he classified these measures as primitive accumulation, dispossessing the producers of the land and the use of the means of production.

Using the terms of Roman law to describe the statute of modern bourgeois ownership imply that it dates from time immemorial, that is, the ownership of the land in the Roman Empire, and more precisely the slave-labour land ownership. In actual fact, these particular forms of ownership, having disappeared in feudal Europe, make it impossible to talk of the ‘continuity’ of a ‘Western’ concept of ownership (itself associated with individualism and the values that it represents) that has never existed.

The rhetoric of the capitalist discourse—the ‘liberal’ ideology—has not only produced this myth of ‘Western continuity’. It has produced another myth that is still more dangerous: that of an ‘absolute and superior rationality’ of the management of an economy based on the private and exclusive ownership of the means of production, which include agricultural land. Conventional economics does, in fact, claim that the ‘market’, that is,



the alienability of the ownership of capital and land, ensures the optimal usage (the most efficient) of these ‘factors of production’. According to this logic, therefore, land must be turned into ‘a commodity like the others’, which can be alienated at the price of ‘the market’ to guarantee that the best use is made of it for the owner concerned and for the whole society. This is only a miserable piece of tautology, but it is what the whole discourse on which the bourgeois economy is based. This same rhetoric thinks it can legitimize the principle of ownership of the land by the fact that it alone gives the cultivator who invests to improve the yields per hectare and the productivity of his work (and of those that he employs, if this is the case) the guarantee that he will not suddenly be dispossessed of the fruit of his labours and savings.

This is not true at all, for other forms of regulations on the right of land use can produce the same results. Finally, this dominant discourse extends the conclusions that it believes to draw from the construction of Western modernity, to propose them as the only ‘rules’ necessary for the progress of all other peoples. Giving over the land everywhere to private ownership in the current sense of the term, such as that practised in the centres of capitalism, is to apply to the whole world the policy of the Enclosures—in other words, dispossessing the peasants. This is not a new process: it was initiated and continued during the centuries preceding the world expansion of capitalism, particularly in the colonial systems. Today, the World Trade Organization (WTO) actually proposes to accelerate the movement, whereas the destructions that this capitalist option involves are increasingly foreseeable and calculable. For this reason, the resistance of the peasants and the peoples involved can make it possible to build a real alternative, one that is genuinely human-oriented.

Land Tenure Systems Not Based on the Private Ownership of Land

This definition, being negative, cannot apply to a homogenous group. For, in all human societies, access to the land is regulated. But this is done either through ‘customary communities’, ‘modern local authorities’, or the



state. Or, more precisely, and more often, by a collection of institutions and practices that concern individuals, local authorities and the state.

The ‘customary’ management (expressed in terms of customary law or so-called customary law) has almost always excluded private ownership (in the modern sense) and has always guaranteed access to the land to all the families (rather than individuals) concerned—that is, those who constitute a distinct ‘village community’ and identify themselves as such. But it hardly gave ‘equal’ access to the land. First, it usually excluded ‘foreigners’ (very often what remained of the conquered people) and ‘slaves’ (of various status); it also unequally distributed land according to membership of clans, lineage and castes, or status (‘chiefs’, ‘freedmen’, etc.). So it is inappropriate to indiscriminately praise these customary rights as is done by numerous ideologues of anti-imperialist nationalism. Progress will certainly require them to be questioned.

Customary management has almost never been that of ‘independent villages’, which were in fact nearly always integrated into some sort of state, stable or shifting, solid or precarious, but seldom absent. The usage rights of communities and of the families that composed them have always been limited by those of the state that received tribute (which is the reason why I described the vast array of premodern production modes as ‘tributary’).

These complex kinds of ‘customary’ management, which differ from one country and epoch to another, now only exist, at best, in extremely degraded forms, having suffered from the attack by the dominating logic of globalized capitalism for at least two centuries (in Asia and Africa) and sometimes five centuries (in Latin America). The example of India is probably the most striking in this regard. Before British colonization, access to land was administered by the ‘village communities’ or, more exactly, their governing castes, excluding the inferior castes—the *dalits*—who were treated as a kind of collective slave class, similar to the helots of Sparta. These communities, in turn, were controlled and exploited by the imperial Mogul State and its vassals (rajahs and other kings), who



levied the taxes. The British raised the status of the *zamindars* (whose responsibility it was to actually collect the taxes) to becoming ‘owners’, so that they constituted a kind of allied large land-owning class, regardless of tradition. On the other hand, they maintained the ‘tradition’ when it suited them, for example excluding the *dalits* from access to land! Independent India did not challenge this heavy colonial inheritance, which is the cause of the unbelievable destitution of most of the peasantry and, thus, of its urban population (Amin, 2006, ch. 4).

The solution to these problems and the building up of a viable peasant economy of the majority thus requires an agrarian reform, in the strict sense of the term. The European colonization in Southeast Asia and that of the USA in the Philippines have had similar consequences. The regimes of the ‘enlightened’ despots of the East (the Ottoman Empire, the Egypt of Mohamed Ali, the Shahs of Iran) also mostly supported private ownership in the modern sense of the term for the benefit of a new class (incorrectly described as ‘feudal’ by the main currents of historical Marxism), recruited from the senior agents of their power systems.

As a result, the private ownership of land is now applicable to most agricultural land—particularly the most fertile ones—in all Asia, except for China, Vietnam and the former Soviet republics of Central Asia. There remain only the vestiges of para-customary systems, particularly in the poorest areas and those less attractive to prevailing capitalist agriculture. This structure is highly differentiated, juxtaposing large landowners (rural capitalists in my terminology), rich peasants, middle peasants and poor peasants without land. There is no peasant organization or movement that transcends these acute class conflicts.

In Arab Africa, in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Kenya (but not in Egypt), the colonial authorities had granted their colonizers ‘modern’ private property, generally of a *latifundia* type. This inheritance has certainly been eliminated in Algeria, but there the peasantry had practically disappeared and been proletarianized or reduced to vagrancy by the extension of the colonial properties, while in Morocco and Tunisia the



local bourgeoisie took over (which also partially happened in Kenya). In Zimbabwe, the revolution underway has challenged the colonial heritage on behalf partly of new owners who are more urban than rural and partly of the ‘communities of poor peasants’. South Africa, for the time being, has not taken part in this movement. The strips of degenerated para-customary systems which remain in the ‘poor’ regions of Morocco and Berber Algeria, as in the Bantustans of South Africa, are suffering from the threat of private appropriation, encouraged by elements inside and outside the concerned communities.

In all these situations, the peasant struggles (and sometimes the organizations that support them) should be identified more precisely: do they constitute movements and represent claims by ‘rich peasants’ that are in conflict with some state policies (and the influence of the dominant world system on them)? Or are they poor and landless peasants? Could they both form an alliance against the dominant (so-called ‘neoliberal’) system? On what conditions? To what extent? Can the claims—whether they are expressed or not—of the poor, landless peasants be ‘forgotten’? In intertropical Africa, the apparent persistence of these ‘customary’ systems is certainly more visible. Because, here, the colonization model took off in a different direction known as the *économie de traite*: the meaning of this concept, which has no English translation, is that the management of access to land was left to the so-called ‘customary’ authorities, nevertheless controlled by the colonial state (through genuine traditional chiefs or false ones fabricated by the administration). The objective of this control was to force the peasants to produce, beyond their own subsistence, a quota of specific export products (groundnuts, cotton, coffee, cacao). The maintenance of a land tenure system that did not recognize private property was convenient for the colonizers, as land rent did not have to be taken into account in calculating the price of the products. This resulted in the degradation of the soils, destroyed by expanding crops, sometimes definitively (as, e.g., the desertification of Senegal where groundnuts had been cultivated). Here, once again, capitalism demonstrates that the ‘short-term rationality’ inherent in its dominant logic is largely responsible for ecological disasters. The juxtaposition of subsistence food crops and



exports crops also made it possible to pay the work of the peasants at levels close to zero. For these reasons, to talk about the ‘customary land tenure system’ is grossly misleading: it is a new regime that conserves only the appearance of ‘tradition’, often its least interesting aspects.

China and Vietnam provide a unique example of a system for managing access to the land which is based neither on private ownership, nor on ‘custom’, but on a new revolutionary right, unknown elsewhere, which is that of all the peasants (described as the inhabitants of a village) having equal access to land—and I stress the ‘equal’. This is the most beautiful acquisition of the Chinese and Vietnamese revolutions.

In China, and still more in Vietnam, which had a deeper colonization experience, the ‘old’ land tenure systems (those I have described as ‘tributary’) were already fairly eroded by dominant capitalism. The old governing classes of the imperial power system had taken over agricultural land as owners, or almost as private property, while capitalist development encouraged the creation of new classes of rich peasants. Mao Zedong is the first—followed by Chinese and Vietnamese communists—to have prescribed an agrarian revolution strategy based on the mobilization of most of the poor peasants, without land or other assets. The victory of this revolution made it possible to abolish the private ownership of land right from the beginning—which was replaced by that of the state—as well as the organization of new forms of equal access to land for all peasants. True, this procedure has passed through several successive stages, including the Soviet-inspired model based on production cooperatives. The limits of their achievements led both countries to return to the idea of family peasant units. Are they viable? Can they produce a continual improvement in production without freeing up too much rural labour? On what conditions? What kinds of support are required from the state? What forms of political management can meet this challenge?

Ideally, the model involves the double affirmation of the rights of the state (the only owner) and of the usufructuaries (the peasant family). The state guarantees the equal division of the village lands among all the



families and it prohibits all other usage other than family cultivation— for example, the renting of land. It guarantees that the result of investments made by the usufructuaries is given back to them immediately through their right of ownership of all the produce of their land, which are marketed freely, although the state guarantees purchase at a minimum price. On the longer term, the children who remain on the land can inherit from the usufructuaries (those who definitively leave the place lose their right to the land, which reverts to the lands for future redistribution). This is the case, of course, for fertile land, but also for the small, even dwarf-sized plots, so that the system is only viable if there is vertical investment (the green revolution without much mechanization), which proves as effective in increasing production through rural activities as horizontal investment (extension of the holdings, supported by intensified mechanization).

Has this ‘ideal’ model ever been implemented? It was surely close to it, for example, during the period of Deng Xiaoping in China. Nevertheless, even if it has created a greater degree of equality within a village, it has never been able to avoid the inequalities between one community and another, which are created by the difference in the quality of the soils, the density of population, or the proximity to urban markets. No other system of redistribution (even through the structures of cooperatives and state marketing monopolies during the ‘Soviet’ stage) has managed to resolve this challenge.

What is certainly more serious is that the system itself is subject to internal and external pressures that undermine its aims and social impact. Access to credit and favourable conditions for the supply of inputs are the object of bargaining and interventions of all kinds, legal and illegal: ‘equal’ access to the land is not the same as ‘equal’ access to the best conditions for production. The increasing popularity of the ‘market’ ideology promotes this erosion: the system tolerates tenant farming (if not re-legitimizing it) and the hiring of wage labour. The discourse of the right—encouraged from the outside—repeats that it is necessary to give the peasants ‘ownership’ of the land and open up ‘the market in



agricultural land'. It is very clear that those supporting this are the rich peasants (if not agribusiness), who want to increase their holdings....

The management of this system of access to land for the peasants is ensured up until now by the state and the Party together. It may well be that this is because of the village councils that have been genuinely re-elected, and it has been necessary because there is no other way to mobilize the opinion of the majority and reduce the intrigues of the minorities of profiteers who would eventually benefit from a more marked capitalist development. The 'dictatorship of the Party' has shown that this has been largely solved through careerism and opportunism, if not corruption. The social struggles under way in the Chinese and Vietnamese countryside make their voices heard in these countries, just as they do elsewhere in the world. But they remain very much on the 'defensive', that is, attached to defending the heritage of the revolution: the equal right of everyone to land. Defence is necessary, because this heritage is more threatened than would appear, in spite of repeated affirmations by the two governments that 'the ownership of land by the state will "never" be abolished for the benefit of private ownership'! But now this defence requires recognition of the right to do it through the organization of those concerned, the peasants.

Not Only One Formula for Peasant Alternatives

'Agrarian reform' should be understood as the redistribution of private ownership when it is considered to be unequally distributed. It is a land tenure system that is based on the principle of ownership. This reform becomes necessary both to satisfy the demand (perfectly legitimate) from poor and landless peasants and to reduce the political and social power of the large landowners. But where it is implemented, in Asia and Africa after the liberation of old forms of imperialist and colonial domination, it has been carried out by hegemonic non-revolutionary social blocs who were not governed by the dominated and poor majority classes. The exceptions were in China and Vietnam where, also for this reason, there



had not been an ‘agrarian reform’ in the strict sense of the term but, as I have said, private ownership of land was suppressed, the principle of state ownership was affirmed, and the ‘equal’ access to the use of land by all the peasants was put into operation. Elsewhere, real reforms only dispossessed the large landowners for the profit, ultimately, of the middle and even rich (long-term) peasants, ignoring the interests of the poor and those without land. That was the case in Egypt and in other Arab countries. The reform underway in Zimbabwe risks ending up in the same way. In other situations, reform is always on the agenda of what should be done: in India, in South-East Asia, in South Africa and in Kenya.

The progress created by agrarian reform, even where it exists as an immediate and essential requirement, is nevertheless ambiguous for its more long-term implications. For it reinforces attachment to ‘small property’, which becomes an obstacle to the questioning of a land tenure system based on private ownership.

Russia’s history illustrates this drama. The developments that followed the abolition of serfdom, in 1861, were accelerated by the revolution of 1905, because Stolypin’s policies had already produced a ‘claim for ownership’ that was (finally) fulfilled in the radical agrarian reform after the 1917 revolution. And, as we know, the new small owners did not enthusiastically renounce their rights for the benefit of the unfortunate cooperatives, which were dreamt up at the time, in the 1930s. ‘Another path’ to development, based on the peasant family economy of the generalized small owners, would have been possible. But it was not attempted.

And what about the regions (other than China and Vietnam) where, in fact, the land tenure system had not (yet) been based on private property? This was, of course, the case of intertropical Africa.

Here we find the old debate. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Marx, in his correspondence with the Russian Narodniks (Vera Zasulich, among others), dared to say that the absence of private ownership could



constitute an advantage for the socialist revolution, enabling a leap forward towards a regime for managing the access to land other than the one governed by private ownership. But he did not specify what forms this new regime should take, the adjective ‘collective’, correct as it was, being insufficient. Twenty years later, Lenin believed this possibility no longer existed, eliminated by the penetration of capitalism and the spirit of private ownership that accompanied it. Was this a correct assessment? I cannot say, as I do not know enough about Russia. However, Lenin was hardly able to give decisive importance to this question, having accepted the viewpoint of Kautsky in *The Agrarian Question*.

Kautsky made generalizations about the extent of the model in modern European capitalism and believed that the peasantry was destined to ‘disappear’ because of the capitalist expansion itself. In other words, that capitalism would be able to ‘resolve the agrarian question’. While this was true (for 80 per cent) of the other capitalist countries (the Triad: 20 per cent of the world population), it is not the case for the ‘rest of the world’ (80 per cent of the population). History has shown that not only has capitalism not solved this question for the 80 per cent of the world population, but that, as it pursues its expansion, it cannot resolve it, other than by genocide – what a marvellous solution! It was necessary to await Mao Zedong and the Communist Parties of China and Vietnam to give an adequate response to this challenge.

The question came up again in the 1960s, when Africa attained its independence. The national liberation movements of the continents, the states and the State-Parties which it had produced received, in different degrees, the support of the peasant majorities of their peoples. Their natural tendency to populism was to imagine a ‘specific (“African”) path to socialism’. This could be described as very moderately radical in its relationships both with dominant capitalism and with the local classes associated with its expansion. Nevertheless, it posed the question of reconstruction of peasant society in a humanist and universalist spirit. This spirit was often very critical of ‘traditions’ that the foreign masters had, in fact, been trying to mobilize for their own profit.



All the African countries—or almost all—adopted the same principle, formulated in the ‘eminent ownership right of the state’ over all the land. I am not among those who consider this declaration to have been ‘a mistake’, nor that it was motivated by extreme ‘statistim’.

To grasp the extent of the challenge it is necessary to study the way in which the current system controls the peasantry and how it is integrated into the world capitalist system. This control is ensured by a complex system that calls upon ‘custom’, private (capitalist) ownership, and the state, all at the same time. ‘Custom’, as we have just seen, has degenerated and only serves as decoration in the discourses of dictators appealing to what is known as ‘authenticity’, the fig leaf to cover their appetite for pillage and betrayal to imperialism. The tendency for private appropriation to expand has not met with any serious obstacle, apart from some resistance by the victims. In certain regions, which are more suitable for profitable cultivation (irrigated areas, market gardens), land is bought, sold and rented without any formal ownership titles.

The eminent state ownership of land, which I defend as a principle, is itself promoting private appropriation. The state can thus ‘give’ the land necessary for installing a tourist area, a local or foreign agro-business enterprise, or a state farm. The title deeds required for access to the areas to be developed are the object of a distribution process that is rarely transparent. In all cases, the peasant families that occupied the areas and are forced to clear off are the victims of these practices that amount to abuse of power. But to ‘abolish’ eminent state ownership of land to transfer it to the occupiers is not, in fact, feasible (all the village territories would have to be registered!), and if it were attempted it would enable the rural and urban notables to make off with the best bits of land.

The right response to the challenges of a land tenure system that is not based on private ownership (at least not dominated by it) should be to reform the state and its active involvement in setting up a management system of access to land that is modernized, efficient (economically), and democratic (to avoid, or at least to reduce inequalities). Above all, the



solution is not to ‘return to custom’, which is, anyway, impossible and which would only serve to increase the inequalities and open up the way to unbridled capitalism.

However, it cannot be said that the African states have never tried to take the path recommended here. In Mali, the Sudanese Union, just after independence in September 1961, started on what was very inaccurately called ‘collectivization’. In fact, the cooperatives that were established were not production cooperatives, which remained the exclusive responsibility of the family farmers. They constituted a form of modernized collective power, replacing the so-called ‘custom’ which the colonial power used to support. The party that took over this new modern power was also clearly aware of the challenge and aimed at eliminating the customary forms of power—which were judged to be ‘reactionary’, if not ‘feudal’. It is true that this new peasant power, formally democratic (the leaders were elected), was only as democratic as the state and the party. However, it did exercise ‘modern’ responsibilities, seeing that access to land was carried out ‘correctly’, that is, without ‘discrimination’. It managed the credits, the distribution of the inputs (which were partially supplied by state trading) and the marketing of produce (also partially delivered for state commerce). Nepotism and extortion were certainly not eliminated in these procedures. But the only response to these abuses was the gradual democratization of the state, not its ‘withdrawal’, which was later imposed by liberalism, through an extremely violent military dictatorship, for the benefit of the traders (*the dioulas*).

Other experiences, like those in the liberated areas of Guinea Bissau, inspired by the theories advanced by Amilcar Cabral, in Burkina Faso during the Sankara era, have also openly confronted these challenges and sometimes produced unquestionable advances. There are now efforts to obliterate them from people’s minds. In Senegal, the establishment of elected rural authorities constitutes a response that I unhesitatingly defend in principle. Democracy is a practice whose apprenticeship never ends, no less in Europe than in Africa.



What the dominant discourse at the moment means by ‘reform of the land tenure system’ is the exact opposite of what is required for the building of an authentic alternative based on a prosperous peasant economy. What this discourse means by land reform—conveyed by the propaganda instruments of collective imperialism, the World Bank, many development institutions, but also a number of NGOs that are richly endowed—is the acceleration of the privatization of land, and nothing more. The aim is clear: to create the conditions that would enable some ‘modern’ islands of agribusiness (foreign and local) to take over the land they require to expand. But the supplementary produce that these ‘islands’ could supply (for export or for local ‘effective demand’) could never meet the needs for building a prosperous society for all, which would involve the development of the peasant family economy as a whole.

Need to Define Role of the State in Land Reform

I do not exclude complex and mixed formulas, which can be specific for each country. Private ownership of the land can be accepted—at least where it is established and considered legitimate. Its distribution can—or must—be reviewed where this is the case, by agrarian reforms (for Sub-Saharan Africa, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Kenya). I do not even necessarily exclude the opening up of space—under control—of the setting up of agribusiness. But what the essential question lies elsewhere: how to modernize peasant family production and democratize its integration into the national economy and globalization. I have no ready-made solutions to propose in these fields. I shall just mention some of the great problems that this reform raises.

The question of democracy is the indisputable issue to be tackled in responding to this challenge. It is a complex and difficult issue that cannot be reduced to the insipid discourse of good governance and electoral multipartyism. It has, of course, a genuine cultural aspect: democracy wants to abolish the ‘customs’ that are hostile to it—prejudices about social hierarchies and, above all, the treatment of women. It includes juridical



and institutional aspects: the construction of systems of administrative, commercial and personal rights that are consistent with the aims of social construction and the setting up of adequate institutions (elected, for the most part). But, above all, the progression of democracy will depend on the social power of its defenders. The organization of peasant movements is, in this sense, absolutely irreplaceable. It is only to the extent that the peasantry can express itself that the advances towards what is called ‘participatory democracy’—in contrast to reducing it to the problem of ‘representative democracy’—can clear the path (Amin, 2005).

The relationship between men and women is no less important in the democracy challenge. Those who speak of ‘family cultivation’ (peasant) evidently refer to the family, which up until now and almost everywhere has structures that impose the submission of women and the over-exploitation of their labour. The democratic transformation will not take place if there are no organized movements of the women concerned. Attention should be given to the question of migrations. ‘Customary’ rights generally exclude ‘foreigners’—that is, all those who do not belong to the clans, lineages, and families of which the original village community is constituted—from right to the land, or their access is conditioned. The migrations caused by colonial and postcolonial development have sometimes taken on dimensions that upset the ethnic ‘homogeneity’ of the regions concerned. The emigrants who come from outside the country (like the Burkinabe in Cote d’Ivoire), or those who are formally citizens of the same country but of ‘ethnic’ origin that is foreign to the regions where they settle (like the Hausa in the Plateau state of Nigeria), have faced questioning of their rights to the land which they have cultivated by narrow-minded and chauvinistic political movements, which also benefit from foreign support. One of the most unavoidable conditions for real democratic advance is to dismiss ideological and political ‘communitarianisms’ and firmly denounce the para-cultural discourse that underlies them.

All these analyses and proposals which were the object of past developments only concern the status of ownership and the rules of



access to land. These questions are, indeed, a major issue in the debates about the future of agricultural and food production of peasant societies and of the individuals who constitute them. But they do not cover all dimensions of the challenge. Access to land cannot be a potential transformer of the society if the peasants who benefit are unable to get access to the indispensable means of production on favourable conditions (credit, seeds, inputs, access to the markets). National policies, like the international negotiations that aim to define the framework in which the prices and incomes are determined, are another dimension of the peasant question. We refer the reader to the writings of Jacques Berthelot (2001) on these questions. He is the best and most critical analyst of the projects to integrate agricultural and food production into the 'world' markets. We shall just mention two of the conclusions and most important proposals that we have reached.

First, it is not possible to accept that agricultural and food production, as well as land, be treated as ordinary 'goods', and thus allow them to be integrated into the project of globalized liberalization promoted by the dominant powers and transnationalized capital.

The WTO agenda must just be rejected, purely and simply. Opinion in Asia and Africa must be convinced of this, and particularly of the need for food sovereignty, beginning with the peasant organizations, but also all the other social and political forces that defend the interests of the popular classes and those of the nation. All those who have not renounced a project for development that is worthy of the name must realize that the negotiations underway in the framework of the WTO agenda will only be catastrophic for the peoples of Asia and Africa. Capitalism has reached the stage where the pursuit of profit requires 'enclosure' policies at the world level, like the enclosures that took place in England in the first stage of its (modern) development. Now, however, the destruction of the 'peasant reserves' of cheap labour at the world level will result in nothing less than the genocide of half of humanity.



Second, it is impossible to accept the behaviour of the main imperialist powers, the USA and Europe, that are associated with the assaults against the peoples of the South within the WTO. These powers, that try to unilaterally impose the 'liberalism' proposals on the countries of the South, have freed themselves from the same restrictions by ways that can only be described as systematic trickery.

The Farm Bill of the USA and the agricultural policies of the European Union violate the very principles which the WTO intends to impose on other states. The 'partnership' projects proposed by the European Union, following the Cotonou Convention, as from 2008, are nothing less than 'criminal' to use the strong, but appropriate, expression of Jacques Berthelot. These powers can and must be accused in the very courts of the WTO set up for this purpose. A group of countries from the South can do this—and they must.

The alternative consists of national policies to construct/reconstruct national funds for stabilization and support for production, completed by the establishment of common international funds for basic products, enabling an effective alternative reorganization of the international markets of agricultural products. Jean-Pierre Boris has elaborated such proposals in detail.

The peasants of Asia and Africa organized themselves during the stage prior to the liberation struggles of their peoples. They found their place in the strong historical blocs which made it possible to win victory over the imperialism of the time. These blocs were sometimes revolutionary (China and Vietnam), and they then had their main rural bases in the majority classes of middle peasants and poor, landless peasants. Or, elsewhere, they were led by the national bourgeoisie or sectors who aspired to become so, among the rich and middle peasants, thus isolating the large landowners in some places and the 'customary' chieftaincies in the pay of the colonizers.



That page of history having been turned, the challenge of the new collective imperialism of the Triad will only be got rid of if historical blocs are constituted in Asia and Africa. But this cannot be a remake of the preceding blocs. The challenge faced by the so-called alternative world movement and its constitutive components of social forums is to identify, in the new conditions, the nature of these blocs, their strategies and immediate and long-term objectives. This is a far more serious challenge than is realized by many of the movements committed to the struggles.

A Complex and Multidimensional Challenge

Is the capitalist modernization path as 'effective' as the conventional economists claim? Let us imagine that, in this way, we can double production (from an index of 100 to one of 200), but that this is obtained by the elimination of 80 per cent of the surplus rural population (the index of the number of active cultivators falling from 100 to 20). The apparent gain, measured by the growth of production per active producer is considerable: it is multiplied by 10. But, if it is seen in terms of the rural population as a whole, it is only multiplied by two. Therefore, it is necessary to distribute freely all this growth in production in order simply to keep alive the peasants who have been eliminated and cannot find alternative work in the towns. This was what Marx wrote concerning the pauperization associated with the accumulation of capital.

The challenge, which is to base development on renewing peasant societies, has many dimensions. I will just call attention here to the conditions for constructing the necessary and possible political alliances that will enable progress to be made towards solutions (in the interests of the worker peasants, of course) to all the problems that are posed: access to the land and to the means to develop it properly; reasonable wages for peasant work; improvement of wages parallel to the productivity of this work; and appropriate regulation of the markets at the national, regional and world levels.



New peasant organizations exist in Asia and Africa that are visibly activating the struggles underway. Often, when political systems make it impossible for them to constitute formal organizations, the social struggles in the rural world take the form of ‘movements’ with no apparent direction. These actions and programmes, where they exist, should be analysed more carefully. Which peasant social forces do they represent and whose interests are they defending? The majority mass of the peasants? Or the minorities which aspire to participating in the expansion of dominant globalized capitalism? We should mistrust quick answers to these questions that are complex and difficult. We should be careful not to ‘condemn’ a number of organizations and movements on the pretext that they are not mobilizing the peasant majorities on radical programmes. This would be to ignore the need to formulate broad alliances and strategies by stages. But we should also be careful not to support the discourse of the ‘naïve alternative world people’ who often set the tone in the forums and fuel the illusion that the world is on the right path only because of the existence of the social movements. This is a discourse that belongs more to the many NGOs—with good intentions, perhaps—than to the peasant and worker organizations.

I myself am not so naïve as to think that all the interests that these alliances represent can naturally converge. In all peasant societies, there are the rich and the poor, who are often without land. The conditions of access to land result from different historical experiences which, in some cases, have rooted aspirations to ownership in peoples’ minds, while in others, it is to protect the access to land of the greatest number. The relationships of the peasantries to state power are also the result of different political paths, particularly as concerns the national liberation movements of Asia and Africa: populisms, peasant democracies, state anti-peasant autocracies show the diversity of peoples’ heritages. The way in which international markets are run favour some, penalize others. These divergences of interest are sometimes echoed in many of the peasant movements and often in the divergences of the political strategies adopted.



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