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Presentation

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY AND THE AGRARIAN QUESTION

Constructing convergence of struggles within diversity

Cet ouvrage fournit des éléments de réponse précieux concernant quelque unes des questions majeures de notre temps : (i) quelle agriculture – capitaliste, socialiste, paysanne – peut garantir la souveraineté alimentaire sans laquelle la construction d'un monde multi polaire est impossible, (ii) quelles productions alimentaires devraient bénéficier de la priorité dans le développement, (iii) comment concilier la croissance nécessaire de la production alimentaire et la préservation de la viabilité de notre planète pour les générations futures ?

Ma contribution – en défense de la solution paysanne – place l'accent sur la construction de convergences des luttes opérant dans des conditions diverses au Nord et au Sud de notre planète.

1. L'agriculture familiale dans le monde contemporain Convergences et différences entre le Nord et le Sud

L'agriculture familiale moderne, dominante en Europe occidentale et aux Etats-Unis, a largement démontré sa supériorité par rapport à d'autres formes de la production agricole. La production par travailleur/an qui la caractérise (l'équivalent de 1.000 à 2.000 tonnes de céréales) n'a pas d'équivalent, et a permis à un segment minime de la population active (de l'ordre de 5 %) de nourrir richement le pays en entier et même de dégager des excédents exportables. L'agriculture familiale moderne a par ailleurs démontré une capacité d'absorption des innovations exceptionnelle (il n'y a pas ici de « comportements conservateurs traditionnels » qui tiennent) et beaucoup de souplesse d'adaptation à l'évolution de la demande.

Cette agriculture ne partage pas avec le capitalisme ce qui constitue la spécificité par excellence de son mode d'organisation majeur du travail. Dans « l'usine, l'importance du collectif des travailleurs permet une division du travail poussée, qui est elle-même à l'origine du bond en avant de la productivité. Dans l'entreprise agricole familiale ce collectif se réduit pour l'essentiel à un ou deux individus (le fermier ou le couple de fermiers), parfois assisté de un, deux ou trois associés ou ouvriers permanents (notamment dans les entreprises laitières), mais aussi dans certains cas d'un plus grand nombre de saisonniers (notamment pour la récolte des fruits et légumes). Aucune division du travail fixée définitivement n'est généralement pratiquée et les tâches sont polyvalentes et variables. Dans ce sens M. Mazoyeer a raison de dire que cette agriculture familiale n'est pas capitaliste.

Certes cette forme d'agriculture n'est pas exclusive dans le monde capitaliste moderne. Il existe parfois des grandes entreprises de l'agrobusiness (comme par exemple pour la production « en usine » de poulets ...), parfois de « grandes propriétés » employant un nombre élevé de salariés (quand ces propriétés ne sont pas concédées en fermage à des agriculteurs familiaux) – ce fut le cas dans les terres de la colonisation en général, encore le cas en Afrique du Sud (cette forme de latifundia ayant été abolie par la réforme agraire du

Zimbabwe). On en trouve des formes diverses en Amérique latine, peu « modernisées » ici, fort « modernisées » (c'est-à-dire mécanisées) là, comme dans le Cône Sud. Il reste que l'agriculture familiale est dominante en Europe et aux Etats-Unis.

Les formes de l'agriculture « familiale » dominantes en Asie, en Afrique et dans certaines régions de l'Amérique latine sont différentes (« traditionnelles » n'étant pas le qualificatif qui convient le plus souvent) et n'ont pas du tout la même efficacité (la production par travailleur/an varie de une à 200 tonnes d'équivalent céréales). Il s'agit d'agricultures paysannes qu'il faudra donc soigneusement distinguer de l'agriculture familiale moderne.

Les expériences du « socialisme réellement existant » avaient mis en place des formes « industrielles » de la production agricole. Le « marxisme » à l'origine de cette option était celui de Karl Kautsky qui, à la fin du XIXe siècle, avait « prédit » non la modernisation de l'entreprise agricole familiale (son équipement et sa spécialisation) mais sa disparition au profit de grandes unités de production à l'image de l'usine, censées bénéficier des avantages d'une division interne du travail poussée. Cette prédiction ne s'est pas matérialisée en Europe et aux Etats-Unis. Mais par contre on a cru au mythe qu'elle véhiculait en Union Soviétique. Indépendamment d'autres raisons qui ont agi dans le sens de l'échec de cette expérience (la gestion bureaucratique, l'articulation sur une mauvaise planification macro-économique, la dilution des responsabilités faute de démocratie etc.), celui-ci doit être d'abord rapporté à l'erreur de jugement concernant les avantages de la division du travail et de la spécialisation, extrapolé sans justification de certaines formes de l'industrie à d'autres champs de la production et de l'activité sociale.

On remarquera que si l'échec est ici désormais reconnu, il n'en est pas de même pour ce qui est des formes de l'agriculture capitaliste de régions de l'Amérique latine ou de l'Afrique australe mentionnées plus haut. Pourtant l'échec est ici aussi patent en dépit de la rentabilité et de la compétitivité de ces formes latifundiaires modernisées. Car cette rentabilité est obtenue par un effroyable gaspillage écologique (destructions irréversibles de potentiels productifs et de terres arables) et social (salaires de misère).

Bien que « non capitaliste » au sens précisé ici, l'agriculture familiale moderne constitue un segment indissociable de l'économie capitaliste dans laquelle elle est totalement intégrée.

Cette intégration se manifeste sur tous les plans de la réalité sociale :

(i) dans cette entreprise agricole familiale l'auto consommation ne compte plus ; l'entreprise tire l'intégralité de sa légitimité de sa production pour le marché. La logique qui commande donc les options de production n'est plus celle qui caractérisait les agricultures paysannes d'hier (analysées par Chayanov) ou d'aujourd'hui (dans les pays du tiers monde contemporain).

(ii) l'efficacité de l'entreprise familiale tient à son équipement moderne (et adapté bien sûr). Cette agriculture concentre comme on le sait 90 % des tracteurs et autres équipements. Cet équipement, qui est « acheté » (fut-ce à crédit) par les agriculteurs en question, est donc leur « propriété ». Dans la logique du capitalisme, comme l'économie conventionnelle en fait la présentation, l'agriculteur est à la fois un travailleur et un capitaliste et son revenu devrait correspondre à la somme du salaire de son travail et du profit tiré de sa propriété du capital mis en œuvre. Comme on le sait, il n'en est rien. Les revenus nets des agriculteurs en question sont comparables aux salaires moyens gagnés dans l'industrie de leur pays. Les politiques nationales d'intervention et de régulation mises en œuvre justement en Europe et aux Etats-Unis où domine cette forme de l'agriculture, ont pour objectif proclamé d'assurer (à travers

des systèmes de subventions) l'égalité revenus des « paysans » /revenus des « ouvriers ». Les profits du capital mis en œuvre par les agriculteurs sont donc ici captés par les segments du capitalisme industriel et financier situés en amont. Il en est ainsi tout simplement parce que le capitaliste réellement existant n'a jamais été celui décrit par l'économie conventionnelle, mais a toujours fonctionné comme Marx (puis Braudel) l'ont analysé, c'est-à-dire au bénéfice des segments dominants lorsque propriété et pouvoir deviennent indissociables.

Tous ces faits et ces mécanismes sont parfaitement connus et ont été magistralement analysés, en termes empiriques et dans leur portée théorique, au cours des années 1960-1970, notamment par une pléiade d'économistes, de sociologues et de ruralistes français.

(iii) dans l'agriculture familiale de l'Europe et des Etats-Unis le composant que la rente foncière représente lui-même censée constituer dans l'économie conventionnelle la rémunération de la productivité de la terre, ne se retrouve pas dans la rémunération du fermier-proprétaire, ou du propriétaire (quand ce n'est pas le fermier). Le modèle français « d'anesthésie du propriétaire » est ici fort éclairant, les droits de l'exploitant ayant acquis dans la législation la priorité sur ceux du propriétaire. Aux Etats-Unis, où le « respect de la propriété » est toujours bénéficiaire de la priorité absolue, le même résultat est obtenu en contraignant de facto la presque totalité des entreprises familiales à être propriétaires des terres qu'elles exploitent. La rente de propriété de principe disparaît alors de la rémunération des fermiers.

L'efficacité de l'agriculture familiale en question tient également au fait qu'elle exploite (en propriétaire ou pas) des superficies adéquates de bonnes terres : ni trop petites, ni inutilement grandes. La surface exploitée qui correspond, pour chaque étape du développement des moyens mécanisés, à ce que peut travailler un fermier seul (ou un petit collectif familial), s'est graduellement élargie comme M. Mazoyer l'a parfaitement montré (dans les faits) et démontré (comme exigence d'efficacité). Il fallait pour y parvenir, que soient réunies des circonstances exceptionnelles : sociales comme les enclosures qui ont renforcé la solidité de la propriété privée, la concurrence qui a permis sa concentration, l'industrialisation et l'émigration vers les Amériques qui ont permis l'absorption de l'excédent de ruraux, mais aussi naturelles (bonnes terres, pluviométrie adéquate). Les coûts du maintien de la valeur productive des terres en question sont souvent pris en compte dans ce modèle d'économie familiale qui échappe à la vision courte du temps propre au capitalisme, parfois même ceux de son amélioration à long terme (mais on connaît aussi des situations de dégradation écologique). Ces coûts se retrouvent dans les prix (sortie ferme), mais jamais dans les revenus du fermier. Ici encore Marx et Braudel ont raison, pas l'économie conventionnelle qui ignore la réalité et lui substitue l'étude d'un capitalisme imaginaire, dit de « marchés généralisés ».

(iv) le contrôle de la production agricole opère également en aval par celui du commerce moderne (notamment des grandes surfaces).

(v) en définitive donc l'exploitant agricole familial, si efficace soit-il (et il l'est), n'est qu'un « sous traitant » pris dans les pinces en amont de l'agro business (qui lui impose semences sélectionnées, demain OGM), de l'industrie (qui fabrique les équipements et les produits chimiques), de la finance (qui lui donne les crédits nécessaires), en aval de la commercialisation par les grandes surfaces. Son statut est plus proche de celui de l'artisan (producteur individuel) exploité naguère dans le cadre du putting out (le tisserand dominé par celui qui lui fournissait le fil et écoulait ses tissus)

L'agriculture paysanne des pays du Sud est, elle aussi, bel et bien intégrée dans le capitalisme local et mondial. Dans ce sens elle n'est plus « traditionnelle » en dépit de quelques apparences ici et là. Mais elle n'est pas intégrée dans le capitalisme de la même manière que l'agriculture familiale moderne de l'Europe et des Etats-Unis. Question de degré seulement ?

L'examen de l'état des lieux fait immédiatement apparaître les convergences et les différences entre les deux espèces d'économie « familiale ».

Différences gigantesques, visibles et incontestées : (i) l'importance de l'auto consommation dans les économies paysannes du Sud, seul moyen de survie pour les populations rurales concernées ; (ii) la faible efficacité de cette agriculture, non équipée en tracteurs et autres matériels, souvent micro fundiaire en termes de superficies des exploitations ; (iii) cette faiblesse se traduit par la pauvreté du monde rural considéré (trois quarts des victimes de la sous alimentation sont des ruraux) ; (iv) l'incapacité grandissante de ces systèmes d'assurer le ravitaillement alimentaire de leurs villes ; (v) la taille des problèmes, l'économie paysanne en question concernant près de la moitié de l'humanité.

En dépit de ces différences l'agriculture paysanne en question est déjà intégrée dans le système capitaliste global dominant. Dans la mesure de ses contributions au marché elle dépend d'inputs achetés (au moins produits chimiques et semences sélectionnées) et est victime des oligopoles qui contrôlent la commercialisation de ses produits. Pour les régions ayant « bénéficié » de la « révolution verte » (la moitié de la paysannerie du Sud) les ponctions opérées sur la valeur des produits par le capital dominant en amont et en aval sont extrêmement lourdes. Mais elles le sont également, en termes relatifs, pour l'autre moitié de la paysannerie du Sud, compte tenu de la faiblesse de sa production.

S'agit-il seulement donc d'une question de « degré », celui de l'intégration des paysans du Sud d'aujourd'hui rappelant celui des paysans de l'Europe du XIXe siècle ? Dans ce cas on serait tenté de penser, comme veut le faire croire le discours conventionnel dominant, que la transition, si longue et pénible soit-elle (mais « inévitable ») conduira finalement à une situation analogue à celle des pays développés.

L'analyse que nous avons développée à partir de l'observation des faits et des tendances qui commandent l'évolution oblige à rejeter catégoriquement cette conclusion « heureuse » et « facile » (mais fausse !). Le développement inégal immanent au système global de l'accumulation mondialisée rend illusoire la possibilité d'absorber la moitié paysanne de l'humanité dans des formes du développement industriel à la fois « compétitives » et respectueuses des exigences de l'équilibre écologique de la Planète.

Il existe des entreprises capitalistes dans l'agriculture, commandées, comme les autres, par la recherche du profit maximal du capital investi. Les entreprises familiales modernes et les économies paysannes ne répondent pas à ce critère. Ici l'agriculteur cherche seulement la meilleure rémunération possible (ou la moins mauvaise en fait le plus souvent) pour son travail. Il se comporte comme un travailleur, qualifié certes ; mais il n'est pas un entrepreneur (même lorsqu'il se pense comme tel !). Car tout se passe, dans le capitalisme réellement existant, comme si ce travailleur était en fait exploité par le capital qu'il met en œuvre et qui est juridiquement sa propriété, puisque les profits qu'on doit attribuer à ce capital vont à d'autres. Cette agriculture familiale moderne trouve sa place dans le capitalisme central dominant, l'agriculture paysanne dans le capitalisme périphérique dominé. De ce fait, dans ce

domaine comme dans les autres, les voies du développement qui ont façonné les centres modernes ne peuvent être reproduites dans les périphéries.

L'expression « agriculture capitaliste » pour désigner dans son ensemble l'agriculture des centres capitalistes contemporains (a fortiori l'agriculture à l'échelle de l'ensemble du monde moderne) n'est pas scientifiquement rigoureuse. Son emploi ambigu, risque alors d'inspirer des déductions politiques dangereuses. Il n'en reste pas moins que la réalité économique, sociale et politique que représente le monde des agriculteurs opérant dans le capitalisme central contemporain est fort différent de celle des sociétés paysannes du Sud.

Le préjugé « eurocentrique » ne permet pas de saisir la portée de cette différence. Les paysans du Sud seraient appelés à disparaître pour laisser la place à des agriculteurs semblables à ceux du Nord ; car il n'y aurait pas de « voie de développement » autre que celle initiée par « l'Occident » (en fait le capitalisme historique, qui est effectivement né en Europe occidentale). Les « experts » de la Banque Mondiale sont « viscéralement » incapables de penser autrement. Le passage par l'appropriation privative du sol défendue par toutes les grandes agences du développement étatsuniennes et européennes est alors proposé comme le moment nécessaire incontournable du « progrès ». Que cette voie ait été l'exception et non la règle dans l'histoire ne perturbe aucune de leurs certitudes. Que par ailleurs la « disparition des paysans du Sud » n'est possible que si l'on procède à leur extermination franche (le génocide) ou déguisée (en construisant la Planète des bidonvilles) ne perturbe pas davantage nos défenseurs de la voie capitaliste. La moitié de l'humanité que représentent les paysanneries du Sud constitue une gigantesque réserve pour le déploiement d'un capitalisme terriblement sauvage. Au-delà des discours hypocrites sur la pauvreté les politiques préconisées par les forces dominantes visent à soutenir ce modèle inhumain « d'enclosures à l'échelle mondiale ». Sans doute la défense des sociétés paysannes est-elle parfois assurée par un de ces discours que j'ai qualifiés de « culturaliste » (mettant l'accent et faisant l'éloge des « spécificités culturelles ») qui n'est pas le mien. C'est dire que la mise en œuvre de voies nouvelles du développement au bénéfice de tous les peuples de la planète et, pour ce qui nous concerne ici, de tous leurs paysans reste à inventer.

La réponse au défi passe par la construction des alliances politiques nécessaires et possibles qui permettent d'avancer dans sa direction. Ces alliances doivent être construites partout, au Nord et au Sud, aux plans nationaux d'abord, régionaux s'il y a lieu et évidemment mondial. Elles doivent permettre de faire avancer des solutions (dans l'intérêt des paysans travailleurs bien sûr) à tous les problèmes posés : accès au sol et aux moyens de le mettre en valeur convenablement, rémunération correcte du travail paysan, amélioration de cette rémunération en parallèle à celle de la productivité de ce travail, régulation convenable des marchés.

Je n'ai pas la naïveté de penser que tous les intérêts que ces alliances pourraient rassembler sont naturellement convergents. Dans toutes les paysanneries il y a des riches et des pauvres (parfois sans terre). Les conditions d'accès au sol sont le produit de trajectoires historiques différentes qui ont, pour les uns, ancré l'aspiration à la propriété dans les mentalités, pour les autres protégé les droits à l'accès au sol du plus grand nombre. Les rapports des paysanneries au pouvoir d'Etat sont aussi le produit de parcours politiques différents, notamment en ce qui concerne les mouvements de libération nationale d'Asie et d'Afrique : populismes, démocraties paysannes, autocraties d'Etat anti paysannes traduisent la diversité de ces héritages. Les modalités de gestion des marchés internationaux favorisent les uns, pénalisent les autres. Ces divergences d'intérêts trouvent leur écho parfois dans la multiplicité des organisations paysannes, souvent dans les divergences de stratégies politiques adoptées. Les

débats que nous souhaitons animer avec ces organisations paysannes, leurs coordinations régionales quand il y a lieu, et Via Campesina au niveau mondial devraient nous permettre d'avancer dans les réponses aux questions posées ici.

2. The struggles of the peasants in the South for the access to land

3.

As the access to land depends on tenure status, first of all, two types of "tenure status" (or systems of land tenure) must be defined: those based on the private ownership of farm land and those that are not.

(i) *Land Tenure Based on the Private Ownership of the 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 the lease, amount of land rent) limit those of the owners in varying degrees to the extent of affording the tenant farmer the major benefit of the protection of the state and its agricultural policies (this is the case in France). Freedom to choose his crops is not always the rule. In Egypt, from most remote time, the state agricultural services establish the proportion of land allotted to different crops depending on their irrigation requirements.

This system of land ownership is modern, inasmuch as it is the product of the constitution of ("really existing") historic capitalism which originated in western Europe (England) in the first place) 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 19th century. Very early on, Marx denounced this radical transformation which excluded the majority of peasants from access to use of the land, turning them into proletariat emigrants to the towns (forced by circumstance) or, in the case of those who stayed into farm labourers or tenant farmers, which he regarded as numbering among the type of measures of primitive accumulation that dispossessed the producers of property or 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, those of land ownership in the Roman Empire and more precisely those of 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 itself - "liberal" ideology - has not only produced this myth of "western continuity". It has, above all, produced 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 to say 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 "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 concerned and society as a whole. This is nothing but mere tautology yet it is the one upon which all ("vulgar" which is to say acritical to use Marx's terms) bourgeois economic discourse is based. This same rhetoric is used to legitimise the principle of land ownership 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. In sum, this dominant discourse uses the conclusions that it sees fit to draw 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 the land everywhere private property in the current sense of the term, as practiced in capitalist centres, is to spread the policy of "enclosures" the world over, in other words, to hasten the dispossession of the peasants. This course of action is not new, it began and continued during earlier centuries of the global expansion of capitalism in the context of colonial systems in particular. Today the World Trade Organisation (WTO) intends only to accelerate the process even though the destruction that would result from this capitalist approach is 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.

(ii) *Land Tenure Systems not Based on the Private Ownership of the Land*

As we can see, this definition is negative – *not* based on private property – and therefore cannot designate 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 for all of the families (rather than the 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) always never guaranteed "equal" right to land. In the first place, it most often excluded "foreigners" (usually the vestiges of conquered peoples), "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 as 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 described the vast family of pre-modern production methods as "tributary").

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 in Africa), 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 upper ruling castes-classes, however, excluding lower castes, the Dalits, who were treated as a kind of collective slave class similar to the Hilotes of Sparta. These communities were, in turn, controlled and exploited by the imperial Mughal state and its vassals (Rajahs' and other ruler's states) which levied tribute. The British raised the status of the zamindars, formerly land revenue collectors, to that of "owners" who thus became large allied landowners in spite of tradition although they upheld "tradition" when it suited them to do so, for example, by "respecting" the exclusion of Dalits from access to land! Independent India has not challenged this serious colonial inheritance which is the cause of the incredible poverty of the majority of its peasantry and then after of its urban proletariat (cf S Amin, *India, A Great Power?*). The solution to these problems and the building of a viable economy for the peasant majority is therefore through an agrarian reform in the strictest sense of the term. The European colonisations of Southeast Asia and that of the United States in the Philippines resulted in similar developments. The "enlightened despotic" regimes of the east (the Ottoman Empire, the Egypt of Mohamed Ali, the Shahs of Iran) also by and large established private ownership in the modern sense of the term to the benefit of a new class wrongly described as "feudal" (by most historical Marxist thinking) recruited from among the senior ranks of their power system.

As a result of this, private ownership of the land has since then affected the majority of farm land, especially the best of it, throughout Asia outside China, Vietnam and the former Soviet republics of central Asia and 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. This structure differs widely juxtaposing large landowners (country capitalists to use the terminology I proposed), 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 here the peasantry had almost disappeared, 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 peasants 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, 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 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 "neo-liberal) 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, however, 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 composition of 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 products 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 far too far. It is a new regime that preserves only the appearance of "traditions" and often the least valuable of these.

China and Vietnam provide a unique example of a an access to land administration system that is based neither on private ownership or on "customs" but on a new revolutionary right unknown elsewhere. 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 "tributary") 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 the private ownership of land, which was replaced by that of the state, 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 of 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 the village land among all of the families. It prohibits any use of it, such as renting, other than for family farming. It guarantees that the proceeds of investments made by the usufructuary return to him in the short term through his right of ownership of all farm produce (which is freely marketed, although the state guarantees a minimum price), and in the long term by inheritance of usufruct to the exclusive benefit of children remaining on the farm (any person who emigrates from the village loses his 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 equally efficient to allow the increase of production per rural worker as is horizontal investment (the expansion of farming supported by increased industrialisation).

Has this "ideal" model ever been implemented? Certainly close to it (for example during the time of Deng Xiaoping 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 not been up to the challenge (even through the structures of cooperatives and state trade monopolies of the "Soviet" phase).

Certainly 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 "market" ideology contributes to this destabilization. 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 are behind 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 genuine 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 to say, the peasants.

The forms of organisation of agricultural production and land tenure are too varied in Asia and Africa 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. This reform, however, 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 in the majority, except in 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 under way in Zimbabwe may face 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 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 and, 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 19th century, Marx, in his correspondence with the Russian Narodniks (Vera Zassoulitch among others), 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 of the administration of 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. Was this judgment right or wrong? I cannot say on this matter as it goes beyond my knowledge of Russia. However, the fact remains that Lenin did not consider this matter of crucial importance, having accepted Kautsky's point of view regarding 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. In other words, capitalism would have been capable of "resolving the agrarian question". Although 80% true for the capitalist centers (the Triad: 15% of the world's population), this proposition does not hold true for the "rest of the world" (85% of its population!). History shows not only that capitalism has not resolved this question for 85% of

the people but that from the perspective of its continued expansion, it can resolve it no longer (other than by genocide! A fine solution!). So it fell to Mao Zedong and the Communist Parties of China and Vietnam to find a suitable solution to the challenge.

The question resurfaced during the 1960s with African independence. The national liberation movements of the continent, the states and party-states that arose from them enjoyed, in varying degrees, the support of the peasant majority of their peoples. Their natural propensity to populism led them to conceive of a "specific ("African") socialist approach". The latter could certainly be described as very moderately radical in its relationship both with dominant imperialism and the local classes associated with its expansion. It did not raise the question of 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 profit.

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 both 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 thirst 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 improved 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 would 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.

In Mali following 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, 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 to say, 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 today people try to erase. 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.

What current dominant discourse understands by "reform of the land tenure system" is quite the opposite from 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 number of NGOs with considerable financial backing - understands land reform to mean the acceleration of the privatisation of land and nothing more. The aim is clear: create the conditions that would 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 creation of 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 that of 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 the 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 even necessarily 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.

I have no blue print 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 insipid discourse about good

governance and electoral pluralism. There is an indisputably 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: the creation of systems of administrative, commercial and personal rights that are consistent with the aims of the plans for social construction and the creation of suitable (generally elected) institutions. However, above all, the progress of democracy will depend definitively on the social power of its defenders. The organization of peasant movements is, in this respect, absolutely irreplaceable. It is only to the extent that peasants are able to express themselves that progress in the direction known as "participative democracy" (as opposed to the reduction of the problem to the dimension of "representative democracy") will be able to make headway.

The question of relations between men and women is 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 work force. 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 to say, all those who do not belong to the clans, lineage 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 post colonial development have sometimes been of a such a scale that they have overturned the concepts of ethnic "homogeneity" in the regions affected by this development. Emigrants from outside the state in question (such as the Burkina Be in Ivory Coast) or those who although formally citizens of the same state are of an "ethnic" origin other than that of the regions they have made their homes (like the Hausa in the Nigerian state of Plateau), see their rights to the land that they have cultivated challenged by short-sighted and chauvinistic political movements who also benefit from 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 above 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 peasant who benefits from it cannot have access to the essential means of production in 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 - the best critical analyst of projects to integrate agricultural and food production into "world" markets. So we shall restrict ourselves to mentioning 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 World Trade Organisation (WTO), which inherited the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1995, must quite simply be refused. Opinion in Asia and Africa, beginning with peasant organisations but also all the social and political forces that defend the interests of popular classes and those of the nation (and demands for food sovereignty in particular), all those who have not given up on a development project worthy of the 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 and simply threaten to devastate the lives of more than two and a half 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.

Capitalism has reached a stage where its continued expansion requires the implementation of "enclosure" policies on a world scale like the "enclosures" of the beginning of its 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 the genocide of half of humanity. On one hand the destruction of the peasant societies of Asia and Africa. On the other, some billions in extra profit for world capital and its local associates derived from a socially useless production since it is not destined to cover the unsolvable needs of hundreds of millions of extra hungry but only 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.

(ii) We can no longer accept the behaviour of the major imperialist powers that together assault the people of the South (the United States and Europe) within the WTO. It must be pointed out that the same powers that try to impose their "liberalist" proposals unilaterally upon 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 Jacques Berthelot.

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 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 which 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, 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 of social forums. A far more serious challenge than a large number of movements engaged in current struggles imagine.

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 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 over hasty replies to these complex and difficult questions. We should not "condemn" many organisations and movements under the pretext that they do not have 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 one of numerous NGOs - well-meaning perhaps - than of peasant and worker organisations.

The analysis and proposals made in this study are only relevant for Asia and Africa. The agrarian question 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 and Chilli), modernised, mechanised latifundism 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.

Further readings:

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