

The Agrarian Question, Access to Land, and Peasant Responses in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Acronyms

ECA	Economic Commission for Africa
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IMF	International Monetary Fund
SAPs	structural adjustment programmes
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

Summary/Résumé/Resumen

Summary

Sub-Saharan Africa is characterized by some unique land tenure regimes and systems of social organization for production, which have profound conceptual implications and raise intriguing questions with regard to agrarian transformation in the subregion. In this paper, Archie Mafeje argues that most of these were lost in the welter of Eurocentric theories and universalizing tendencies. Yet a careful study of African agrarian systems shows that there is more than one way to agricultural and rural social development, which Mafeje says is particularly important in the wake of “mono-economics” from the West and the drive toward globalization or homogenization in a unipolar world order. Recognition of variety is not only one of the imperatives of democratization of the world order, he says, but is also enriching in the long run.

In the paper, Mafeje deals with five major issues. First, he interrogates Eurocentric concepts and notions about land tenure in sub-Saharan Africa. Second, he seeks to reinstate the authenticity of African systems of land tenure and social organization for production by looking at them from inside. This constitutes a study of African attitudes toward land, its acquisition and uses, and its management for social reproduction and production. Third, Mafeje describes how African producers have adapted to changing economic conditions, especially the introduction of the capitalist system and the market for agricultural commodities. This also entails a review of the theoretical constructs that have been evolved mainly by Eurocentric advocates to characterize such adaptations or responses, and the policy predispositions to which they have given rise. Fourth, the author attempts to clarify some of the conceptual issues involved so as to discern more clearly some of the underlying processes and thus explain why African peasants, in particular, have behaved in ways that are unpredictable, even to their governments. And finally, he evaluates the prospects for a genuine agrarian transformation in sub-Saharan Africa.

Mafeje discusses the concept of “ownership” of land in sub-Saharan Africa. The concept is alien to African customary law: property is held by, and transmitted through, lineages or unilineal descent groups. African jurisprudence recognizes rights of possession determined by prior settlement and membership in given social groups, use-rights contingent on social labour, and rights of social exchange underscored by implicit reversionary rights. Attempts by some African governments to introduce individual land tenure have often met with resistance from the population.

Mafeje says that the decline in agricultural productivity in Africa is not the result of a lack of access to land or individual tenure. Rather, he attributes it to degradation of the soil, which is largely attributable to inappropriate production techniques. Africa will have to industrialize as a matter of urgency—not only to survive economically, but also in order to meet the technical and scientific requirements for the development of agriculture. He says that the immediate task for African planners and policy makers is to make sure that agriculture can, in the foreseeable future, feed the rapidly growing African population. He emphasizes social democracy as a necessary condition for equitable development in Africa.

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Résumé

L'Afrique subsaharienne se caractérise par des régimes fonciers et des systèmes d'organisation sociale aux fins de production uniques qui ont de profondes implications conceptuelles et soulèvent des questions fascinantes sur les changements agraires dans la sous-région. Archie Mafeje montre dans cette étude qu'ils se sont perdus pour la plupart dans le fatras des théories eurocentriques et des tendances universalistes. Pourtant, une étude approfondie des systèmes agraires en Afrique révèle que plus d'une voie mène au développement agricole et social des campagnes, ce qui, de l'avis d'Archie Mafeje, revêt une importance particulière eu égard à la "mono-économie" venue d'Occident et aux forces de mondialisation ou d'homogénéisation qui s'exercent dans un monde unipolaire. La diversité, dit-il, est non seulement un impératif indispensable à la démocratisation de l'ordre mondial mais aussi enrichissante à long terme.

Archie Mafeje traite ici de cinq grandes questions. Premièrement, il interroge les concepts et notions eurocentriques existantes sur l'occupation des terres en Afrique subsaharienne. Deuxièmement, il cherche à rétablir l'authenticité des régimes fonciers et systèmes africains d'organisation sociale aux fins de production en les examinant de l'intérieur, ce qui l'amène à étudier les attitudes africaines face à l'acquisition, l'emploi et la gestion de la terre à des fins de production et de reproduction sociale. Troisièmement, il décrit la façon dont les producteurs africains se sont adaptés aux conditions économiques changeantes, en particulier à l'introduction du système capitaliste et au marché des produits agricoles. Il en arrive ainsi à examiner les constructions théoriques, qui sont principalement l'œuvre de tenants de l'eurocentrisme, élaborées pour caractériser ces adaptations ou réponses, ainsi que les prédispositions politiques auxquelles elles ont donné naissance. Quatrièmement, il tente de clarifier quelques-unes des questions conceptuelles qui se posent afin de mieux discerner certains des processus sous-jacents et d'expliquer ainsi pourquoi les paysans africains, en particulier, ont eu un comportement imprévisible, même pour leurs gouvernements. Enfin, il évalue les chances d'une véritable révolution agraire en Afrique subsaharienne.

Archie Mafeje traite du concept de "propriété" foncière en Afrique subsaharienne. Le concept est étranger au droit coutumier africain: la propriété est détenue et transmise par des lignages ou groupes de descendants unilinéaires. La jurisprudence africaine reconnaît des droits de possession tenant à un établissement antérieur et à l'appartenance à des groupes sociaux donnés, des droits d'usage dépendants du travail social, et des droits d'échanges sociaux mis en évidence par des droits de retour implicites. Lorsque des gouvernements africains ont tenté d'introduire un statut individuel d'occupation des terres, ils se sont souvent heurtés à la résistance de la population.

Selon l'auteur, la baisse de la productivité agricole en Afrique ne vient pas de l'inaccessibilité ni d'une occupation individuelle des terres. Il l'attribue plutôt à la dégradation des sols, due en

grande partie à des techniques de production inadaptées. L'Afrique devra s'industrialiser d'urgence, non seulement pour survivre économiquement, mais aussi pour répondre aux impératifs techniques et scientifiques indispensables à son développement agricole. Archie Mafeje estime que la tâche des planificateurs et décideurs africains consiste dans l'immédiat à veiller à ce que, dans un avenir prévisible, l'agriculture puisse nourrir une population africaine en augmentation rapide. Il souligne l'importance d'une démocratie sociale, condition nécessaire au développement équitable de l'Afrique.

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Resumen

África subsahariana se caracteriza por algunos singulares regímenes de tenencia de la tierra y sistemas de organización social para la producción, que tienen consecuencias conceptuales significativas y que plantean cuestiones interesantes respecto de la transformación agraria en la subregión. En este documento, Archie Mafeje sostiene que la mayoría de estas cuestiones se perdieron en el maremagno de las teorías eurocéntricas y tendencias universalistas. Sin embargo, un estudio detallado de los sistemas agrarios africanos revela que existe más de una forma para conseguir el desarrollo social agrícola y rural; según Mafeje, esto es particularmente importante tras la "monoeconomía" del Occidente y la tendencia hacia la mundialización u homogeneización en un orden mundial unipolar. Afirma que el reconocimiento de la variedad no es sólo uno de los imperativos de la democratización del orden mundial, sino que también es enriquecedor a largo plazo.

En estas páginas, Mafeje aborda cinco cuestiones principales. En primer lugar, cuestiona las nociones y conceptos eurocéntricos sobre la tenencia de la tierra en África subsahariana. En segundo lugar, trata de restablecer la autenticidad de los sistemas africanos de tenencia de la tierra y organización social para la producción, examinándolos desde dentro. Esto constituye un estudio de las actitudes africanas hacia la tierra, su adquisición y utilización, y su gestión para la reproducción y producción social. En tercer lugar, Mafeje describe como los productores africanos se han adaptado a las condiciones económicas en continuo cambio, en particular a la introducción del sistema capitalista y del mercado de productos agrícolas. Esto conlleva asimismo un examen de la teoría desarrollada fundamentalmente por defensores eurocéntricos para caracterizar tales adaptaciones o respuestas, y las predisposiciones políticas a que han dado lugar. En cuarto lugar, el autor trata de aclarar algunas cuestiones conceptuales conexas para distinguir más claramente algunos de los procesos subyacentes y explicar así por qué los campesinos africanos, en particular, han reaccionado de forma imprevisible, incluso para sus gobiernos. Por último, el autor evalúa las perspectivas de una verdadera transformación agraria en África subsahariana.

Mafeje aborda el concepto de "propiedad" de la tierra en África subsahariana, ajeno al derecho consuetudinario africano: la tierra es propiedad del linaje o de grupos de descendientes

unilineales, y se transmite a través de los mismos. La jurisprudencia africana reconoce los derechos de posesión determinados por el asentamiento previo y la pertenencia a ciertos grupos sociales, los derechos de utilización de la tierra que dependen del trabajo social, y los derechos de intercambio social destacados por los derechos de reversión implícitos. En muchos casos, la población ha mostrado resistencia a los esfuerzos desplegados por algunos gobiernos africanos para introducir la tenencia individual de la tierra.

Mafeje señala que el declive de la productividad agrícola en África no se debe a una falta de acceso a la tierra o a la tenencia individual de la misma, sino que más bien obedece a la degradación del suelo, lo que en gran parte se puede atribuir a la aplicación de técnicas de producción inapropiadas. Es imperativo que África se industrialice cuanto antes—no sólo para sobrevivir económicamente, sino también para reunir las condiciones técnicas y científicas para el desarrollo de la agricultura. Señala que la tarea inmediata que incumbe a los planificadores y los responsables de formular las políticas/autoridades decisorias en África es asegurar que la agricultura pueda alimentar, en un futuro previsible, a la población africana que aumenta con gran rapidez. Pone de relieve la democracia social como condición necesaria para el desarrollo equitativo en África.

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Introduction

It is important to stress the fact that the point of reference in this paper is sub-Saharan Africa. The reason for this is that sub-Saharan Africa is characterized by some unique land tenure regimes and systems of social organization for production. This has profound conceptual implications and raises intriguing questions with regard to agrarian transformation in the subregion. As will be shown, most of these were lost in the welter of Eurocentric theories and universalizing tendencies. Yet a careful study of African agrarian systems could easily show that there is more than one way to agricultural and rural social development. This is particularly important in the wake of mono-economics from the West and the drive toward globalization or homogenization in a unipolar world order. Recognition of variety is not only part of the imperatives of democratization of the world order but is also enriching in the long run.

Accordingly, the paper will deal with five major issues. First, it will interrogate Eurocentric concepts and notions about land tenure in sub-Saharan Africa. Second, it will attempt to reinstate the authenticity of African systems of land tenure and social organization for production by looking at them from the inside. As such, this will constitute a generic study of African attitudes toward land, its acquisition and uses, and its management for social reproduction and production. Third, it will look at how African producers have adapted to changing economic conditions, especially the introduction of the capitalist system and the market for agricultural commodities. This will also entail a review of the theoretical constructs that have been evolved mainly by Eurocentric advocates to characterize such adaptations or responses, and the policy predispositions to which they have given rise. Fourth, the paper will attempt to clarify some of the conceptual issues involved so as to discern more clearly some of the underlying processes and thus explain why African peasants in particular have behaved in ways unpredictable even to their governments. Fifth, the paper will evaluate the prospects for a genuine agrarian transformation in sub-Saharan Africa. Nonetheless, it is fair to warn the reader that these issues are dynamically linked and will tend to be interwoven in the paper.

Eurocentric Conceptions and Notions

For a very long time agrarian studies in sub-Saharan Africa had been subjected to prejudices derived from experiences from other continents, namely, Europe, Latin America and Asia. For instance, in spite of the fact that African researchers have not found any relevance of the concept of "land reform" outside the Southern African settler societies, it became a major preoccupation of European scholars working on agriculture in Africa. This dates back to the colonial times and continued after independence. Specialized agencies such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Bank have reinforced this tendency since the 1970s. This is despite the fact that all were aware that sub-Saharan Africa had endured no landlordship, had an abundant supply of land, and producers, including married women, had guaranteed access to land for cultivation. Nonetheless, African land tenure systems continued to be seen as a major barrier to agricultural development. The underlying Eurocentric supposition was and still is that lack of exclusive individual rights to

land gives rise to insecurity of tenure and, therefore, inhibits permanent investment in land. This is based on the mistaken idea that African land tenure systems are “communal” and as such any and every individual can lay claim on any piece of land or be granted access at will. This is a basic misconception.

First of all, it is important to point out that the concepts that were used to characterize African land tenure systems were derived from European jurisprudence. This led to a series of misconceptions. Among these may be mentioned the notion of “ownership” over land and land as “property”. According to European jurisprudence, these two concepts refer to some delineated portions of the physical *solum* and confer jurisdiction as well as exclusive control on the holder. In contrast, in sub-Saharan Africa the holder could be any of several things—the territorial authority (*dominium eminens*), the clan, the lineage, the household or production unit, but never the individual. Hence, a distinction is made between repository and use-rights. As is quite evident in this instance, the holders are vertically organized groups with corporate rights and not the community as a whole. Unlike in Asia and Europe, African villages were not economic units but rather sociopolitical units held together by kinship ties and neighbourliness. Insofar as allocation and exploitation of arable land were determined by membership in the particular groups enumerated above, it is a serious conceptual transgression to think of African systems of land tenure as “communal”. On the contrary, although collective, land rights in sub-Saharan Africa were more narrowly defined and controlled than would be implied by the notion of “communal tenure”.

This has a very important bearing on the question of security of tenure that became an obsession among bourgeois theorists simply because, out of prejudice, they construed collective rights in land as “free for all” on a communal basis. Collective land rights in sub-Saharan Africa are jealously guarded by solidary landholding groups, and any socially unsanctioned transfer inevitably leads to conflict, if not actual violence. This is one of the basic principles that eludes “free-marketeers” and government “land reformers”. It gives security to the members of the landholding groups but strongly militates against resettlement schemes, as governments in Kenya, Ghana and Zimbabwe have come to know.

Regarding the concept of ownership of land in black Africa, after many years of legal artifice it is agreed that the concept is alien to African customary law. African jurisprudence, recognized rights of possession determined by prior settlement and membership in given social groups, use-rights contingent on social labour, and rights of social exchange underscored by implicit reversionary rights. For that matter, there was separation in African social thought between the soil and its possible manifestations such as crops and vegetation. Essentially, what was transferred to the user was not the soil itself but what it could produce. Otherwise, the land was treated as a permanent part of human existence and generally taken for granted. This did not diminish its value, as is generally believed by Eurocentrics, but instead made it inestimable. Among other things, this means that far from being a physical *solum*, land is a social endowment that is in principle inalienable. It is associated with corporate existence that is fixed in space but transcends time; that is, there are certain recognized domains of land possession

but variable cycles of control over it. This gives the system unusual permanency as well as practical flexibility within its own terms of reference. In modern times this has become a great source of confusion and misunderstanding. Desirous of change and development, planners, legislators and policy makers have strived to discover in this milieu equivalents of western materialistic concepts or to impose them. "Property" is one of these magical words.

At first, it was "communal property"; now it is "common property". Yet, it is apparent that the jural connotations of, and the incidence of personal power in, "property" are too specific and restrictive to describe accurately the inclusive and variegated rights in land as understood by Africans. For instance, the rights that a clan asserts over a domain are partly political and partly ritual, and no more. In contrast, the rights that a lineage may claim over land are concrete and vindicated by actual ties of consanguinity and corporate interests. Even more mundane are extended family rights of use in which control over the soil is more personalized in the form of male household heads. While in this instance the claim over the land is vindicated through social labour, it would be erroneous to suppose that the latter confers "property rights" on the users. Although in the literature, terms such as "family estate" are frequently invoked, it is well to remember that it is only the products of social labour—for example, crops and livestock—that are objects of appropriation. These may legitimately be referred to as the *property* of the users. However, great care should be taken to distinguish between the property rights of different productive and consumptive units. Once again, although under Western influence we might be accustomed to thinking of the "family" as the ultimate unit of production and consumption in agrarian societies, this is not necessarily the case in Africa. It is often *households* that fit this social definition, while families more often than not are the repositories of *heritable property*, irrespective of how it is generated.

This apparent paradox is explained by the simple fact that social organization in sub-Saharan Africa is based on the principle of *lineages* or unilineal descent groups. Legally, property is held by and transmitted through them. Since lineages and clans are exogamous, this *ipso facto* excludes spouses, whether they be male or female. From the point of view of the relationship between social labour and rights over its product, this constitutes a great contradiction and a source of injustice to women and other non-kin members of the African households. This rule of exclusion has serious implications for households, which are the *basic units of production in agriculture* and for whose constitution wives are a *necessary condition*. That is, according to custom, land is allotted only to married men for cultivation by their wives who have no jurisdiction over family or minimal lineage property. In other words, married women produce value for their husbands' groups (compare Boserup 1974). They retain only latent claims to use-value in their fathers' families. Furthermore, insofar as recruitment into households is not based only on descent but also on marriage and other relations, its composition is necessarily variable and inconsistent with the principle of determining access to property through descent. The separation between social labour and its value—current or accumulated—has a definite limiting effect on the mobilization of labour and resources within African agriculture under modern market conditions.

The Dynamics of African Land Tenure Systems

What is described in the preceding section is the grammar or guiding principles of sub-Saharan African land-tenure systems. But like any system, to survive under changing conditions, it must exhibit the necessary flexibility. It is interesting to note that most African governments do not have any land policy to speak of, but essentially have an agricultural policy (one of the exceptions is Ethiopia after the 1974 revolution). This is not surprising, given our contention that there is no land question in sub-Saharan Africa, except in the white settler societies of Southern Africa. Any tinkering with the allocation of land had been aimed at boosting agricultural production among a few selected farmers in particular development schemes. In Southern Africa, similar tinkering had been undertaken for the sake of appeasing land-starved blacks confronted with intransigent white landowners. This aside, the best way of testing the validity of our thesis that there is *no land question* in the subregion would be to investigate existing mechanism for the generation, allocation and vindication of land rights in the contemporary setting.

Generation of Land Rights

Several surveys from different sub-Saharan countries (FAO 1985) have shown that more than 90 per cent of the land rights enjoyed by African cultivators and pastoralists are generated through customary tenure. This applies even to those cases where demographic pressure has reached critical proportions, for example, Rwanda, Burundi, Gambia and Lesotho. Membership in given lineages or clans is still the major criterion for allocation of land. Recognition of certain clan domains makes it easy for lineages to maintain a steady pool of land and to control any influx of strangers, i.e., non-kinsmen. Likewise, the corporate land rights that lineage members have in common guard against alienation of land to outsiders.

However, this does not mean that there is no exchange of land across lineage boundaries, but that a strong belief in the inalienability of land or in reversionary rights still persists. In the past this problem had been circumvented by loaning use of the land to needy strangers in exchange for an agreed price or portion of the produce, which is not tantamount to sale of land. This gave rise to the well-known phenomenon of *migrant farmers* in West Africa and in southern Uganda, which was made possible by the separation in African customary law between the *solum* and its manifestations. At the same time, it afforded access to land by a wider circle of potential users as a response to the introduction of cash crops, without endangering the security of the lineages. There are a number of issues implicit in this development that have elicited conflicting responses from development theorists. There are those who see the insistence among sub-Saharan African rural dwellers on corporate rights in land and on the inalienability of land in general as a barrier to further development. It is argued that it inhibits investment in land by incumbent users for fear of their plots being allotted to other claimants. The counter-argument from those who are concerned about the plight of the small producers or the rural poor is that *individualization* of land rights will inevitably lead to the monopolization of land by the lucky few and consequently to the immiseration of the vast majority of the rural population. While logically sustainable, both arguments fail to come to terms with the dynamics of the situation.

Concerning the first argument, it need only be pointed out that there is no evidence that African agricultural producers are not doing so well in general because of lack of access to arable land and insecurity of tenure under customary tenure regimes. If this were the case, we would not be able to account for the expansion in agricultural production in sub-Saharan Africa in the 1950s and 1960s, and for the development of the expanded petty mode of production in several countries under the same land tenure conditions. The second argument is also theoretically contrived, because since independence and despite the stated preference for individual tenure by neocolonial African governments, over 90 per cent of rights in land in the rural areas continue to be generated through customary channels.

In the few countries in which some progress was made in introducing individual land tenure there is evidence of popular pressure or attempts to regain corporate rights over such lands. In countries such as Kenya in recent years this went so far as the unprecedented demand that longstanding residents who came from elsewhere be evicted. The movement, of which local politicians took advantage, became known as *majimbo*. It led to bitterness among the residents while at the same time creating opportunities for corrupt local politicians to grab land for themselves (Kanyinga 1998). This is undoubtedly a perversion of what we referred to as reversionary rights. It is distinguishable from the popular movement in densely populated areas, such as the Central Province and the Rift Valley, where displaced people reacted by squatting on original clan or lineage land or by establishing self-made “companies” to re-buy lost lands. This is certainly a manifestation of popular resistance against individualization of rights in or control over land. By the same token, it is a popular veto of the policies of those governments that have sought to institute alienation of land to individuals and a stubborn assertion of African cultural values toward land and its use. Critics on the left have exaggerated the extent of individualization of land rights in Africa and thus have minimized the extent of popular resistance. One of the reasons is that in their minds commercialization of agricultural production is strongly associated with “individualization” of production on a progressive scale. This is neither true nor necessary for the commercialization of agricultural production to take place. The fact of the matter is that the bulk of the so-called commercial agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa has occurred on *family plots*, whether with a title deed or without.

The missionary-trained rural elite might have welcomed the opportunity to have titles to their plots or even to add to them. The point, however, is that it was universally done on behalf of the same families or corporate units that made it possible for them to acquire Western education. Self-aggrandizement by Christian converts in the rural areas is well-known but seldom does it issue in “absolute property” in the Western sense. In our view, this hinges on the dynamics of the lineage mode of social organization in sub-Saharan Africa that consists of units that are radically different from what is known as “family” in the West. Therefore, what might have changed in this part of the continent is not so much the generation of land rights, but rather the manipulation of user-rights.

Allocation of Land Rights

Allocation of land in ex-colonial sub-Saharan Africa is subject to two regimes. On the one hand, there is the persistent customary tenure whereby chiefs or heads of lineages are responsible for

distribution of land for use among members of the local community, who are invariably bound together by agnatic ties. While the latter is not necessarily true of every member of the community, it denotes the endurance of founding lineages that account for transmission of land from generation to generation. Whereas particular allottees might try to maximize their benefits under modern conditions of growing demographic pressure and rising land values, the system itself is geared toward equity. Individual members treat access to land as a natural right that is realizable at a certain stage in their lifecycle. This definitely sets a limit to the amount of land each member can claim. Although discussions on this issue often degenerate into ideological squabbles, it is evident that its effects on development depend on demographic and technological factors, a point to which we will return at the appropriate moment.

The second source of authority for allocation of land in independent sub-Saharan Africa is, of course, the government. Several governments, through legislation and administrative intervention, have attempted to modify existing customary systems of tenure. Virtually, in all cases the overriding concern was the improvement of agricultural production. Transfer of land from one class of owners to another, except in Ethiopia, was one of the objectives of the exercise. Based on the persistent but erroneous belief that “communal ownership” of land inhibits investment in land, a number of African governments tried to promote individual land tenure by offering titles to sitting plotters in designated areas for example, the “one-million-acre” scheme in Kenya or the granting of leaseholds of up to 99 years to selected plotters or identified heads of family, as was done in Lesotho, Nigeria and Zambia. Generally speaking, no direct appropriations were carried out. The strategy was to leave this to market forces once individual titles had been introduced. This was a half-measure because it was limited to government-sponsored consolidation, resettlement, irrigation schemes and a limited number of estate farms that were inherited from departing white settlers. In this context it is not without significance that when sub-Saharan African governments talk of “land reform”, they do not have in mind redistribution of land, but rather limited land and technical reforms in selected areas, usually “released” land or public land. This would vindicate the contention that there is no need for land reform in sub-Saharan Africa and would indicate that, those African governments attempting to implement it, were well aware of the resistance they would encounter from the custodians and adherents of customary tenure. Consequently, for the time being, the generation of land rights remains a prerogative of the people. This is not found anywhere else in the modern world and might point to alternative modes of social organization that had been ruled out by Eurocentrics.

Vindication of Land Rights

The concept of “communal land tenure”, however persistent, is incapable of explaining how land rights are generated and vindicated in black Africa. It also fails to distinguish between different kinds of rights in land. Yet it is important to note that, whereas grazing grounds, trees for firewood and building, and grass for thatching are used communally, plots of arable land are not free for all. Their use is restricted not to individuals but to particular production units that are represented by heads of minimal lineages or the so-called extended families. Such allottees are entitled to maximum security of tenure as long as their holdings are kept under continuous cultivation and they themselves had not been excommunicated by their kin or

banished by the territorial authority under whose jurisdiction they fall. As the latter two rarely happen, the implication is that minimal lineages actually hold their allotted land in perpetuity. What might—and does—occur is that under conditions of increasing land scarcity original allotments may be subdivided among more holders, for example, brothers and parallel cousins. To call this “communal” would be stretching the point too far since the sharing occurs among those who already have certain common rights in movable or immovable property and are bound together by exclusive ties of mutual obligation. Therefore, it can be concluded that sub-Saharan African customary tenure rights are vindicated by membership in recognized corporate groups and by continued use of the land by recipient productive units.

As was mentioned earlier, parallel to the above, there had been a selective introduction of individual land tenure in a few African countries. This was done on the grounds that it offered greater security of tenure than customary systems of tenure and thus encouraged investment in land. This position received support from orthodox Marxists such as Samir Amin (1980), who argued that “private property in land” was a necessary condition for agricultural development in Africa. One ventures to say that this is nothing more than presuppositions based on the European historical experience. In the Orient, great agricultural revolutions occurred without the introduction of private ownership of land. Indeed, it was collective production that made possible big agricultural projects, such as irrigation schemes and economies of scale in agriculture in Mesopotamia, Egypt and India. In black Africa, it has yet to be proved that in general, investment in privately owned land has been higher than in equivalent plots held under customary tenure, except in Southern Africa where government policy favoured white farmers on freehold to the exclusion of the so-called subsistent farmers in the former Native Reserves. Collective farming and co-operatives have not been given a fair chance among the black producers in the subregion. In countries such as Senegal and Zimbabwe, women producers, who are a disadvantaged category, have done best under market conditions by banding together. One suspects that male members of given lineages would do the same, if they were given the opportunity under appropriate consolidation schemes. Under the new dispensation in South Africa, communities that had been expropriated for the benefit of white farmers are happy to receive their land back not as individuals but as the original collectivities. It would be interesting to see how they distribute such land among themselves after nearly 100 years of dispossession. This could apply to Zimbabwe as well, if the campaign by blacks (messy as it is) to regain lost lands is successful. Majimboism in Kenya is problematic in that it was not initiated by popular forces but rather by opportunistic politicians who, instead of letting the people decide how to deal with the land issue, grabbed the disputed land for themselves. This might prove not to be the end of the story and, therefore, democratic Kenyans should derive very little comfort from it.

Government and Peasant Responses to the Agrarian Question

In the foregoing discussion, it is strongly maintained that rights in land in black Africa continue to be associated with membership in descent groups and to be governed by customary notions even in those areas where governments have imposed limited individual land tenure. From the

point of view of agrarian reform, this creates some confusion and general lack of direction. Things that should not happen *de jure* happen *de facto*. This signifies potential conflict between the state and the sitting cultivators or the peasantry. It also reflects negatively on the agrarian policies that have been adopted by different African governments so far. For a proper assessment of the situation, it would be useful to identify some of these. Included in the list would be such things as special development schemes, technological innovation, marketing and taxation.

Pseudo-Land Reforms

As had been warned already, land reform programmes in sub-Saharan Africa did not aim at redistribution of land (except in Ethiopia) but rather at improving what was thought to be insecurity of tenure under customary tenure. Due to the impact of European colonialism, this became strongly associated with only one alternative, namely, individual land tenure. Consequently, shortly after independence various African governments made strenuous efforts to achieve this objective through a number of schemes (see Seidman 1970). As is apparent, this did not presuppose eviction or expropriation of sitting cultivators. The envisaged schemes were introduced either on vacant land generally considered public land, or on occupied land with the co-operation of current holders who hoped to secure title deeds for themselves, as in Kenya. Elsewhere this applied especially to planters who were anxious to ensure ownership of their trees by acquiring exclusive rights over the land itself. In addition, estate farms of departing colonial settlers were sold to some privileged individuals through government loans.

Although the individualization of land rights in high-density areas, such as southern Malawi, deprived small producers under customary tenure access to good land, the extent of individual land tenure itself in African countries is minimal. In the worst cases, such as Kenya (Odingo 1986), Côte d'Ivoire (Campbell 1985) and Malawi (Mkandawire 1983), this accounts for hardly 20 per cent of the land available in each country. Above all, in spite of the existence of individual titles, surveys carried out as far back as 1986 (Odingo 1986) showed progressive fragmentation of African estates, illegal squatting, labour tenancies, borrowing and lending of private land to kinsmen and friends, and sharecropping. Most of these transactions are forbidden under law and detract from the affected governments' idea of individual land tenure. On these grounds, it could be argued that, where applicable, governments in sub-Saharan Africa have failed to institute individual land tenure in their societies.

The above observation might prove unpopular to both those on the left and those on the right. Nevertheless, it is worth considering. As far as one can see, there are two basic explanations. First, it is apparent that most of those who rushed for land titles did not mean to be *capitalist farmers* in the sense that the sponsoring governments had intended it. There is ample evidence, especially from Kenya, that the entitlements were intended for other purposes, which will be referred to below. Second, they did not mean to renounce their membership in their respective descent groups, but rather to enhance their personal status within the corporate group and in the wider society. It is common knowledge that most African estate farmers, who are usually politicians or higher civil servants, are absentee farmers. They rely on their relatives or trusted friends to run their farms for them (a few might engage professional managers). Generally

speaking, the idea of *hacienda* is not far removed from this. Moreover, it is common practice among them to use their land titles to secure loans to finance business ventures outside agriculture. A fair amount of their accumulation often goes into social investment within their descent groups, home community and other potential allies—not an unusual way of augmenting one's *social capital* in traditional societies. In the long run this guarantees them access to more resources, services and labour in the form of poor relatives and clients. In other words, they get richer not so much by direct exploitation of the land but rather through its direct control. This does not make them landlords but “big men” whom kinsmen and free peasants in the African villages do not mind having in their midst—so much for class analysis.

Smaller landowners and the so-called commercial farmers do exactly the same thing, though on a descending scale. The main difference is that initially they concentrate on direct exploitation of their land in order to raise revenues through cash-crop production. However, once they have made enough money, instead of reinvesting in agriculture continuously, they divert some of their capital into *petty trade* – retail shops, bars, petrol stations, butcheries and transport. The last is commonly used for conveying agricultural produce from poorer farmers who get drawn into usurious transactions with haulers. Social investment also features strongly among this category of farmers.

It transpires, therefore, that the individual land tenure advocated by some African governments benefited agriculture only partially and, probably, not any more than did production from plots under customary tenure—a point that will be elaborated later. The underlying reason is that a significant proportion of the value derived from privatization of land went into circulation and consumption. Thus, by the end of the 1960s, agricultural production in sub-Saharan Africa had reached a plateau, while a few speculators continued to prosper. Another disturbing aspect of the limited African land reforms is that they favoured exploitation and parasitism between big and small farmers or between big and small men. One thing it did not do was to develop a self-reproducing class of agricultural capitalists, relying on full-time labour divested of any means of production, as predicated by the classical European model.

Government Policy Toward Modernization

Associated with the idea of individual land tenure were prospects for the introduction of new technologies or intensification of technical factors in what was presumed to be more secure private property than communal property. Indeed, not only did the farmers who had land titles have easy access to bank and government loans, but they also received the best technical services from the government. In Malawi these were known as *achikumbe*, and as “progressive farmers” in Zambia and Uganda. In Tanzania under the impact of the ideology of *ujamaa* these were simply dubbed *kulaks* but the grain growers in the western region were referred to outrightly as “capitalist farmers”. An attempt was made to extend the same designation to Kenya's medium-sized farmers toward the end of the 1970s. This did not hold because in Kenya it proved difficult to distinguish them from the middle peasants who were largely responsible for the Kenyan “success story”. In West Africa Polly Hill (1963) referred to successful middle peasants as “capitalist farmers”, notwithstanding the fact that this was not based on property and production relations but merely on the volume on production. Otherwise, the cocoa

farmers in Ghana and the coffee growers in Cote d'Ivoire were referred to simply as "planters" with the same connotations.

Naturally, these developments boosted agricultural production up to a point. What is in serious doubt is whether in fact they signalled a technological revolution in agriculture, spearheaded by the favoured big farmers. From the available evidence, there does not seem to be any appreciable difference, with respect to technological progress and labour productivity, between those African farmers who are on freehold plots and those who have only usufructuary rights under customary tenure but have enough resources of their own to engage in expanded petty commodity production. Indeed, the present agricultural crisis in sub-Saharan Africa has been blamed on "technological stagnation". While this is open to debate, it does call into question the uncritical supposition that individual tenure offers opportunities for development that are denied under customary tenure. Moreover, this belief led to a bias in resource allocation by African governments in favour of private landholders who were mistaken for capitalist farmers in the classical sense. This has not been without a very high social and economic cost, for it resulted in the neglect of the vast majority of agricultural producers and of food production in favour of short-lived cash crops.

Peasant Responses

From the point of view of development, it is most important to bear in mind that governments, despite their critical role, do not have monopoly of initiative. In sub-Saharan Africa, small producers or peasants have shown themselves to be quite responsive to the capitalist market and have taken the necessary initiatives when opportunities offered themselves. In Southern Africa and Kenya, they responded to maize production with great zeal. Likewise, they became the biggest cotton growers in Uganda and Tanzania. In West Africa, they were largely responsible for groundnut and rice production. As a response to the prolonged agricultural crisis in sub-Saharan Africa in some countries such as Kenya (Collier and Horsnell 1995), Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Senegal, they have switched from traditional crops to high-value crops such as hybrid maize, horticulture, paddy-rice, poultry and dairy farming. Some have gone back to the original heat- and drought-resistant varieties, such as millet and sorghum. All these adaptations are taking place within the confines of customary tenure. But the individuals involved are "modernized" in the sense that they have received minimal modern education, have had experience in the cities as migrant workers, and have had enough imagination to mobilize kin group resources and labour to adapt their agricultural activities to changing market conditions. Over time their numbers will increase because participation is in principle open to all under customary tenure, and it is in the interest of less fortunate producers to prevent any foreclosure.

This is perfectly sustainable because successful individuals depend on the members of their descent groups for support and labour, and are bound by principles of reciprocity. What tilted the balance toward individualism earlier was government intervention on behalf of its chosen progressive farmers, who were supposed to do without family obligations and rely only on hired labour. In reality this did not happen, so much so that in some cases whole communities, for example, in Luoland in Kenya (Anyang' Nyong'o 1981) rejected offers of individual tenure

land tenure. The Ghanaian government, which was keen to protect the rights of migrant farmers, encountered the same resistance. Equally important, however, is the fact that kin or group solidarity does not imply absence of exploitation and social domination. As was mentioned earlier, successful individuals can, and often do, take advantage of less fortunate members of the group. But one thing they cannot do is to dispossess them outright. To extract certain concessions from kinsmen, enterprising individuals must invest socially in the group. In this way not only can destitution and hunger be minimized but poorer members can also be helped to improve their chances of livelihood, which is more than can be said of “modernizing” African governments. They simply do not offer the would-be landless people any security in trying to individualize agricultural production, as happened spontaneously in the West under conditions of rapid and simultaneous industrialization.

There are many stock arguments against the system described above. First is the underinvestment argument. Second, it is claimed that loyalty to kin does little to maximize returns to capital and labour. Third, it is contended that, if people do not compete for land, labour and capital, they are most likely to use scarce resources unproductively. With regard to the first point, it can easily be pointed out that over the last 50 years or more, African cultivators, where they were allowed, adopted enough modern technology to be able to take advantage of the capitalist market. They reached a high point in the 1960s. What is of particular relevance to our analysis is the fact that most of this is attributable to the rise of what we called “middle peasants”. It was certainly not the work of capitalist farmers who were insignificant in numbers and undistinguishable technologically from the latter. Nevertheless, it is believed that African agriculture has suffered technological stagnation since the end of the 1960s. Contrary to this belief, in a finding—that is as striking as it is puzzling—in the PSC (potential population-supporting capacity) studies carried out by FAO and collaborating UN agencies, it was declared that:

Land use intensity actually estimated to prevail implies that African agriculture uses land at cropping intensities close to those compatible with the intermediate level of technology of the PSC study. ... However, the yields actually prevailing are decidedly closer to those of the low technology of the PSC study (Alexandratos 1995).

This result was re-checked, using different computer programming techniques, and confirmed. It raises some fundamental questions and goes against received theory, including that which is reflected in the 1986 FAO report, *African Agriculture: The Next 25 Years*. In conclusion it can be stated that, whatever is the problem in agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa, it does not lie in the existence or non-existence of either individual land tenure or “technological stagnation”. It is worth noting that in the current crisis there has been virtual collapse among farmers of all sizes and descriptions. In fact, the indications are that the small producers weathered the storm better than the capitalist or commercial farmers. Their survival strategies, such as developing parallel markets, bartering agricultural commodities with producers in neighbouring countries, and switching to high-value crops, though on a modest scale, seem to have paid off. Thus, the question of technological innovation or its opposite, technological stagnation, needs to be studied afresh, as does the question of who should “mobilize” whom.

It is known, but not acknowledged, that sub-Saharan African peasants have been mobile since the beginning of the last century as migrant labour and petty cash producers who were deeply involved in the capitalist market in a variety of ways. What became a problem is the structural relationship between them and their governments. It is also known that growth of markets goes hand-in-hand with capitalist development. Nevertheless, markets, like capitalism, are not evenly developed everywhere. This is particularly true of sub-Saharan Africa. Thus, in proposing to promote capitalist development among agricultural producers after independence, African governments were cognizant of the fact that this could not be done without providing the necessary marketing facilities. The idea of marketing boards appealed to them. Not only did it offer possibilities for better co-ordination and regulation of prices, but it also created opportunities for raising revenues. In the same way that “capitalist”/“commercial” farmers were geared toward cash production, the marketing boards dealt exclusively with cash crops as they were defined by colonial governments. This resulted in a failure to develop domestic markets for food crops and, therefore, in the neglect of what were known as “subsistence farmers”. It also had negative long-term effects that were not recognized until the onset of the present agricultural crisis in sub-Saharan Africa.

Suffice it to say for the time being, whereas the marketing boards were seen initially as facilitating institutions, they actually ended up being powerful instruments for extracting surplus, not so much from the estate and commercial farmers but more from the peasant producers under customary tenure. In some countries the level of taxation of this category of producers reached as much as 70 per cent of the world market value of their produce (Wrigley 1959). The bigger farmers, who were often well-represented in the government bureaucracy, were exempted from such exactions and were usually allowed to sell their commodities on floor shows. The social, economic and political implications of this are too obvious to merit comment. Under the circumstances it is not surprising that the small and middle producers reacted to these policies by withdrawing from the regular market and by engaging in what is officially called “smuggling” or by cutting down on production. At the time of writing, it is not absolutely clear whether production among the majority of the agricultural producers declined so steeply because they were supply-constrained or demand-constrained. The liberalization policies of the World Bank in the 1980s do not seem to have made any difference (see Mkandawire and Soludo 1999). This remains an intractable problem between African governments and the peasantry, and it would seem that it is African governments that have to be “mobilized” in order to be more responsive to peasant needs and not the other way round. The African peasants, unlike the classical peasantry, are not “land-rooted”. They are highly mobile as petty commodity producers, migrant workers and petty traders in agricultural commodities, in a continuing struggle for survival. It is their governments that are moribund and need rejuvenation and democratic transformation (compare Mamdani 1987).

Critique of Neoliberalism from an African Perspective

The issues discussed above are differently understood by Western neoliberals and their African adversaries. In the meantime, the neoliberal position is so dominant at the present historical juncture that it even has the pretension of being the only viable alternative since the collapse of the so-called Eastern European socialism. Therefore, a critique of neoliberal pretensions

willy-nilly becomes an imperative for throwing everything into relief and giving protagonists an opportunity to come back to their antagonists. This has already been done by Mkandawire and Soludo in their book, *Our Continent, Our Future* (1999), referred to above. Here, we can only review what could be considered the basic presuppositions of the neoliberals and their disastrous consequences with regard to the agrarian question in sub-Saharan Africa.

Since the advent of the present agricultural and food crisis in Africa, structural adjustment programmes are probably the most dramatic intervention in African economies. They came hot on the heels of the Lagos Plan of Action, which was a clear recognition by African governments of the need for social and political solutions to their economic problems. The World Bank detracted from this vision in no mean way by insisting on: (i) intensification and diversification of export production among those farmers who have the necessary resources; (ii) elimination of price controls on agricultural commodities; (iii) removal of government subsidies to farmers of all sizes; (iv) withdrawal of food subsidies by government; (v) cutbacks on social services; and (vi) of all things in a underdeveloped region, withdrawal of the state from production. These recommendations, which became part of the “conditionality” of loans from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), were consistent with the prescriptions of the Berg Report (1981) that were declared incompatible with the Lagos Plan of Action by the African Council of Ministers in Tripoli the same year and rejected as “unacceptable”. Despite this, 34 African governments capitulated to the demands of the World Bank and the IMF.

The results of this unprecedented intervention by the World Bank are well known. The structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) brought about neither growth nor social amelioration. Instead, they contributed to an increase in the rate of poverty and indebtedness among the “adjusting” African countries. The total effect of 10 years of the structural adjustment programmes was the “lost decade” of the 1980s in Africa. The World Bank could only make flimsy excuses for itself (see Humphreys 1989) when challenged first by the Economic Commission for Africa in a critical document entitled *African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programmes for Socio-Economic Recovery and Transformation* (ECA 1989) and finally, by *Our Continent, Our Future* (Mkandawire and Soludo 1999). The latter marked the end of the Washington Consensus in Africa but fell short of giving a clear perspective for economic development in the future, especially with regard to the agrarian question, which is important if agriculture is truly the backbone of the African economies. With the continuing crisis in sub-Saharan Africa, neither the World Bank nor the neoliberals have a clear agenda for the development of the subregion in the new millennium. This leaves the room open for developing new perspectives and for offering new solutions.

First, can it be assumed that *individual tenure* is a necessary condition for development of agriculture, irrespective of the cultural context and historical juncture? Second, is *bourgeois individualism* the only possible mode of social organization for agricultural production for a *capitalist market*? Third, is the idea of *large-scale farming and enclosures* applicable to African conditions where there is no land question and no industrialization to absorb a displaced rural population? Fourth and related to the last, is *poverty inescapable* in the stage of *primary*

accumulation under whatever mode of social organization? Finally, does *agrarian reform* presuppose land reform in sub-Saharan Africa?

Prospects for Agrarian Reform in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Counter-Thesis

It seems that the fact that there is no land question in sub-Saharan Africa, except in Southern Africa where land reform is a hot issue, has lulled governments and policy makers into thinking that there is no agrarian question as well. This is a mistaken view because the prolonged agricultural and food crisis in the subregion is a clear indication that all is not well. Surprisingly enough, this has not led to any serious research on the agrarian question in the subregion. Yet there are a number of issues that need to be addressed in this regard. First and foremost is the question of how best extant land tenure systems and modes of social organization for production in the subregion can be modified so as to meet the current needs of all agricultural producers, including women. Second is the relationship between the state and the peasantry. It is apparent that governments can no longer treat agriculture as a milch cow for raising revenues for financing development in urban areas, while neglecting the countryside. This calls for a new social contract between governments and agricultural producers, particularly the small and middle ones, who constitute more than 90 per cent of all farmers. Third are the implications of the collapse of the development strategy based on “large-scale” farming. This is of crucial importance, given the fact that poverty eradication is high on the agenda everywhere. It is no longer a question of maximizing physical output but of development with justice and protection of the environment, or sustainable agriculture. All these are novel questions to which valid answers cannot be derived from Eurocentric models, as has happened before. However, theoretically the issue has not yet been resolved. Neoclassical economists, led by the World Bank, are convinced that the “free market” is the key to solving all these problems and thus uphold the bourgeois individualism of the West. Needless to say, those who are on the receiving end prefer social solutions, which fall in the domain of political economy.

Therefore, in approaching the agrarian question in Africa, our starting point is the colonial division of labour in agriculture. This determined not only the role of men and women in production, but also the structure of the economy as a whole. While agriculture was divided into two subsectors—the “subsistence” and the “modern” sector—the disparity between the rural and the urban sector increased. In fact, the urban sector grew at the expense of the rural sector precisely because it was a result of urbanization without industrialization (except in South Africa). Insofar as the subsistence needs of the rural population were subordinated to those of the so-called modern sector and to the colonial demand for raw materials, it could be argued that, as a result of the colonial imposition, the rural producers could best defend themselves by giving priority to their subsistence needs. In other words, it was not simply a question of conservatism, but primarily a conflict of interests that has persisted up to the time of writing and underlies the agrarian question in sub-Saharan Africa. In the light of this, the adoption or non-adoption of cash crops is not the issue, and the division of labour between men and women in agriculture is incidental. It was rural households that were being undermined by colonial capitalism, a process that reached its climax in Southern Africa (Murray 1984 and Desmond 1971). It is this underlying contradiction and its manifestations that received conflicting interpretations from bourgeois and Marxist scholars.

From Dual Theories to the Lineage Mode of Production

The bourgeois theorists, best represented by Arthur Lewis, a black Jamaican who did so well that he earned himself international fame, postulated that the “subsistence sector” would be gradually absorbed into the more dynamic and expansive “modern sector”, or capitalist agriculture (Lewis 1954). But, unlike in the development of capitalism in Europe, this has not so far materialized in sub-Saharan Africa. It would appear then that though they are quick to dismiss the would-be socialists, the metropolitan capitalists have just as much to account for themselves: they have so far failed to develop capitalism in Africa, despite their historical dominance on the continent. Or is this the probable cause? The left is more than convinced that this is the case, as is reflected in such theories as “development of underdevelopment”, “unequal exchange” and “articulation of modes of production”. It is the last theory that provides an antithesis to the “dual theories” of the right. It was originated by the French Marxists, but it was not until the publication of Rey’s *Colonialisme, neo-colonialisme et transition au capitalisme* in 1971 that it gained currency in African studies. The basic thesis was that, contrary to neoclassical suppositions, capitalism did not expand such that it became universal in Africa, precisely because colonialism tried to undermine African modes of production, while at the same time contriving to preserve them in a modified form in order to guarantee the social reproduction of labour at no cost to the colonial exploiters. Insofar as the subsistence producers got committed to this structural role or imperative, they were not destined to become capitalists in their own right, as was predicted.

While the dissolution and preservation theory (as it came to be known) has been rejected as “functionalist” (Bernstein 1990) as well as undialectical (Mafeje 1991), it certainly holds in situations where extra-economic coercion or discrimination against the small producers was the policy, for example, in Southern Africa and in countries such as Kenya and Malawi. Acknowledgement of this fact has theoretical significance because the catalytic effect of voluntarism is often minimized in classical Marxist theory. This being granted, also it has to be recognized that, if necessary, voluntarism by itself is not sufficient because it is often trammelled by actual existing objective conditions and the reflexes of actual agents of history. For instance, it is not without significance that even under the most coercive and discriminatory regimes the so-called subsistence producers engaged in a variety of other activities out of necessity so as to meet their consumer needs or to supplement their falling subsistence incomes.

The need became most acute in Southern Africa where the system of reservation had been perfected and where subsistence production could no longer guarantee the social reproduction of migrant labour and of the productive units to which they belonged. Indeed, up to 80 per cent of rural incomes came from the urban areas in the form of remittances by migrant workers. Thus, ironically enough, the historical case that seemed to confirm the dissolution and preservation theory ended up disproving it. Quite unintended, dissolution became the inexorable trend and gradually the rural areas were turned into rural slums, but were still used as a dumping ground for unwanted urban workers under the so-called influx control. Elsewhere in Africa, although the subsistence sector did not suffer the same ravages as in Southern Africa, virtually all small producers practised more than subsistence production. They engaged in what the British empiricist referred to as “subsistence plus”. Whether or not this

implied a transition from the simple to the expanded petty mode of production in all cases is a matter of interpretation.

Nonetheless, it can be stated that the latter is of no theoretical interest to neoclassical adherents, for they believe unambiguously in accumulation from above as a matter of course. In contrast, those on the left have been concerned to explain the “underdevelopment” of the small producers in Africa since the end of the 1970s. Two main perspectives dominated the discussion. These were (i) the “proletarianization” of the peasantry due to increased labour migration and general dependence on intermittent labour employment; and (ii) differentiation of the peasantry due to “accumulation from below”. Although these two processes appear to be antithetical, they are in fact dynamically linked. But this point would appear to be lost to the protagonists from either side. For good historical reasons, the proletarianization thesis received its greatest ovation in the Africa of “labour reserves”, Southern Africa (Wolpe 1980). The majority of the Southern African black males spent the greater part of their lives between the ages of 15 and 55 working in the urban areas or on white farms as migrant labour remunerated at rates far below than the actual value of their labour. Through discriminatory or racist legislation, the employers were allowed to pay starvation wages that did not take into account the cost of social reproduction of their black labour. This obliged the migrant workers to keep one foot in the so-called subsistence sector, in spite of its diminishing economic value.

They achieved this by investing part of their meagre wages in agricultural production. Here, the latter expression is used consciously for, despite persistent stereotypes about African agriculture even among Eurocentric Marxists, in Southern Africa subsistence production has long ceased to exist. Even the so-called staple crops, such as maize, have been cash crops since the end of the nineteenth century (Bundy 1979). Sheep are reared for their wool, which is sold to local white traders; cattle are not only raised for ceremonial/ritual purposes such as bridewealth but also for sale in fairs (*fantesi* from the Afrikaans word *vandusie*) organized by itinerant white traders; while bred mainly for transport, surplus horses are sold to local buyers; and chicken, eggs and vegetables are often produced and sold by women to the local white traders. Of course, the terms of trade between the peasants and the white traders are worse than those that generally obtain between the white farmers and the urban areas. Not only does this reduce significantly the prospects for accumulating from below but it also forces producers to subsist at levels lower than would be justified by their productivity.

Finally, once again contrary to the usual stereotype about the technological backwardness of the African agricultural producers, in Southern Africa animal traction and the use of the iron plough has been the standard practice among cultivators of all sorts for the greater part of the last century. In addition, the iron planter, harrow, mechanical weeder, manure and fertilizers (usually phosphates) are commonly used, if not always affordable. However, all this did not improve the productivity of the black producers under apartheid nor did it arrest the declining levels of subsistence among them. Incompetence is not the immediate explanation, for it is the same migrant workers who man and manage white farms in the region—up to 80 per cent of the farm managers in South Africa are black, according to Wilson (1971). It transpires, therefore,

that technology and its use is not the universal explanation it is believed to be by Western “modernizers”. Unfavourable socioeconomic conditions, such as the land and the agrarian question in Southern Africa, have proved to be more critical than the sheer physical existence of European technologies. It is interesting to note that African producers in the tropics who have not adopted the cherished plough, out of a very good sense of their physical environment and not out of ignorance, as is usually alleged (compare Coquery-Vidrovitch 1977) are not worse off than their brethren in the South. If anything, they might be better off because they retained effective control over the land and, in the main, determined their own conditions of livelihood.

This takes us directly to the question of accumulation from below. What are its prospects and under what conditions does it occur? It has been argued (Neocosmos 1993) that those who emphasize the proletarianization of the peasantry in Africa overlook the importance of accumulation from below and its liberating effect. It is true that the process of proletarianization in Africa is not linear, as is shown by the dual role of migrant workers alluded to above. However, the process of accumulation from below cannot be taken for granted under all socioeconomic conditions, nor can its contribution to the development of democracy be assumed in advance. Neocosmos is guilty of both presumptions. The main reason is that Neocosmos relies too heavily on the Russian analogy as is depicted by Lenin in *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* (Lenin 1964). It is thus apposite to warn that in social analysis analogies can be very misleading, especially when drawn across continents. As far as the Russian analogy is concerned, it is well to remember that Lenin’s interest was the overthrow of the feudal aristocracy in Russia, and he therefore saw the rise of independent capitalists owing to accumulation from below as their negation. As such, it was a liberating force from feudal bondage. Lenin also surmised that the disappearance of the commune (*mir*) was the price paid for the development of capitalism in Russia and for the unleashing of progressive forces as a prelude to a socialist revolution. Among these Lenin included displaced peasants and achieved the distinction of being the first Marxist theoretician to advocate an alliance of peasants and workers in the revolutionary struggle toward socialism (see Waterman 1981).

When applied to sub-Saharan Africa, the Russian analogy breaks down completely. First, there is no feudal aristocracy from which the emergent capitalists might wish to “liberate” themselves and, thereby, contribute to the development of bourgeois democracy. Second, the few capitalist farmers who have emerged in sub-Saharan Africa, barring Southern Africa, have not necessarily displaced small producers nor have they consistently exploited them as wage labour (that is, converted them into a rural proletariat divested of any means of production). Rather, it is rural-urban migration that has led to the proletarianization of African peasants. Presumably, this would have made Lenin’s task easier since the requisite alliance between peasants and workers is embodied in the same social agents. But even this has not yet been proven. Differences in outlook between fully urbanized workers and migrant workers persist. Third, unlike in Tsarist Russia, in Africa the capitalist farmers are patronized by the state. This has been the case since colonial rule and went furthest in Southern Africa with regard to white farmers. In contrast, the relationship between the peasantry and the state continued to be antagonistic. Not only did the colonial and post-colonial states pursue extractive policies toward the peasantry, but both also

used repressive methods to ensure compliance. Not surprisingly, the state came to be looked upon as an enemy of the people. But, surprisingly enough, the capitalist farmers or the so-called *kulaks*, though looked upon with favour by the state, were generally not looked upon as enemies, except in Southern Africa. This is a rock on which mechanistic Marxist class analysis flounders, and it is one of the traps into which Mamdani unwittingly fell.

Although Mamdani (1987) and Neocosmos (1993) seem to think that they are on the same wavelength as far as accumulation from below is concerned, a closer reading of their texts suggests otherwise. For Mamdani, accumulation from below does not lead to the expansion of social democracy but to growing exploitation and political domination of the poor peasants by an infinitesimally small number of aspirant local capitalists who are invariably in league with bureaucrats at all levels, if not part of the bureaucracy themselves. Second, unlike Neocosmos, who is inclined to emphasize the fact that accumulation from below occurred in spite of the repressive white regimes in Southern Africa, Mamdani is convinced that the repressive African state and lack of popular democracy are a hindrance to genuine accumulation from below. He actually shows by a variety of examples that the local capitalists are as villainous as government bureaucrats. However, this might not be totally true, if the sociology of these two relations is taken into consideration.

In fact, there is some doubt concerning Mamdani's characterization of village "capitalists". They are characterized not by production relations but largely by exchange relations, including traditional forms of labour exchange. His argument is that such transactions involve unequal exchange between rich and poor peasants. But he admits elsewhere that the difference between a "rich" and a "poor" peasant is having one chicken or no chicken. I see this as an unnecessary slip on Mamdani's part for he had taken the trouble to measure meticulously what he considered to be essential differences between what he categorized as rich, middle, and poor peasants in one of the villages in which he did fieldwork. All the same, it is revealing because one chicken is as good as no chicken in the medium term, since it cannot reproduce itself. Under the present objective conditions in northern Uganda, where rural poverty is worse than average at 83.1 per cent of the peasants, compared with 26.1 per cent in southern Uganda (Mamdani 1987:213), it is conceivable that all peasants are poor not because of unequal exchange between them and a few isolated local "capitalists". Rather, they are poor because of a lack of development of any kind in their region—a dismal and debilitating human condition.

Marx had warned that differences in "the heaviness of the purse" did not necessarily signify class differences. In Mamdani's case it could be similarly warned that differences in the lightness or emptiness of the purse might be of little consequence under the prevailing conditions in Africa. This is a comment on too much reliance on quantitative indices at the expense of qualitative analysis. In the past (Dupre and Rey 1978) relations of domination and of exchange (Godelier 1977) had been construed as class relations simply on the premise of social inequality. This supposition was successfully refuted by writers such as Meillassoux (1972), Coquery-Vidrovitch (1977), and Samir Amin (1980).

As has been reiterated throughout our discussion, one of the most enduring and unique principles of social organization in sub-Saharan Africa is kinship, by which is meant affiliation by descent or consanguinity. Without exception, the descent group or lineage is the pivot around which social reproduction and production turn. This is normally regulated by senior men who are traditionally known as elders and who, although not necessarily referred to as such nowadays, are still recognized as the representatives of the constituent units of the lineage (minimal lineages). They are the ones who determine the allocation of resources and labour, and act as the politico-jural representatives of their respective units in the public domain or external affairs. This entails a hierarchical relationship between them and their juniors as well as between them and women. In turn, they accept responsibility for the protection and well-being of both, that is, they control the means of subsistence and social reproduction.

It is of great significance that some French Marxists, despite being schooled in Marxist universalism as is exemplified by the five modes of production or historical stages of development postulated by Marx, not only found the sub-Saharan mode of organization intriguing but also unique to the extent that they were prepared to make an exception of it. Coquery-Vidrovitch (1977) argued that: "By taking into account these specific traits (articulation between kinship, political and economic power) it is possible to discern an *African mode of production* distinct from the classical model of the *Asiatic mode of production*" (Gutkind and Waterman 1977, italics original). Pierre Phillippe Rey (1975), inspired by Claude Meillassoux's analysis (1964) of the economics of kinship among the Gouro in Côte d'Ivoire, set out to establish the existence of a diagnostic *lineage mode of production* in Africa. Both suggestions were resisted by more orthodox Marxists in the belief that they would lead to "particularism" and proliferation of modes of production according to the historical specificity of each region. It is exactly the uniqueness of the *African mode of social organization* that we wish to re-emphasize in this paper. As we contended, it is based on kinship and characterized by relations of domination and not of production. Hence, it cannot, theoretically speaking, be referred to as a mode of production.

Owing to corporate existence under the lineage mode of organization, when members of the community enter into transactions with other members, they do not do so as individuals but as representatives of their respective groups. This creates a very intricate web of mutual obligations that are manipulable according to the relative power of each group. This is why lineage members take pride in having a "big man" in their midst. A big man commands more services and prestations than a small man, not only in relation to outsiders but also in relation to his kinsmen/women. But often his obligations increase accordingly; for example, school fees for the children of his poor relatives, a helping hand in times of need such as weddings, illness, funerals and any other major event. So it can be said that while African systems of kinship are marked by relations of domination, they also have a very important welfare function that guarantees the survival of individuals and often makes it possible for promising youngsters to receive education, thus contribute to the development of human capital in society as a whole. Generations of educated Africans are thoroughly familiar with this tradition and continue to be part of it.

The contention that relations of domination, which entail social inequality, are not relations of exploitation precisely because they involve socially determined redistribution, does not necessarily invalidate any supposition about accumulation from below. The argument is that, if by accumulation from below is meant class differentiation, then not all forms of social exchange lead to class formation. African lineages are proof of this and consequently their redistributive dialectic has been held responsible for a lack of accumulation among African producers. This is only true from the point of view of bourgeois individualism. Collectively, a significant percentage of African production units have been able to accumulate value by growing crops or rearing animals for the capitalist market. Otherwise, it is not possible to account for the prosperity of the African peasants in the 1950s and 1960s, when commodity prices were buoyant, or for the rapid rise of "middle peasants", that is, the development of the expanded petty mode of production everywhere, except in Southern Africa. It is probably true that the development of capitalism in the bourgeois sense was thwarted by collective resistance against individualization of production, while accepting commercialization of production under customary tenure where use-rights are guaranteed to all potential producers within the fold until demographic pressure dictated otherwise. The latter also affects pre-existing land exchanges between repository groups. This is why sale of land by individuals does not mean much because under certain conditions the original holding group could invoke its reversionary rights and offer to buy back the land with due compensation for any permanent investments. This is what happened in Kenya and could happen to the heirs of Mamdani's "capitalist buyer" in northern Uganda.

The least troublesome mode of accumulation from below that has occurred in Africa is the one that did not involve alienation of land but took advantage of customary tenure that allows perpetual use and inheritance of allotted plots of land. It also need not be as predatory as in Mamdani's case. In East and Southern Africa it was financed from remittances from urban areas, from the salaries of the petty bourgeoisie (for example, priests, teachers, petty bureaucrats, craftsmen, small-scale speculators and share-croppers) trained by missionaries. These simply intensified the technical factors of production while relying on household labour. The term "household labour" is used here advisedly because in Africa, contrary to the common European usage, households are the production units, not families, whose composition is determined by descent (filiation) and are the repositories of lineage assets and accumulated value. In contrast, in households the primary relation is marriage (affinity) and the primary purpose is reproduction and production. It is for this reason that unmarried individuals are not entitled to allocation of land and are expected to eat from their mother's pot, irrespective of their sex or age. This would appear to be irrational. But there are underlying structural reasons for it. Traditionally, it was the duty of women to cultivate the land for their husbands. Therefore, it would have been pointless to allocate land to an unmarried man. Only in matrilineal societies was the husband expected to cultivate the land for the benefit not so much of his wife but for the benefit of her group, since he was subject to the authority of her sister's son or his brother-in-law as long as he lived in their compound. As can be seen, even in matrilineal societies the men are the legal representatives, and the matrilineage assets are passed down through them. The sister's son was the heir, to the exclusion of the children of the

labouring husband. Females from either side have neither inheritance rights nor juridico-political authority in the matrilineages to which they belong by descent.

The logical reason for this is that in African societies where clan exogamy is the rule, in getting married, women move to their husband's group (affines). First, under the circumstances, the lineages foreclose any possibility of transfer of their assets to another lineage through women. Second, insofar as they are destined to leave their natal lineages, women cannot be relied upon for the continuity that is necessary for the maintenance of the integrity of the lineage. These are determinate structural predispositions of the lineage mode of organization and not acts of volition by men, no matter how dominant they are. Therefore, the basic issue is the lineage mode of organization itself, which feminists cannot hope to transform by demanding individual rights for women. For instance, if under the extant lineage system men have no individual rights over land, why should women be entitled to any? Likewise, if unmarried men are not entitled to allocation of land for cultivation, why should unmarried women be an exception? These are not principled demands and stem from a confusion between the fact that married men have usufructuary rights while women have none and gain access to land only through their husbands: that is, wives are entitled to the use of the land (or part thereof) allotted to their husbands for subsistence production for their households. But it is the husbands who have ultimate control over the means of subsistence.

With the introduction of cash crops this has become a major source of conflict between wives and husbands, because it gives the husbands the right to appropriate the value of what their wives produce and dispose of it at their discretion. This is possibly an instance of domination as well as exploitation since the product—but not the labour of the wives—is commoditized. It is here that the disadvantages of dependent tenure manifest themselves most strongly. The immediate solution to the problem would be to grant the same usufructuary rights to men and women, whether married or not. This would not threaten the reversionary rights of the landholding groups since none of the allottees would thereby acquire the right to dispose of the land, but only its manifestations. The only rub is that it would radically affect the division of labour between men and women, and would profoundly affect the processes of social reproduction of the African lineages.

The exchange of women is essential for the biological reproduction of African lineages, since exogamy and the incest taboo preclude men from marrying their kinswomen, real or putative. First, for their material survival, lineages endeavour to keep their patrimony/matrimony intact and within the group. This immediately excludes women who are married into the group, and those who are born in the group but are destined to be recruited by other lineages as wives, from any juridical control that they might wish to exercise on their own behalf. Second, for their subsistence fund, African lineages depend largely on the labour of the women they recruit through marriage. Full usufructuary rights would enable women to expend their labour power on their own behalf and would grant them the right of disposal over the product. However, it is most unlikely that married women would neglect the subsistence needs of their households. Third, it is probable that husbands would be obliged to do more agricultural work or hire

labour from outside, especially when they themselves are engaged in temporary wage employment elsewhere. Unlike before, the rest of the household budget would become negotiable, something that is not unknown in mercantile West Africa (see Fapohunda 1987).

But one certainty is that husbands would not wish to be seen as derelict of their lineage duties and obligations while at the same time would strenuously resist any attempt by their wives to transfer value from their households to their natal lineages. The latter might prove non-negotiable since the bridewealth paid to the wife-giving lineage transfers to her husband not only conjugal rights and her capacity to bear children (who are part of the reproduction of the lineage), but also her ability to provide for her husband. On the question of retention of maximum value, possible members of the lineage (including women) would in all probability be unanimous. On the other hand, ordinary (i.e. non-middle class) African women would not wish to enter marriage without payment of the bridewealth to their lineage for fear of losing any support and succour from its members should the marriage fail. In case of the latter, the woman would automatically lose her usufructuary rights in her husband's area and would be expected to return to her natal family or to go and seek her fortune elsewhere (usually in towns where life is unpredictable). In conclusion it can be said that the lineage mode of social organization has both advantages and disadvantages. These are underscored by kinship ideology that gives rise to serious gender issues that affect both men and women and cannot be blamed only on men as if they are socially produced without the active participation of women.

Prospects for the Resolution of the Agrarian Question in Africa

Despite the contradictions and relations of domination discussed above, a full-scale revolution against lineages in sub-Saharan Africa is not feasible. Kinship ties are still vital to individuals in a situation where development is tardy and the new institutions cannot sustain the individuals; and where the welfare function of the economy and the role of the state cannot be guaranteed. Nor is this simply a problem of the underprivileged. It transcends social class since even the privileged (for example, university and secondary school teachers, senior bureaucrats and other white collar workers) are also deeply involved. Nonetheless, the situation has been far from being static. In agriculture a number of households have made the transition from the petty to the expanded petty mode of production. Both men and women have been active agents in the process, although on unequal terms. They achieved this by growing cash crops for the capitalist market while relying on household labour and occasional help from kin and hired labour. This was accompanied by some intensification of technical factors of production such as use of animal traction and mechanical implements, where possible, and manuring, mulching and applying inorganic fertilizers and insecticides. Thus, the problem of African agriculture is not the land question or land tenure systems—except in Southern Africa and a few small land-deficit countries such as Lesotho, Burundi, Rwanda, Gambia and the Comoros Islands. However, the Seychelles and Mauritius, though small countries, both solved their land question by breaking up the original colonial estates into medium-sized farms and by expanding the non-agricultural sectors of their economies. The surplus population from agriculture (not to be confused with the countryside in general) was thereby absorbed. Rural development via non-agricultural activities was an important part of their development strategy.

For the rest of the African continent, the agrarian question is the critical issue. As is known, this involves social, economic and technological reforms that vary according to historical circumstances. In African agriculture it is obvious that there is a social and an economic imperative to liberate women from male domination. This is not only their democratic right but also a liberating force in the agrarian sector in general. Not only are women the majority of agricultural producers in sub-Saharan Africa (nearly 70 per cent) but their full potential has not been realized under the restrictive and male-biased lineage mode of organization, which has remained pervasive, despite bourgeois individualism fostered first by the missionaries and the colonial state, and now by the World Bank and similar agencies. It has also been demonstrated that participation in the capitalist system is not contingent on individualized production and that collective forms of social organization can do just as well in non-Western societies. Historically, kinship ties played a very prominent role in the development of capitalism in Southeast Asia. It is apparent that in the short- to medium-term, bourgeois individualism, as is advocated by Western-oriented feminists, could easily play into the hands of ardent male chauvinists. Therefore, the way in which the reform is carried out is as important as the final objective itself. Equal land rights for men and women, equal participation in the labour process and equal say in the distribution of the product are fair demands and are capable of transforming the lineage mode of organization, if consciously implemented by African governments. This presupposes that future African governments will be democratic and gender sensitive. The obvious implication here is that women can attain their legitimate rights only as part of a political struggle for social democracy. Otherwise, they could easily fall prey to liberal petty reformism, as is happening in the West.

In pursuance of the above argument, it could be asserted that female producers by and large fall into the category of “poor peasants” or small-scale producers, which includes men as well. Collectively, these are the inevitable objects of agrarian reform. They suffer certain common problems, such as extractive state policies, lack of infrastructure, lack of proper marketing facilities, exploitation by middlemen and unscrupulous traders, all of which militate against accumulation from below. This refers to the great majority of African agricultural producers, without whose full participation in production, it is difficult to talk of agricultural development. Their marginalization has not been compensated for by concentration on the bigger farmers in the era of “progressive farmers”, then “commercial farmers”/“large-scale farmers” and, finally, the bogus “agricultural entrepreneurs” of the era of structural adjustment programmes. Large-scale farming as a model for agrarian transformation in sub-Saharan Africa, except in Southern Africa where it succeeded in creating the worst immiseration and chronic rates of unemployment among the land-starved peasants, *has failed*.

The large-scale farmers could not reproduce themselves mainly for technological and managerial reasons. First, they became increasingly uncompetitive because they continued to rely on traditional European technologies and traditional export crops. Second, most of them did not have the requisite managerial skills for modern large-scale farming, and dependence on permanent crops such as cocoa, coffee and tea made the need appear even less urgent. It is interesting to note that traditional sugar-estate owners in Mauritius suffered the same fate and

were forced to sell their land to medium-sized producers who found it easier to diversify production. Under the current agricultural crisis large-scale farmers, who had no ready market for their more or less derelict farms, simply pulled out of agriculture into circulation (trade). This is not surprising because even at the best of times bigger African farmers showed a definite preference for making quick money by diverting their surpluses into trade rather than *re-investing* in agriculture. This is a sign of the weakness of agricultural capital in sub-Saharan Africa and has very serious implications for the development of genuine capitalist agriculture, instead of the present lumpen agricultural capitalism.

In contrast to the large-scale farmers, African peasants of all sizes have shown great resilience, perhaps because they did not have much choice. They have done their best to maintain their agricultural activities even under the present crisis. As before, the middle peasants have fared best. Although conventionally “middle peasants” are thought of as those with five to eight acres, acreage is not the best measurement because it is subject to soil fertility, crops grown and labour intensity. A more reliable criterion is their productivity and type of labour used. This lends itself to the distinction between the petty mode of production in which use value is the dominant factor, and the expanded petty mode of production in which exchange value is an important factor in the allocation of resources and labour, that is, part of production is expressly meant for the market and is aimed at accumulating value. Whether using more or less acreage, or selling some products out of necessity, those who operate within the petty mode of production are qualitatively different because their primary objective is subsistence and not accumulation.

This does not mean that they are averse to accumulation, but that it is beyond their reach. It is this category of producers who can be accurately referred to as poor peasants. Those who have no access to agricultural resources of any kind, such as land, domestic animals and implements, and survive by other means, including selling their labour power, technically cannot be referred to as peasants even if they reside in the countryside. In sub-Saharan Africa, where even the destitute have residual rights in the assets of their lineages, the problem is less of access than of lack of means for joining in the mobilization of existing resources. Put differently, minimal accumulation is the prerequisite for reproducing oneself socially. The poor are not poor because they are poor but because they are *socially deprived*, that is, they can help themselves if someone somewhere in society can help them to do so. Poverty is not simply a fault of individuals but a socially determined economic condition.

This would indicate that, while always possible, accumulation from below has its own limits under certain conditions. For instance, it could be unrealizable under conditions of super-exploitation of the peasantry, political repression or extra-economic coercion, as in Southern Africa and, increasingly, in the rest of Africa. It is not absolutely clear whether accumulation from below, as is used by Mamdani and Neocosmos, means the same thing as “primitive accumulation”, which need not be from below, if we take seriously the Marxist notion of “primitive socialist accumulation”, or whether it means what happened in establishing state capitalism in non-socialist countries (such as South Africa under Afrikaner domination) and

some ill-fated attempts by black nationalists after independence. What is observable is that the preferred terms in liberal discourse are “savings”, “capital-formation”, and simply “accumulation”, and a direct association between these and investment is made. The latter is a bourgeois presupposition, which is betrayed by the African experience. Ruling African elites accumulate a great deal of ill-gotten revenues but are not noted for their propensity to invest. At the other extreme, African small producers, contrary to neoclassical suppositions, save but do not mobilize their savings. Instead, they keep them as an insurance against hard times. Therefore, it would be useful if the notion of primitive accumulation, whether from above or below, were limited to the conversion of available stocks of revenue into *capital*. It is important to recognize that this process is not automatic and is often subject to extra-economic factors, such as the social significance that is attached to material value. *Homo economicus* is a bourgeois social construct that is historically determined. As is known, in Europe the feudal aristocrats did not have the same social attitude toward material value as the rising bourgeoisie. Why should this be any different elsewhere?

By accident, after fruitless inquiries from African economists, I found in Toyo’s forgotten paper, *Primary Accumulation and Development Strategy in a Neocolonial Economy* (no date), the most unambiguous definition of “primitive accumulation” I had encountered in the writings of the African left.

[P]rimitive capitalist accumulation is a transitional category of accumulation. It is the setting up of capitalist enterprise, that is, wage-employed enterprises with private capital whose origin is not surplus generated in the same or another capitalist enterprise (p.21).

Although Toyo goes on to say: “It is obvious that the source of this capital for embryonic capitalism must be the surplus generated in the pre-capitalist sphere of production”, this is an unnecessary diversion because the capitalist market has, to a very great extent, integrated the different sectors of the African economies. For instance, it would be difficult to argue that wage employment, petty trade and government revenues in Africa are “pre-capitalist”. What is germane to Toyo’s argument is the fact that the surpluses derived from them are *pre-capital*, insofar as they have to be converted into capital—the only form of value which can reproduce itself indefinitely—without recourse to any primary source. Presumably, this is why it is advanced, that is, not primitive. Since these other forms of accumulation are hardly primitive, it seems quite in keeping to refer to them as “primary accumulation”.

Having made the critical distinction between primary accumulation and expanded accumulation, it is now time to return to the subjects of these processes. It is apparent that middle peasants are capable of both primary and expanded accumulation, and hence their mode of production is referred to as the expanded petty mode of production. In contrast, poor peasants cannot attain either and are happy to meet their subsistence needs. However, in spite of this, some keep trying but often fail. This is the logic of their mode of social existence—“petty”—and has given rise to suppositions about their “lack of the propensity to save” among neoclassical economists. They are thus condemned to a lowly social existence or to sell their

labour power to their betters. This leaves neoclassical economists bereft of any theory for poverty eradication in Africa, where opportunities for employment outside agriculture are very limited. Within agriculture, general access to land renders unavailable what appears to be a ready supply of labour, namely, the poor peasants.

To the bewilderment of the unwary, in FAO reports (and the World Bank seems to agree) *shortage of labour* is often cited as one of the biggest constraints on agricultural expansion in Africa. Likewise, in feminist reports there is a frequent complaint that women producers, unlike men, suffer more because of lack of access to hired labour. Apart from the ideological connotations of such assertions, individualization of production, as is demanded by some feminists, implies competition for labour. However, this is beside the point. What is important from the point of view of development is the general unavailability of labour in a situation where the labour supply is supposed to be unlimited. The World Bank in particular believes that wages in Africa are “too high”, forgetting that by the same logic wages could be too low for those who have access to land resources or other forms of self-employment. Otherwise, why do poor African peasants prefer to be self-employed? Why has increased unemployment in the urban areas not “cleared” the urban labour markets but rather accelerated the growth of the informal sector, which is another form of self-employment among the poor? Does not self-employment imply the “propensity to save”, however limited it might be? Neoclassical economists have no clear answers to these questions, largely because they suffer from Eurocentrism.

The insistence on or drive toward self-employment among the poor in Africa in the wake of the collapse of the national economies and the growth of poverty at an alarming rate has given credibility to the demand for a bottom-up development strategy at the beginning of the new millennium. In its *Human Development Report* (1997), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) put forward a convincing humanitarian argument for “eradication” of poverty, and not simply alleviation of poverty, as was the fashion in the previous two decades. Consistent with this, it emphasized development of “human capital”, without going into the economics of either of these two pillars of its development strategy. The World Bank, under heavy criticism for having failed to take into account the “human dimension” in its SAPs which, far from alleviating poverty, increased it at least among vulnerable groups, found it expedient to go along. But cognizant of the fact that development of human capital detracts from accumulation before it enhances it, the World Bank contrived to accommodate development of human capital under the confines of economic growth. In a similar vein it saw eradication of poverty as a consequence of growth, spearheaded by capitalist producers without the interference of the state (Mkandawire and Soludo 1999). Thus, it cast the poor in a passive role in the belief that they are incapable of generating investible surpluses and are as a rule *unbankable*, unlike big farmers. Is all this verifiable and universally true? It is possible that most of these suppositions are nothing more than bourgeois prejudices based on the history of development of capitalism in agriculture in the West.

For instance, there is no evidence that big farmers in black Africa are more efficient than smaller ones. Second, if large-scale farmers were bigger foreign exchange earners until the onset of the current agricultural crisis, the small female cultivators in Africa were and still are the biggest food producers. The latter observation is not invalidated by the fact that there are mounting food deficits in African countries. If anything, it is an argument for giving this category of producers preferential treatment, instead of marginalizing them. Likewise, it cannot be proved that big farmers in Africa are more responsive to technological innovations than smaller farmers. In the present agricultural crisis in Africa, big farmers have generally responded to the collapse of international markets for traditional export crops by pulling out of agriculture altogether, instead of diversifying away from such crops as a matter of expediency. In contrast, middle peasants in countries such as Kenya have adjusted to the crisis by switching to high-value annual crops, dairy farming and poultry (Collier and Horsnell 1995); as have small-scale female producers in countries such as Senegal and Zimbabwe. This would indicate that technological responsiveness has nothing to do with size of farmers but rather with the cost of innovation. In this context poor peasants are necessarily handicapped and naturally disinclined to take risks. In a more enabling environment this need not be the case. With a certain amount of encouragement, peasants in Kenya and Zimbabwe have readily switched to hybrid maize varieties while their brethren in Malawi, faced with a cynical and oppressive government, have consciously avoided such a move.

Concerning the propensity to save, once again it cannot be proved that big farmers actually save more than poorer peasant farmers in Africa. According to a survey conducted by E. Aryeetey (1993), the probability is that poor peasants save more as a percentage of their income than big farmers. However, the essential difference is that the peasants' savings are intended as insurance against unexpected economic exigencies. Therefore, they remain immobilized for long periods of time. Looked at from this angle, the problem is not savings but economic insecurity. This provides further arguments for government support in the form of loans, since commercial banks think of poor farmers as unbankable. Unlike landless peasants in Asia and Latin America, poor peasants in Africa have a claim to land resources and their land rights are often recognized by their families or lineages. Such surety makes them thoroughly *bankable* and an economic asset, if given the opportunity to be productive. In Malawi, Kydd and Hewitt (1986) found that the rate of repayment of government loans by poor peasants exceeded 94 per cent. To drive home the point about the bankability of the poor, reference could be made to the famous Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, which experienced a 100 per cent loan recovery from poor women, or to the Employment Guarantee Scheme of Maharashtra in India, which made it possible for thousands of unemployed rural poor to be productive through food aid.

The above considerations predispose us not toward poverty alleviation but toward a trickle-up strategy for development, whose immediate objective is elimination of poverty. It is, however, important to note that here the emphasis is not on the timeframe but on treating poverty elimination as basically development from below. This makes perfect sense in regions such as sub-Saharan Africa, where the vast majority of the population is poor but has access to land. In its report, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD 1992) argued

persuasively that not only is the productivity of the rural poor easily raised by modest investment, but also that the marginal capital to output ratio is much lower for the poor rural producers than for more capital-intensive large-scale farmers. Taking into consideration marginal capital productivity (that is, the reciprocal of the capital to output ratio) between the two subsectors, the report posited that one unit of resources invested in the peasant subsector would generate greater savings than if it were invested in the capital-intensive subsector. It further suggested that, given a situation in which the poor are the vast majority, the diminishing return to capital would not be as significant in the poor sector as in the non-poor sector.

The thrust of these inspiring arguments is that in situations where the poor predominate, it is more efficient to invest in them than in the non-poor, who are prone to absorb more resources than can be economically justified. In other words, not only is it cheaper in terms of capital outlay (including foreign exchange) to invest in the under-capitalized majority, but also it helps to mobilize their only form of wealth, labour. This is a guarantee for self-development and a necessary foundation for national development. In this context bourgeois arguments about scattered and unproductive marginal producers lose all relevance, as they do not take into consideration the real social, economic and human cost of poverty. In the context of sub-Saharan Africa, pervasive poverty is fundamentally a problem of development and is amenable to "trickle-up" development strategies.

By investing in the small producers, African governments could hope to reap multiple benefits, namely, elimination of absolute poverty and acceleration of agricultural expansion by pushing into the expanded petty mode of production as many small producers as possible, and reduction/elimination of rural unemployment. All this would require a significant increase in investment in agriculture and rural development. So far, African governments average about 6 per cent of their national budgets for investment in agriculture. Yet it is estimated that as much as 24 per cent would be required to improve productivity in African agriculture (World Bank 1994). This makes nonsense of any demands that the state withdraw from involvement in economic production. It is known that private capital is only attracted to the more developed parts of the economy and does not involve itself in primary accumulation, the development of infrastructure nor the development of water resources and energy. These responsibilities devolve upon the state; so does the development of human capital that directly benefit the employers who generally seek tax exemptions, which is especially true of foreign capital. The state has a big facilitative role to play in development in Africa, where the local capitalists are too few and too weak to take charge of the national economy.

Despite the empty talk about protectionism from the West, it is obvious that fledging economies such as the African ones need some protection from the state against critical external economies, as is the case even in developed countries. The African tragedy is that the state itself has become the single biggest development problem. Apart from rampant corruption, there is wanton waste of resources on the development of means of repression such as militarization (Hutchful and Bathily 1998). This is not simply a matter of lack of democracy, properly understood, but

physical destruction of the very people who should be mobilized for development. Under the circumstances, despite the usual liberal inhibitions, the dividing line between insurrection and development becomes very thin indeed. This notwithstanding, intervention by a democratic developmentalist state should not be interpreted as a case against capitalist accumulation. The development of a strong national bourgeoisie could strengthen the required national democratic revolution and could reduce the prospects for the resurgence of state authoritarianism. In agriculture, if the middle peasants become the dominant force, their transformation into capitalist farmers through intensification of technical factors such as irrigation, introduction of new cultivars, increased use of fertilizers, better pest control and improved implements, rather than through alienation of land, should be encouraged as has happened in Japan.

This presupposes the development of industries that are able to respond to the demand from agriculture, including generation of appropriate technologies, as occurred in Japan after the country turned against the Western model of agricultural development (Franks 1980). Nearer home, in Egypt (the cradle of the plough), the despised hoe with a much broader blade and shorter handle than the one common in sub-Saharan Africa is still used in conjunction with a tractor-drawn plough for virtually all operations besides turning the soil and breaking the clods on medium and small farms. Also, animal (horse and donkey) traction for conveying produce to the market is still standard among this category of farmers. And yet, their productivity and cropping intensity is second only to that of the Dutch and the Danish farmers. The sub-Saharan Africans are still very far from exhausting these possibilities, which means that a great deal could be achieved with relatively very little capital investment. But Eurocentrism is blocking their vision.

Against the envisaged development strategy from below and above, it is important to point out that to give priority to agriculture is one thing, and to regard agricultural as the “backbone” of African economies in any intrinsic sense is another. In fact, the latter is a great fallacy perpetrated by the World Bank and former colonial masters for their own purposes. Whereas Africa has a great deal more land per person than any other continent, its share of arable land is relatively small. Of the 10 major soil types found in Africa, two—desert and shallow soils—are not capable of supporting rain-fed cultivation, and yet they constitute nearly 40 per cent of the land surface. Of the remaining 60 per cent, 20 per cent is covered by sandy soils of various kinds which are deficient in plant nutrients and subject to both wind and rain erosion. Possibly half of what remains consists of clay and poorly drained soils which, while not infertile, are extremely difficult to manage. This leaves a small proportion, about 20 per cent, of good arable land found mainly in the tropical highlands of eastern Africa, the tropical lowlands of central and southerly West Africa, and the ferruginous tropical soils of southeast Africa and parts of west Africa. Here, it is important to note that, while tropical soils are generally deep, most of those in the humid zones are characterized by a thin organic layer, which easily disintegrates in the absence of vegetation cover.

Nonetheless, there are still enough reserves of cultivable land in Africa, especially in central and southeast Africa. Outside the humid and sub-humid tropical zone, the limiting factor is rain or water (including frequent droughts). To make matters worse, the prospects for irrigation in Africa are very limited: 20–25 million hectares out of an estimated 600 million hectares of land is suitable for cultivation. Worse still, currently less than 5 per cent of this land is under irrigation and almost half of it is in North Africa (especially Egypt). Furthermore, it is estimated that the cost of irrigation in Africa would be prohibitive—two to three times as much as in India (FAO 1985). Water availability is not the problem in Africa; rather, the difficulty is in obtaining it where it is most needed: outside the equatorial zone. Due to low carrying capacity, subregions outside the humid and semi-humid zone have suffered steady ecological decline under intensive cropping regimes (excluding most of the Sudan). The decline has affected most of central and eastern Ethiopia, sub-humid and mountainous East Africa, and sub-humid and semi-arid Southern Africa (with Botswana, southern and northwestern Namibia, the Eastern Cape up to Zululand, and southern Madagascar showing almost the same intensity of degradation as the Sudano-Sahel). The savannah on both sides of the equator is threatened with soil erosion due to frequent and uncontrolled fires (Lambini and Ehrlich 1995).

Thus, it is probable that most of the decline in agricultural productivity in Africa is accounted for by degradation of the soil, which is largely attributable to inappropriate production techniques, including indiscriminate use of Western technologies. Therefore, soil preservation and protection of the environment might be a critical factor in any efforts to reinvigorate agriculture in Africa. Among other things, this means that Africa will have to industrialize as a matter of urgency—not only to survive economically but also in order to meet the technical and scientific requirements for the development of agriculture. The immediate implication is that, contrary to the usual Eurocentric assumptions, primary accumulation for industrialization could not possibly come from the depressed African agricultural economies. The immediate task for African planners and policy makers is to make sure that agriculture can in the foreseeable future feed the rapidly growing African population. African governments ought to derive great satisfaction from this for both social and financial reasons and think of other ways of financing industrialization, which is fast becoming the *sine qua non* for the future of the continent. This should not be so difficult, remembering how precious resources (including mineral wealth, foreign aid and loans) have been squandered in the past 30 years on contemptible activities such as conspicuous consumption, futile civil wars and, above all, sustaining petty dictators. All this comes back to the issue of social democracy as being a necessary condition for equitable development in Africa. In this context, the important injunction is that, if we are serious about poverty eradication and a bottom-up development strategy, then the policy of extracting surplus-value from the peasants for the benefit of urban areas should be abandoned so as to ensure equity and ensure that the urban areas live on added value, as a logical imperative of such a development strategy.

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