

CHAPTER 1

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY AND THE AGRARIAN QUESTION: CONSTRUCTING CONVERGENCE OF STRUGGLES WITHIN DIVERSITY

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This first chapter provides a series of analytical elements to answer some of the major questions of our times on agriculture: (i) what kind of agriculture – capitalist, socialist, peasant – can guarantee food sovereignty without which the construction of a multipolar society is impossible? (ii) which food productions should benefit from top priority in the decision-making process for development? (iii) how does one conciliate the growth needed for food production with the preservation of the viability of the earth for the generations to come? The present contribution – in defense of the peasant solution – will put the emphasis on building convergences of the struggles operating in diverse conditions in the North and in the South of our planet.

<A-level>Family Agriculture in the Present World: Convergences and Differences between the North and the South

<B-level>*In the North: An efficient family agriculture perfectly integrated into dominant capitalism*

Modern family agriculture, dominant in Western Europe and in the United States, has clearly shown its superiority over other forms of agricultural production. Annual production

per worker (the equivalent of 1,000 to 2,000 tonnes of cereal) has no equal and it has enabled a tiny section of the active population (about 5 per cent) to supply the whole country abundantly and even produce exportable surpluses (Berthelot, 2001). Modern family agriculture has also shown an exceptional capacity for absorbing innovations and much flexibility in adapting to the demand.

This agriculture does not share a specific characteristic of capitalism, that is, its main mode of labour organisation. 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 (FAO, 2006). 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 constitutes an inseparable part of the capitalist economy into which it is fully integrated.

In this family agricultural business, 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 (1986) – 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 (Mazoyer and Roudart, 1997). 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 his income should correspond to the sum of the wages for his work and the profit from his 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 that country (UNDP, various years). The state intervention and regulation policies in Europe and the United States, where this form of agriculture dominates, have as their declared objective the aim of ensuring (through subsidies) the equality of ‘peasant’ and ‘worker’ incomes (CETIM and GRAIN, 2012). The profits from the capital used by farmers are therefore collected by segments of industrial and financial capital further up the food chain. Control over agricultural production also operates down the food chain by modern commerce (particularly the supermarkets).

In the family agriculture of Europe and the United States, the component of the land rent, which is meant to constitute, in conventional economics, the remuneration of land

productivity, does not figure in the remuneration of the farmer/owner, or the owner (when he is not the farmer). The French model of ‘anaesthetising the owner’ is very telling: in law, the rights of the farmer are given priority over those of the owner. In the United States, 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 (Amin, 2005).

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, corresponding, for each stage of the development of mechanised equipment, to what a farmer alone (or a small family unit) can work, has gradually extended, as Marcel Mazoyer and Laurence Roudart (1997) have well demonstrated, by the facts, and illustrated, as an efficiency requirement.

In actual fact, therefore, the agricultural family unit, efficient as it is (and it is) is only a subcontractor, caught in the pincers between upstream agribusiness (which imposes selected seeds today, GMOs tomorrow), industry (which supplies the equipment and chemical products), finance (which provides the necessary credits), and downstream in the commercialisation 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 him with 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, that is, 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 they are very ‘modernised’ (that is, mechanised), as in the Southern Cone, and sometimes not. But family agriculture remains dominant in Europe and the United States.

‘Really existing socialism’ carried out various experiments 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 modernisation of the agricultural family business (its equipment and its specialisation) 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 (Kautsky, 1988). This prediction did not materialise in Europe and the United States. However, the myth that it transmitted was believed in the

Soviet Union, Eastern Europe (with some nuances), China, Vietnam (in the modalities specific to that country), and, at one time, Cuba. Independent of the other reasons that led to the failure of these experiments (e.g., bureaucratic management, bad macroeconomic planning, reduction of responsibilities due to lack of democracy), there were also errors in judgement about the advantages of the division of labour and specialisation, extrapolated – without any justification – from certain forms of industry and applied to other fields of production and social activity.

While the reasons for this failure are now recognised, this cannot be said for the forms of capitalist agriculture in the regions of Latin America and southern Africa mentioned earlier. And yet, the failure is also obvious, despite the profitability and the competitiveness of these modernised 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).

<B-level>*In the South: Poor peasant cultivators as part of a dominated peripheral capitalism*

Peasant agricultures in the South constitute almost half of humanity – 3 billion human beings. These types of agriculture vary: there are those that have benefited from the green revolution (fertilisers, pesticides and selected seeds) although they are not very mechanised, but their production has risen to between 100 and 500 quintals per labourer; and then there are those which are the same as before the 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 10:1 before 1940, is now 100:1. In other words, the rate of progress in agricultural productivity has largely outstripped that in other activities, bringing about a lowering of the real price from 5 to 1 (Mazoyer and Roudart, 1997).

This peasant agriculture in the countries of the South is also well and truly integrated into local and world capitalism. However, closer study immediately reveals 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 parcellised; the poverty of the rural world (three-quarters of the

victims of undernourishment are rural [Delcourt, 2010]); 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 bought inputs (at least for 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’ (or half of the peasantry of the South [Mazoyer, 2002], 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.

<B-level>*Is the modernisation 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 if some 50 million more modern farms were given access to the large areas of land for their activities (taking it from the peasant economy and, of course, choosing the best soils) and if they had 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, i.e., a few decades. What would happen to these billions of human beings, most of whom are already the poorest of the poor, but who feed themselves, for better and/or for worse – and for a third of them, for worse? No industrial development, more or less competitive, even in a far-fetched hypothesis of a continual yearly growth of 7 per cent for three-quarters of humanity, could absorb even a third of this labour reserve within a period of fifty years. 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 modernisation 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 3 billion 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 into its phase of declining senility: the logic of the system is no longer able to ensure the simple survival of humanity (Amin, 1997, 1998). Capitalism is becoming barbaric and leads directly to genocide. It is more than ever necessary to replace it with other development logics that are more rational.

So, what is to be done? It is necessary to accept the continuation of peasant agriculture in the foreseeable future in the twenty-first century. Not due to romantic nostalgia, but quite simply because the solution to the problem is to overtake the logics that drive capitalism and participate in the long, secular transition into 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 global 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 global market, the desirable regulation can probably be put in place through inter-regional agreements that meet the requirements of a development that integrates people rather than excludes them.

<B-level>*There is no alternative to food sovereignty*

At the global level, food consumption is assured, for 85 per cent of it, by local production (FAO, 2013). Nevertheless, this production corresponds to very different levels of satisfaction of food needs: excellent for North America and West and Central Europe, acceptable in China, mediocre for the rest of Asia and Latin America, and disastrous for Africa. One can also see a strong correlation between the quality and the levels of industrialisation of the various regions: countries and regions that are more industrialised are able to feed their populations well from their own agricultural produce.

The United States and Europe have understood the importance of food sovereignty well and have successfully implemented it through systematic economic policies. But, apparently, what is good for them is not good for the others. The World Bank, the OECD and the European Union try to impose an alternative on the Third World countries, which is ‘food security’ (for an overview, see: FAO, 1983). According to them, these countries do not need food sovereignty and should rely on international trade to cover the deficit in their food

requirements, however large it may be. This is perhaps easy for those countries that are large exporters of natural resources (oil, uranium, etc.). For the others, the ‘advice’ of the Western powers is to specialise their agriculture as much as possible in the production of agricultural commodities for export (cotton, tropical oils, and agro-fuels in the future). The defenders of ‘food security’ – for others, not for themselves – do not consider nor take into account the fact that this specialisation, which has been practised since colonisation, has not made it possible to improve the miserable food rations of the peoples concerned, especially the peasants.

Thus, the advice to peasants who have not yet set foot in the industrial era (e.g., in Africa) is not to engage in ‘insane’, ‘negative’ or ‘aberrant’ industrialisation projects. These are some of the terms used by authors (including experts of the World Bank) who go so far as to attribute the failure of agricultural development in Africa to the industrialisation option of their governments. It is precisely those countries that have taken this “insane” option (e.g., Korea or China) that have become ‘emerging countries’ and are able to feed their population better (or less badly), and those that have not done so (in Africa) that are besieged by chronic malnutrition and famine.

This does not appear to embarrass the defenders of the so-called principle of ‘food security’ – or more accurately, ‘food insecurity’. There is little doubt that underneath this obstinacy against Africa committing itself to the path that the success of Asia has inspired lies more than a touch of contempt (if not racism) towards the people. It is regrettable that such condescension is to be found in many Western circles and organisations with good intentions, such as NGOs and even research centres. The complete failure of the ‘food security’ option is demonstrated by governments that thought they could provide for the needs of their poor urban population through exports (oil among others). They now find themselves trapped by the food deficit that is growing at an alarming rate as a result of these policies. For the other countries, particularly the African ones, 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 the partners of the OECD (such as the EU institutions) are clinging to the so-called food security policies at a time when the ongoing crisis clearly illustrates their failure. It is not that the governments of the Triad (U.S.A., Europe, 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 not the ‘food weapon’ already been deployed? Thus, there is another 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 industrialisation.

<A-level>The Struggles of the Peasants in the South for the Access to Land

As the access to land depends on ‘tenure status’, first of all, two types of systems of land tenure must be defined: those based on the private ownership of farmland and those that are not.

<B-level>*Land tenure based on the private ownership of land*

In this case, the owner has to use the terms of Roman law, *usus* (the right to use an asset), *fructus* (the right to appropriate the returns from the asset) and *abusus* (the right to transfer). This right is ‘absolute’ in the sense that the owner can farm his land himself, rent it out or even abstain from farming. The property may be given away or sold and it forms part of assets that can be inherited.

Certainly, this right is often less absolute than it appears. In all cases use is subject to public order laws (such as those prohibiting its unlawful use for the cultivation of stupefacients) and, increasingly, to environmental regulations. In some countries where an agrarian reform has been carried through, a limit has been established for the maximum surface area an individual or family can own. The rights of tenant farmers (duration and guarantee of lease and amount of land rent) limit those of the owners in varying degrees to the extent of affording the tenant farmers the major benefit of the protection of the state and its agricultural policies (this is the case in France [Braudel, 1986]). Freedom to choose the crops is not always allowed. In Egypt, the state agricultural services have since ages determined the proportion of land allotted to different crops depending on their irrigation requirements (Amin, 2011).

This system of landownership is modern inasmuch as it is the product of the constitution of (‘really existing’) historic capitalism, which first originated in Western Europe (England) and among the Europeans who colonised America. It was established through the destruction of the ‘customary’ systems for regulating access to land, even in Europe. The statutes of feudal Europe were based on the superposition of rights to the same land: those of the peasant concerned and other members of a village community (serfs or freemen), those of

the feudal lord and those of the king. The assault on these rights took the form of ‘enclosures’ in England, imitated in different ways in all European countries during the course of the nineteenth century. Very early on, in Volume 1 of *Capital*, Marx (1976) denounced this radical transformation, which excluded the majority of the peasants from access to use of the land, turning them into proletariat emigrants to the towns (forced by circumstance). He regarded the case of those who stayed on as farm labourers or tenant farmers as among the type of measures of primitive accumulation that dispossessed the producers of property or of the use of the means of production.

The use of the terms of Roman law (*usus* and *abusus*) to describe the status of modern bourgeois ownership perhaps indicates that the latter had distant ‘roots’ – in this case, in landownership in the Roman Empire and, more precisely, in pro-slavery latifundist ownership. The fact remains that as these particular forms of ownership have disappeared in feudal Europe, we cannot talk of the ‘continuity’ of a ‘western’ concept of ownership (itself associated with ‘individualism’ and of the values it represents), which has, in fact, never existed.

The rhetoric of capitalist discourse about its ‘liberal’ ideology has produced not only this myth of ‘western continuity’, but, above all, another even more dangerous myth, namely that of the absolute and superior rationale of economic management based on the private and exclusive ownership of the means of production, which it considers farmland to be. In fact, according to conventional economics the ‘market’, that is, the transferability of ownership of capital and land, determines the optimal (most efficient) use of these ‘factors of production’. So, according to this principle, land becomes a ‘merchandise like any other’, transferable at the ‘market’ price, in order to guarantee that the best use is made of it both for the owner and society as a whole. This is nothing but mere tautology, yet the whole (‘vulgar’, or to use Marx’s term, ‘acritical’) bourgeois economic discourse is based on it.

This same rhetoric is used to legitimise the principle of landownership by dint of the fact that it alone can guarantee that the farmer who invests to improve his yield per hectare and the productivity of his work (and that of any employees) will not suddenly be dispossessed of the fruit of his labour and savings. This is not the case and other forms of regulating the right to use the land can produce similar results. To sum up, this dominant discourse draws the conclusions that it sees fit from the construction of western modernity in order to propose them as the only necessary ‘rules’ for the advancement of all other peoples. To make land everywhere private property in the current sense of the term, as practised in

capitalist centres, is to spread the policy of ‘enclosures’ all over the world, in other words, it is to hasten the dispossession of the peasants.

This course of action is not new; it began and continued through the earlier centuries of the global expansion of capitalism in the context of colonial systems in particular. Today the WTO intends only to accelerate the process even though the destruction that would result from this capitalist approach is becoming increasingly foreseeable and predictable. Resistance to this option by the peasants and peoples affected would make it possible to build a real and genuinely human alternative.

<B-level>*Land tenure systems not based on the private ownership of land*

As we can see, this definition is in the negative – *not* based on private property – and therefore cannot be designated to a homogeneous group since access to land is regulated in all human societies. However, it is regulated either by ‘customary authorities’, ‘modern authorities’, the state or more specifically, and more often, by a group of institutions and practices involving individuals, communities and the state.

‘Customary’ administration, expressed in terms of customary law or known as such, has always or almost always ruled out private property, in the modern sense, and always guaranteed access to land to all families (rather than individuals) concerned. In other words, those that are part of a ‘village community’, which is distinct and can be identified as such. Yet it has (almost) never guaranteed ‘equal’ right to land. In the first place, it most often excluded ‘foreigners’ (usually the vestiges of conquered peoples) and ‘slaves’ (of differing status) and shared land unequally depending on clan membership, lineage, caste or status (‘chiefs’, ‘free men’, etc.). So there is no reason to heap excessive praise upon these traditional rights like a number of anti-imperialist national ideologues unfortunately do. Progress will certainly require them to be challenged.

Customary administration has almost never been the system used in ‘independent villages’. These have always been part of stable or changing, sound or precarious state groupings depending on circumstances, but very rarely have they been absent. So, the rights of use of the communities and families that made them up have always been limited by those of the state, which levied taxes. Which is why I describe the vast family of pre-modern production methods as ‘tributary’ (Amin, 1977, 1978, 1980).

These complex forms of ‘customary’ administration, which differ from one time and place to another, only persist, in the best of cases, in extremely deteriorated forms and have

been under attack by the dominant rationale of world capitalism for at least two centuries (in Asia and Africa), and sometimes five (in Latin America).

In this respect, India is probably one of the clearest examples. Before British colonisation, access to land was managed by ‘village communities’, or more precisely by their ruling upper castes and classes. The lower castes or the Dalits were excluded from this and were treated as a kind of collective slave class similar to the Hilotes of Sparta. These village communities were, in turn, controlled and exploited by the imperial Mughal state and its vassals (states of the Rajahs and other rulers), which levied tribute. The British raised the status of the zamindars, formerly land revenue collectors, to that of ‘owners’. These zamindars became large allied landowners in spite of tradition, although they upheld ‘tradition’ when it suited them, for example, by ‘respecting’ the exclusion of Dalits from access to land! Independent India has not challenged this serious colonial inheritance, which has been the cause of incredible poverty of the majority of its peasantry and, later, of its urban proletariat. The solution to these problems and the building of a viable economy for the peasant majority is possible through an agrarian reform in the strictest sense of the term. The European and U.S. colonisations of Southeast Asia and the Philippines respectively, resulted in similar developments. The ‘enlightened despotic’ regimes of the East (the Ottoman Empire, the Egypt of Mohamed Ali and the Shahs of Iran) also by and large established private ownership in the modern sense to the benefit of a new class, wrongly described as ‘feudal’ (by most historical Marxist thinking) and recruited from among the senior ranks of their power system.

As a result, since then, private ownership of land has affected the majority of farmland, especially the best, throughout Asia excluding China, Vietnam and the former Soviet republics of Central Asia. There are only remnants of deteriorated para-customary systems in the poorest regions that are of the least value to the dominant capitalist farming in particular. These structures differ widely, juxtaposing large landowners – country capitalists – rich peasants, middle peasants, poor peasants and the landless. There is no peasant ‘organisation’ or ‘movement’ that transcends these acute class conflicts.

In Arab Africa, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Kenya, the colonisers (with the exception of Egypt) granted their colonists (or the Boers in South Africa) ‘modern’ private properties of a generally latifundist type. This legacy has certainly been brought to an end in Algeria, but the peasantry here had almost disappeared and proletarianised (and reduced to vagrancy) by the extension of colonial lands, whereas in Morocco and Tunisia the local bourgeoisie took them over (which was also the case to some extent in Kenya). In Zimbabwe, the revolution

has challenged the legacy of colonialisation to the benefit, in part, of new middle owners of urban rather than rural origin and, in part, of ‘poor peasant communities’. South Africa still remains outside this movement. The remnants of deteriorated para-customary systems that survive in the ‘poor’ regions of Morocco or Berber Algeria and the former Bantustans of South Africa are threatened with private appropriation from inside and outside the societies concerned.

In all these situations, a scrutiny of the peasant struggles (and possibly those of the organisations that support them) is required: are we talking about ‘rich peasant’ movements and demands in conflict with some orientation of the state policy (and the influences of the dominant world system on them), or of poor and landless peasants? Can they form an ‘alliance’ against the dominant (so-called ‘neoliberal’) system? Under what conditions? To what extent? Can the demands – expressed or otherwise – of poor and landless peasants be ‘forgotten’?

In intertropical Africa, the apparent survival of ‘customary’ systems is certainly more visible because here the model of colonisation took a different and unique direction, known in French (the term has no translation in English) as *‘économie de traite’*. The administration of access to land was left to the so-called ‘customary’ authorities, though controlled by the colonial state (through traditional clan leaders, legitimate or otherwise, created by the administration). The purpose of this control was to force peasants to produce a quota of specific products for export (peanuts, cotton, coffee, cocoa) over and above what they required for their own subsistence. Maintaining a system of land tenure that did not rely on private property suited colonisation since no land rent entered into determining the prices of the designated products. This resulted in land being wasted, destroyed by the expansion of crops, sometimes permanently, as illustrated by the desertification of peanut producing areas of Senegal.

Yet again capitalism showed that its ‘short-term rationale’, an integral part of its dominant rationale, was in fact the cause of an ecological disaster. The combination of subsistence farming and the production of goods for export also meant that the peasants were paid almost nothing for their work. To talk in these circumstances of a ‘customary land tenure system’ is going too far. It is a new regime that preserves only the appearance of ‘traditions’ and often the least valuable ones.

<B-level>*China and Vietnam*

In Asia, China and Vietnam provide a unique example of an access to land administration system that is based neither on private ownership nor on ‘customs’, but on a new revolutionary right unknown elsewhere – with the exception of Cuba. It is the right of all peasants (defined as inhabitants of a village) to equal access to land, and I stress the use of equal. This right is the finest accomplishment of the Chinese and Vietnamese revolutions.

In China, and even more so in Vietnam, which was more extensively colonised, ‘former’ land tenure systems (those that I have described as ‘tributory’ in Amin, 1977, 1978, 1980) were already quite eroded by dominant capitalism. The former ruling classes of the imperial power system had turned most of the agricultural land into private or quasi-private property whereas the development of capitalism encouraged the formation of new rich peasant classes. Mao Zedong is the first and without doubt the only one, followed by the Chinese and Vietnamese communists, to have defined a revolutionary agrarian strategy based on the mobilisation of the majority of poor, landless and middle peasants. From the outset, the triumph of this revolution made it possible to abolish private ownership of land, which was replaced by state ownership, and organise new forms of equal access to land for all peasants. This organisation has certainly passed through several successive phases including that inspired by the Soviet model based on production cooperatives. The limited achievements made by the latter have led both countries to return to peasant family farming.

Is this model viable? Can it lead to a sustained improvement in production without bringing about an excess of rural manpower? Under what conditions? What supporting policies does it require from the state? What types of political management can meet the challenge?

Ideally, the model involves the dual affirmation of the rights of the state – sole owner – and of the usufructuary – the peasant family. It guarantees equal distribution of village land among all families and prohibits any use of it other than for family farming, such as renting. It makes sure that the proceeds of investments made by the usufructuary return to him/her in the short term through his/her right of ownership of all farm produce – which is freely marketed, although the state ensures a minimum price – and in the long term by enabling inheritance of usufruct exclusively to the children remaining on the farm (any person who emigrates from the village loses his/her right of access to the land, which is then redistributed). As this involves rich land but also small (even tiny) farms, the system is only viable as long as the vertical investment (the green revolution with no large-scale industrialisation) is as efficient to allow the increase of production per rural worker as horizontal investment (the expansion of farming supported by increased industrialisation).

Has this 'ideal' model ever been implemented? Certainly something close to it has been, for example, during Deng Xiaoping's time in China. However, the fact remains that although this model ensures a high degree of equality within the village, it has never been able to overcome the inequalities between one community and another that are a function of the quality of the land, the density of the population and the proximity of urban markets. Furthermore, no redistribution system has been up to the challenge, even through the structures of cooperatives and state trade monopolies of the 'Soviet' phase.

Definitely more serious is the fact that the system is itself subject to internal and external pressures, which undermine its direction and social scale. Access to credit, satisfactory subsidisation are subject to bargaining and interventions of all kinds, legitimate or otherwise. Equal access to land is not synonymous with equal access to the best production conditions. The popularisation of the 'market' ideology contributes to this destabilisation. The system tolerates (and has even re-legitimised) farm tenancy and the employment of waged employees. Right-wing discourse – encouraged from abroad – stresses the need to give the peasants in question 'ownership' of the land and to open up the 'farmland market'. It is quite clear that rich peasants (and even agribusiness) seeking to increase their property support this discourse.

This system of peasant access to land has been administered thus far by the state and the party, which are one. Clearly, one might have thought that it could have been administered by genuinely elected village councils. This is certainly necessary as there is hardly any other means of winning the support of the majority and reducing the intrigues of the minority would-be beneficiaries of a more markedly capitalist approach. The 'party dictatorship' has shown itself to be largely inclined to careerism, opportunism and even corruption. Social struggles are currently far from non-existent in rural China and Vietnam. They are no less strongly expressed than elsewhere in the world but they are by and large 'defensive' and concerned with defending the legacy of the revolution – equal right to land for all. This legacy must be defended, especially as it is under greater threat than it may appear despite repeated affirmations from both governments that the 'state ownership of the land will never be abolished in favour of private property'! Yet, today this defence demands recognition of the right to do so through the organisation of those who are affected, that is, the peasants (Amin, 2013b).

<B-level> *Agrarian reforms and forms of organisation of agricultural production and land tenure*

In Asia and Africa, the forms of organisation of agricultural production and land tenure are too varied for one single formula of ‘alternative peasant social construction’ to be recommended for all.

By ‘agrarian reform’ we must understand the redistribution of private property when it is deemed too unequally divided. It is not a matter of ‘reforming the land tenure status’ since we are dealing with a land tenure system governed by the principle of ownership. However, this reform seeks to meet the perfectly legitimate demand of poor and landless peasants and to reduce the political and social power of large landowners. Yet, where it has been implemented – in Asia and Africa after the liberation from former forms of imperialist and colonial domination – this has been done by non-revolutionary hegemonic social blocks in the sense that they were not directed by the dominated poor classes, who are a majority. The exception to this is China and Vietnam, where, in fact, for this reason there has been no ‘agrarian reform’ in the strict sense of the term but, as I have already said, suppression of the private ownership of land, affirmation of state ownership and implementation of the principle of equal access to the use of the land by all peasants. Elsewhere, real reforms dispossessed the only large owners to the eventual benefit of middle and even rich peasants (in the longer term), ignoring the interests of the poor and landless. This has been the case in Egypt and other Arab countries. The reform underway in Zimbabwe may have a similar perspective. In other situations, such as in India, South East Asia, South Africa and Kenya, reform is still on the agenda of what is needed.

Even where agrarian reform is an immediate unavoidable demand, its long-term success is uncertain as it reinforces an attachment to ‘small ownership’, which becomes an obstacle to challenging the land tenure system based on private ownership.

Russian history illustrates this tragic situation. The evolution begun after the abolition of serfdom (in 1861), accelerated by the revolution of 1905, and then the policies of Stolypine, had already produced a ‘demand for ownership’ that the revolution of 1917 had consecrated by means of a radical agrarian reform. As we know, the new small owners were not happy about giving up their rights to the benefit of the unfortunate cooperatives created at the time in the 1930s. A ‘different approach’ based on peasant family economy and generalised small ownership might have been possible but it was not tried.

Yet, what about the regions (other than China and Vietnam) in which the land tenure system is not (yet) based on private property? We are, of course, talking about inter-tropical Africa.

We return here to an old debate. In the late nineteenth century, Marx, in his correspondence with the Russian Narodniks – Vera Zasulich among others (see his letter on: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1881/03/zasulich1.htm>) –, dares to state that the absence of private property may be a major advantage for the socialist revolution by allowing the transition from a system for administering access to land other than that governed by private ownership (but he does not say what forms this new system should take, and the use of ‘collective’, however fair, remains insufficient). Twenty years later, Lenin claimed that this possibility no longer existed and had been destroyed by the penetration of capitalism and the spirit of private ownership that accompanied it (see: Lenin, 1965). Was this judgment right or wrong? I cannot comment on this matter as it goes beyond my knowledge of Russia. However, the fact remains that Lenin did not consider this issue of crucial importance, having accepted Kautsky's point of view ‘*On the Agrarian Question*’. Kautsky generalised the scope of the modern European capitalist model and felt that the peasantry was destined to ‘disappear’ due to the expansion of capitalism itself (see: Kautsky, 1988).

In other words, capitalism would have been capable of ‘resolving the agrarian question’. Although 80 per cent true for the capitalist centres (that is, the Triad, which is 15 per cent of the world's population), this proposition does not hold true for the ‘rest of the world’ (that is, 85 per cent of its population!). History shows that not only has capitalism not resolved this question for 85 per cent of the people, but from the perspective of its continued expansion, it cannot resolve it any longer (other than by genocide! A fine solution!). So it fell upon Mao Zedong and the communist parties of China and Vietnam to find a suitable solution to the challenge (Amin, 2013a).

The question resurfaced during the 1960s with African independence. The states and party-states that arose from the national liberation movements of the continent enjoyed, in varying degrees, the support of the peasant majority of their peoples. Their propensity to populism led them to conceive of a ‘specific (African) socialist approach’. This approach could certainly be described as very moderately radical in its relationship with both dominant imperialism and the local classes associated with its expansion. It did not raise the question of the rebuilding of peasant society in a humanist and universalist spirit to any lesser extent, a spirit that often proved highly critical of the ‘traditions’ that the foreign masters had in fact tried to use to their advantage.

All, or almost all, African countries adopted the same principle, formulated as an ‘inalienable right of state ownership’ of all land. I do not believe this proclamation to have been a ‘mistake’, nor do I think that it was motivated by extreme ‘statism’.

Examination of the way that the current peasant system really operates and its integration into the capitalist world economy reveals the scale of the challenge. This management is provided by a complex system that is based on 'custom', private ownership (capitalist) and the rights of the state. The 'custom' in question has degenerated and barely serves to disguise the discourse of bloodthirsty dictators who pay lip service to 'authenticity', which is nothing but a fig leaf that they think hides their hunger for pillage and treachery in the face of imperialism. The only major obstacle to the expansionist tendency of private ownership is the possible resistance of its victims. In some regions that are better able to yield rich crops (irrigated areas and market garden farms) land is bought, sold and rented with no formal land title.

Inalienable state property, which I defend in principle, itself becomes a vehicle for private ownership. Thus, the state can 'provide' the land necessary for the development of a tourist area, a local or foreign agribusiness or even a state farm. The land titles necessary for access to better areas are distributed in a way that is rarely transparent. In all cases the peasant families who inhabited the areas and are asked to leave are victims of these practices, which are an abuse of power. Still, the 'abolition' of inalienable state property in order to transfer it to the occupiers is not feasible in reality (all village lands would have to be registered with the land registry!), and if this were attempted it would only allow rural and urban notables to help themselves to the best plots.

The right answer to the challenges of the management of a land tenure system not based on private ownership (as the main system at least) is through state reform and its active involvement in the implementation of a modernised and economically viable and democratic system for administering access to land that rules out, or at least minimises, inequality. The solution certainly does not lie in a 'return to customs', which would, in fact, be impossible and only serve to accentuate inequalities and open the way for savage capitalism.

We cannot say that no African state has ever tried the approach recommended here. Following Mali's independence in September 1961, the Sudanese Union began what has very wrongly been described as 'collectivisation'. In fact, the cooperatives that were set up were not productive cooperatives, and production remained the exclusive responsibility of family farms. It was a form of modernised collective authority that replaced the so-called 'custom' on which colonial authority had depended. The party that took over this new modern power was clearly aware of the challenge and set the objective of abolishing customary forms of power that were deemed to be 'reactionary', even 'feudal'. It is true that this new peasant

authority, which was formally democratic (those in charge were elected), was in actual fact only as democratic as the state and the party.

However, it had ‘modern’ responsibilities, namely, to ensure that access to land was administered ‘correctly’, that is, without ‘discrimination’, to manage loans, the distribution of subsidies (supplied by state trade) and product marketing (also partly the responsibility of state trade). In practice, nepotism and extortion have certainly never been stamped out. The only response to these abuses should have been the progressive democratisation of the state and not its ‘retreat’, as liberalism then imposed (by means of an extremely violent military dictatorship) to the benefit of the traders (dioulas).

Other experiences in the liberated areas of Guinea Bissau impelled by theories put forward by Amilcar Cabral, in Burkina Faso at the time of Sankara, have also tackled these challenges head on and sometimes produced unquestionable progress that people try to erase today. The creation of elected rural collectives in Senegal is a response whose principle I would not hesitate to defend. Democracy is a never-ending process, no more so in Europe than in Africa.

<A-level>Alternatives

What current dominant discourse understands by ‘reform of the land tenure system’ 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 as well as a number of NGOs with considerable financial backing – understands land reform to mean the acceleration of privatisation of land and nothing more. The aim is clear: create conditions that allow ‘modern’ islands of foreign or local agribusiness to take possession of the land they need in order to expand. Yet, the additional produce that these islands could provide (for export or creditworthy local market) will never meet the challenge of the requirements of creating a prosperous society for all, which implies the advancement of the peasant family economy as a whole.

So, counter to this, a land tenure reform conceived from the perspective of the creation of a real, efficient and democratic alternative supported by prosperous peasant family production must define the role of the state (principal inalienable owner) and the institutions and mechanisms of administering access to land and the means of production.

I do not exclude here complex mixed formulas that are specific to each country. Private ownership of land may be acceptable – at least where it is established and held to be legitimate. Its redistribution can or should be reviewed, where necessary, as part of an agrarian reform (South Africa, Zimbabwe and Kenya, with respect to Sub-Saharan Africa). I would not necessarily even rule out the controlled clearance of land for agribusiness in all cases. The key lies elsewhere, in the modernisation of peasant family farming and the democratisation of the management of its integration into the national and global economy. This is no blueprint to propose for these areas, so I will limit myself to pointing out some of the great problems that this reform poses.

The democratic question is indisputably central to the response to the challenge. It is a complex and difficult question that cannot be reduced to an insipid discourse about good governance and electoral pluralism. There is an undeniable cultural aspect to the question: democracy leads to the abolition of ‘customs’ that are hostile to it (prejudice concerning social hierarchies and, above all, the treatment of women). There are legal and institutional aspects to be considered: creating systems of administrative, commercial and personal rights that are consistent with the aims of the plans for social construction and establishment of suitable (generally elected) institutions. However, above all, the progress of democracy will depend definitively on the social power of its defenders. The organisation of peasant movements is, in this respect, absolutely irreplaceable. It is only to the extent that peasants are able to express themselves that progress will be made in the direction known as ‘participative democracy’ (as opposed to the reduction of the problem to the dimension of ‘representative democracy’).

Relations between men and women are another aspect of the democratic challenge that is no less essential. Peasant ‘family farming’ obviously concerns the family, which is to this day characterised almost everywhere by structures that require the submission of women and the exploitation of their workforce. Democratic transformation will not be possible in these conditions without the organised action of the women concerned.

Attention must be given to the question of migration. In general, ‘customary’ rights exclude ‘foreigners’ (that is, all those who do not belong to the clans, lineages and families that make up the village community in question) from the right to land or place conditions upon their access to it. Migration resulting from colonial and postcolonial development has sometimes been at such a large scale that it has overturned the concepts of ethnic ‘homogeneity’ in the regions affected by this development. Immigrants from outside the state in question (such as the Burkinabe in Ivory Coast) or those who are formally citizens of the

state but of an 'ethnic' origin other than the regions they have made their homes (like the Hausa in the Nigerian state of Plateau), see their rights to the land they have cultivated challenged by short-sighted and chauvinistic political movements that also have foreign support. To throw the 'communitarism' in question into ideological and political disarray and uncompromisingly denounce the paracultural discourse that underpins it has become one of the indispensable conditions of real democratic progress.

The analyses and propositions set out here only concern the status of tenure or rules on access to land. These matters are certainly central to debates on the future of agricultural and food production, peasant societies and the people that make them up, yet they do not cover all aspects of the challenge. Access to land remains devoid of the potential to transform society if the peasants who benefit from it cannot have access to the essential means of production under suitable conditions (credit, seed, subsidies, access to markets). Both national policies and international negotiations that aim to define the context in which prices and revenues are determined are other aspects of the peasant question.

Further information on these questions that go beyond the scope of the subject we are dealing with here can be found in the writings of Jacques Berthelot – a critical analyst of projects to integrate agricultural and food production into 'global' markets (see, in particular: Berthelot, 2001). Therefore, we shall restrict ourselves to the two main conclusions and proposals reached:

(i) We cannot allow agricultural and food production, and land, to be treated as ordinary 'merchandise' and then agree to the need to integrate them into plans for global liberalisation promoted by the dominant powers (the United States and Europe) and transnationalised capital.

The agenda of the WTO, which inherited the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1995, must quite simply be refused. In Asia and Africa, peasant organisations, social and political forces that defend the interests of popular classes and the nation (and demands for food sovereignty in particular), as well as those who have not given up on a development project worthy of its name, must be persuaded that negotiations entered into as part of the WTO agenda can only result in catastrophe for the peoples of Asia and Africa. It must be emphasised that this agenda threatens to devastate the lives of more than 2.5 billion peasants from the two continents while offering them no other prospect than migration to slums, being shut away in 'concentration camps', the construction of which is already planned for the unfortunate future emigrants (Amin, 2008).

Capitalism has reached a stage where its continued expansion requires the implementation of 'enclosure' policies on a global scale, like the enclosures at the beginning of its development in England. Except that today, the destruction of the 'peasant reserves' of cheap labour on a global scale will be nothing less than the genocide of half of humanity. On the one hand is the destruction of the peasant societies of Asia and Africa; and on the other, some billions in extra profit for global capital and its local associates, derived from a socially useless production, since it is not destined to satisfy the unsolvable needs of hundreds of millions of extra hungry, but to increase the number of obese in the North and those who emulate them in the South!

So Asian and African states must quite simply be called upon to withdraw from these negotiations and therefore reject decisions taken by the imperialist United States and Europe within the famous 'Green Rooms' of the WTO. This voice must be made to be heard and the governments concerned must be forced to ensure that it is heard in the WTO.

We can no longer accept the behaviour of the major imperialist powers (the United States and Europe) that together assault the people of the South within the WTO. It must be pointed out that the same powers that try to unilaterally impose their 'liberalist' proposals on the countries of the South do not abide by these proposals themselves and behave in a way that can only be described as systematic cheating.

The Farm Bill in the United States and the agricultural policy of the European Union violate the very principles that the WTO is trying to impose on others. The 'partnership' projects proposed by the European Union following the Cotonou Convention as of 2008 are really 'criminal', to use the strong but fair expression of J. Berthelot (2012).

So we can and must hold these powers to account through the authorities of the WTO set up for this purpose. A group of countries from the South not only could but also must do it.

Asian and African peasants organised themselves in the previous period of their peoples' liberation struggles. They found their place in powerful historical blocks that enabled them to be victorious over the imperialism of the time. These blocks were sometimes revolutionary (China and Vietnam) and found their main support in rural areas among the majority classes of middle, poor and landless peasants. When, elsewhere, they were led by the national bourgeoisie, or those among the rich and middle peasants who aspired to becoming bourgeois, large landowners and 'customary' local authorities in the pay of colonisation were isolated.

Having turned over a new leaf, the challenge of the new collective imperialism of the Triad (United States, Europe and Japan) will only be lifted if historical blocks form in Asia and Africa that cannot be a remake of the former ones. The definition of the nature of these blocks, their strategies and their immediate and longer-term objectives in these new circumstances, is the challenge facing the alter-globalist movement and its constituent parts in social forums. This is a far more serious challenge than imagined by a large number of movements engaged in current struggles.

New peasant organisations exist in Asia and Africa that support the current visible struggles. Often, when political systems make it impossible for formal organisations to form, social struggles for the campaign take the form of ‘movements’ with no apparent direction. Where they do exist, these actions and programmes must be more closely examined: What peasant social forces do they represent? Whose interests do they defend? The majority mass of peasants or the minorities that aspire to find their place in the expansion of dominant global capitalism?

We should be wary of instantaneous replies to these complex and difficult questions. We should not ‘condemn’ organisations and movements for not having the support of the majority of peasants for their radical programmes. That would be to ignore the demands of the formation of large alliances and strategies in stages. Neither should we subscribe to the discourse of ‘naive alter-globalism’ that often sets the tone of forums and fuels the illusion that the world would be set on the right track only by the existence of social movements. A discourse, it is true, that is more of numerous NGOs – well-meaning perhaps – than of peasant and worker organisations.

The analyses and proposals made in this study are only relevant for Asia and Africa. The agrarian questions in Latin America and the Caribbean have their own particular and sometimes unique particularities. Thus, in the Southern Cone of the continent (southern Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay or Chile), modernised, mechanised latifundium that benefits from cheap labour is the method of farming that is best adapted to the demands of a liberal global capitalist system that is even more competitive than the agriculture in the United States and Europe.

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