Class and Nation in the Agrarian Questions of the South: Notes in Response to Moyo, Jha and Yeros*

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Abstract

The article commences with a statement about the global inequalities in publishing about agrarian and rural issues in the South and the manner in which Northern and Western scholarship has assumed a virtual monopoly in this respect. Consequently, the voice of the South has been muted. It praises the corrective challenge to this inequality spearheaded by Moyo, Jha and Yeros, and then goes on to provide an outline of their broadside. The article places the debate within a historical context but then raises a number of critical questions about the new agrarian question which they propose as both a political intervention for the people of the South as well as a scholarly engagement on contemporary challenges. In particular, the article calls for a class analysis of their assiduously argued project of national sovereignty in the face of global capital.

Keywords

agrarian question, national sovereignty, class analysis, populism

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Introduction

Sam Moyo, Praveen Jha and Paris Yeros (2012, 2013) are at the forefront of endeavours to shift the locus of debates about land and agrarian question from the North to the South. They have spearheaded efforts through scholarly contributions informed by an immediate appreciation of the empirical realities of countries in the South, as well as a conceptual framework located broadly within the Dependency School of Development Studies. Importantly, they have grounded these efforts institutionally through the newly-established Agrarian South Network as an overarching and coordinating body for activities designed to promote the interests of the South. Since its inception, there have already been some notable successes.

Launching the journal, appropriately called *Agrarian South*, in 2012, was a significant milestone in the struggle to challenge the Northern monopoly over intellectual production around agrarian questions. At face value, it may appear ironic that the developed metropolitan urban centres enjoy such intellectual dominance around issues pertaining to the rural realities of the South. Yet, this is merely a microcosm of wider disparities in global scholarship which mirror societal inequalities between the former colonizers and the colonies. The voices of Southern scholarship have been muted by the preponderance of Northern scholarly journals, which, simply by force of numbers, appear to determine research agendas and debates around agrarian issues. *Agrarian South* seeks to address this problem.

The Moyo et al. Broadside

The Moyo et al. broadside is unambiguously from the South, purporting to represent Africa, Asia and Latin America in both theory and in struggle. Writing within these contexts, their challenge has emerged subsequent to the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) in Zimbabwe, which transferred virtually all agricultural land from white commercial farmers to blacks. It also has currency because of the unmitigated failure of the neoliberal structural adjustment programmes in dealing with problems of widespread poverty and underdevelopment.

There is no question that their intervention is a welcome corrective to the overarching monopoly over agrarian studies in the North. Yet, this is not a kneejerk reaction to Northern dominance. Instead, it has depth and relevance premised on the notion of engaged scholarship as a normative expression of Southern interests. The lifeblood of this scholarship is the multifarious efforts to reclaim land and the broader struggles that these battles represent.

The approach is characterized by an intrinsic link between scholarship and struggle. The connections are often quite direct, but they are obviously not reducible to each other. While Moyo et al. (2013) are expressly concerned to set the scholarly record straight, they are also committed to a fundamental reorganization of an international division of labour which is heavily weighted in favour of the North. They articulate the interests of the South not simply as an academic exercise but as a contribution to the struggles of the South in both the manner in which these struggles are represented as well as in practice.

The alternative they provide is premised on a particular understanding of world history, of colonialism, industrialization and modernity emphasizing the enormous differences between the West and the colonial world, and questioning the universal applicability of Marxist dogma. First, they offer a sustained critique of deep-seated Eurocentrism by demonstrating the inadequacies of imposing a set of pre-determined strictures on how economic development ought to unfold. For them, this Eurocentrism finds expression in Marxism and in the making of myths around industrialization as a linear evolutionary development critical to the resolution of the agrarian question. Instead, their position is both of the South and about the South, showing how the locus of revolutionary agency shifted quite decisively after the failure of revolution in the West. The popular national liberation struggles of the colonial world were a potent force for global change which upstaged the sterility of various branches of Western Marxism from the Stalinism of the Soviet version to the disengagement of the New Left.

In many respects, their output has been voluminous. The roots of their approach are firmly embedded in the Zimbabwean experience where, over several decades, Sam Moyo has distinguished himself as the foremost analyst on agrarian issues. He has over this period consistently argued for fundamental land reform in Zimbabwe, exposing the

untenable colonially inherited inequalities in land ownership, as well as promoting the prospects of a peasant revival with greater access to land for blacks as the basis for livelihoods. For him, this is the surest way to enhance livelihoods and for the economic recovery of Zimbabwe out of the severity of the crisis. In this respect, the FTLRP of the early 2000s has been a watershed. Moyo was joined by Paris Yeros, his former research student based in Brazil, and in 2005 they published an edited volume entitled, *Reclaiming the Land: The Resurgence of Rural Movements in Africa, Asia and Latin America*, in which they characterized the land occupation movement in Zimbabwe in glowing terms, as 'the first radical shift in agrarian property rights in the post-Cold War world' (Moyo and Yeros 2005: 3), and also as 'the most notable of rural movements in the world today', as well as 'the most important challenge to the neo-colonial state in Africa' (*ibid.*: 165). The book as a whole is a celebration of peasant movements, although the only chapter on South Africa tellingly deals with urban land occupations. *Reclaiming the land* was followed in 2011 by another edited volume by Moyo and Yeros, entitled *Reclaiming the Nation: the Return of the National Question in Africa, Asia and Latin America.* Taken together these two books represent a concerted effort to recast debates about the South in relation specifically to the national and agrarian questions.

Moyo and Yeros were joined by the well-known Indian economist, Praveen Jha, in 2012, to complete the African, Latin American and Asian tri-continental representative sweep of their analysis. Together with their colleagues on the Editorial Board, they wrote the inaugural editorial statement for *Agrarian South*, which laid out the basis for their approach (Editorial 2012). The editorial was followed by an article entitled, 'The classical agrarian question: myth, reality and relevance today', in which Moyo et al. (2013) provide the basic elements of a peasant path defined as a new agrarian question. My approach in this response is interrogative—asking questions of the authors in respect of particular points of view they advance.

The positions Moyo et al. (2012, 2013) advance are not without their problems. In this response, while locating myself very firmly within the camp of the South, I wish to raise some critical issues in respect of how the agrarian question is framed in relation to a so-called peasant path.

The Context[†]

This is not a new debate. Of the many initiatives of the Agrarian South Network, few are as successful and inspiring as the annual Summer Schools, of which there have been five. These are week-long events during which senior and younger scholars engage with postgraduate students as well as activists in social movements and NGOs dedicated to promoting local and rural interests along a wide variety of agrarian dimensions. The first Summer School was appropriately held in Harare in January 2009, and subsequent schools have been held in Dar es Salaam, in 2010, and at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, in 2011. At this last meeting, it was decided that all further Summer Schools would take place in Harare, under close tutelage of the Africa Institute for Agrarian Studies (AIAS), and so the last two have been held there. It is an exciting space for engaged scholarship and for discussing the difficult issues of praxis.

Each Summer School has a theme, and these are in themselves lessons about the complications around transforming agriculture and rural relations in the South in a context of global capitalism. The theme for the first summer school was *Social Movements and the Agrarian Question*; the second, *The Agrarian Question: Historical Trajectories and Contemporary Policy Alternatives*; the third, *Global Economic Crisis and Agrarian Reform in the South*; the fourth, *The Scramble for Africa's Resources, Accumulation from Below and Food Security*, and this year, *Political Economy of Food Sovereignty in the Global South: Prospects and Contexts.* The themes are indicative of a serious engagement with multifarious problems and struggles of people in the South, especially those in rural areas. The Summer Schools have provided young activists with an opportunity to interact with experienced senior scholars in the field, and this link between the generations is critical to the success of the Summer Schools. Activists in social movements and Masters and PhD students bring their day-to-day experiences in the field into the realm of discussion, so that we together can make sense of local events within a broader historical and conceptual framework.

[†]I am grateful to Lungisile Ntsebeza for suggesting that I include this section to the article.

The younger generations, fired with the all the enthusiasm of youth and the belief that they can change the world, have animated the Schools with their refusal to accept the ordinary limits of social action. For them, anything is possible, and this idealism is a spark for thinking afresh about our problems, but we also need to reflect on the past and on the how ideas have unfolded.

At the third Summer School held in Grahamstownin, in 2011, I gave a presentation during which I said that South Africa has an enduring land problem premised on the colonial dispossession of the indigenous population, but that it does not have much of an agrarian question. The former relates to ongoing racialized inequalities in land, while the latter relates to an evaluation of the current class structure of rural South Africa. This position was by no means new. In an article I published in 1995, entitled 'Is There a Future for a Black Peasantry in South Africa', I advanced an argument around the essentially proletarian character of the rural and urban populations in the country in the following terms (Hendricks 1995: 41–57):

> [t]he overwhelming majority of our rural population are proletarians who are rotten ripe for organization …. Our rural proletarians have simply not been organised along the same lines as the urban working class. This is undoubtedly the first step towards a solution to the abysmal conditions of the rural poor. The essential question is thus proletarian through and through.

Also, in my earlier Master's thesis, entitled *The Displaced Proletarians: Migrant Labour and Class Relations in South Africa*, I argued that '[t]he major oddity in South Africa's path of capitalist development is the fact that the vast majority of its workforce has been (and continues to be) geographically displaced from the urban centres and excluded from its social and political institutions' (Hendricks 1981: 40).

This is not to suggest that there are no impulses at all towards peasant production in the country. Far from it. It merely appreciates that the locus of struggle in South Africa is in the urban areas, and in particular in the informal shanty settlements on the outskirts of the cities. While my geographic vantage point for engaging with Moyo et al. is unquestionably South Africa, much of my argument could be extended to the large parts of the underdeveloped world. It is within this overall context that I interrogate the new agrarian question.

Questions for Moyo et al. on Their New Agrarian Question

In the first instance, how new is the peasant path as a basis for the agrarian question? Moyo et al. (2013) claim that this is a new way of understanding the agrarian question and that '… no serious social or political movement is not considering the peasant path as a modern solution to the multiple crises of our times, the economic, climate and food'; moreover, they suggest that their understanding embraces real changes in the world in this respect: '[a] specter is haunting the world—the specter of a new agrarian question' (*ibid.*: 94). These sweeping statements and grand generalizations have to contend with the much earlier position of the *narodniki* in the Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party at the start of the twentieth century, as well as subsequent populist theorizations. For example, from an African perspective, Gavin Williams (1976) entered the debate with a much celebrated and criticized essay appropriately entitled 'Taking the part of peasants'. Williams was concerned with the survival of peasants in the face of the expansion of commodity relations. His empirical and conceptual engagement with the impact of capitalist development on rural populations in the context of Nigeria and Tanzania reveals very much about the centralized politics of elites and the overall prospects for peasant livelihoods in the South. His approach has been severely criticized as populist (Harriss-White 2012: 113). Patnaik (2011: 16) defines populism with clarity as:

> … a trend of theorizing which (a) tends to view the 'peasantry' as a homogenous entity … (b) believes that there is a peasant economy regulated by its own egalitarian economic laws, quite distinct from feudal or capitalist economy and which (c) stresses the flexibility, efficiency and viability of peasant production relative to capitalist production in agriculture.

The essential question is: how different is the peasant path elaborated by Moyo et al. (2013) from these earlier populist positions? If their peasant path traces its genealogy to populism, then there is a need to elaborate more clearly on how it builds on past theorizations, especially that of Chayanov, to whom they refer in fleetingly complimentary ways. There is no engagement around their claims for novelty, nor any explanation for how their position is distinct, nor any evidence for their grand

assertions of a new agrarian question. Thus, they fail both to articulate the conceptual bases of their supposedly new approach and they fail to provide the evidence to sustain it.

We need to consider the various meanings of the concept of the 'agrarian question'. Moyo et al. (2013) provide a schematic chronology of the evolution of the concept, but they do not provide a class analysis which highlights contradictions within particular countries. Instead, their focus is unambiguously on contradictions between different countries, especially those broadly defined as the North and the South. One aspect of the classical agrarian question revolves around the prospects for class alliances between an urban proletariat and rural dwellers of various shades in the cause of socialism. A holistic approach requires a class analysis of contradictions both within, as well as between, countries. Moyo et al. (2013) conceive of the agrarian question outside of such a class framework. It is not as if they are not aware of the problems of social differentiation, it is just that they tend to suspend their analysis of class in favour of a rhetorical singularity.

Part of the problem is that the agrarian question means different things to different people. Navigating these differences while still retaining a semblance of coherence in a conversation on various proposed resolutions is not easy because each meaning refers to a different set of circumstances and historical situations. These acquired meanings tend to overlap and penetrate each other, causing an unparalleled level of complication. Recognizing this complexity makes it hazardous to suggest a typology, yet it is possible to discern a number of ways in which the agrarian question has been posed, both historically and in the contemporary world.

The so-called classical agrarian question was itself not only one question, but instead concerned itself with three main dimensions. In the first instance, it was a political question concerning the possibilities of an alliance between peasants and workers in order to ensure a socialist political victory, in countries where the majority of the population were rural-dwelling peasants. Therefore, it was sometimes conceived as the peasant question rather than the agrarian question per se. In effect, for Engels, the peasant question was the agrarian question or vice versa (cited in *ibid*.: 98). Second, it addressed itself to the ongoing problems and obstacles of the development of capitalism in the countryside; and third, it was concerned with the prospects of agrarian transition, and

specifically the role of an agricultural surplus in supporting industrial development in the construction of socialism.

Of course, these three dimensions were intimately connected to each other. Thus, the transition to capitalist production in the rural areas which is invariably characterized by uneven development gives rise to specific class forces. In sum, the agrarian question is concerned with the extent to which capitalism has penetrated and transformed agriculture and, consequently, proletarianized the rural population. This, in turn, raises questions about possible political alliances in pursuit of social and political transformation towards socialism (Hendricks 1995: 46).

Starting from these varied conceptual origins, it was to be expected that the agrarian question would acquire further meanings in its history as a concept. Also, given these initial meanings, it is difficult to reach conceptual consensus on what lies at the heart of the agrarian question. When there are conceptual disputes, one response is to return to the source. Yet, even at its source there is no agreement on what it should mean and how it should be interpreted.

When a question acquires so many different meanings, it is important to ensure that it does not become so diluted as to have no meaning at all. Stretching the meanings of the agrarian question to include virtually all aspects associated with the development of capitalism in the countryside (or the transition to socialism) makes it difficult to engage in debate, because of the definitional problems of how to determine the boundaries of the topic. To complicate matters further, the world is also a very different place today to what it was merely a decade ago, and the relevance of our discussions will be determined by how we accommodate these changes in our analyses.

The conversations and debates around the agrarian question have changed quite dramatically since it was first raised as a major approach to understanding the nature of development and underdevelopment in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The plurality of meanings of the agrarian question is broadly connected to the manner in which world capitalism has changed the nature of contemporary agriculture. Thus, in tracing the historical trajectory of the agrarian question, we cannot but notice that its primary conceptual meaning was itself diverse. In the century and half or so since it was first coined, it has developed an accretive tendency, as more and more meanings have simply been latched onto it in the face of a changing global capitalism.

Within the varied meanings there are countless disagreements and debates about the route to follow and the position to adopt on the crucial questions about economic development and social transformation under capitalism and socialism. Moyo et al. (2013) refer to these earlier debates but then abandon them in order to provide a critique of the classical myth of industrialization. For them the binary between backwardness as the ailment and industrialization as the remedy is problematic. They complain that '… industrialization was now being reinstated as an end in itself, by scholars as influential and open-minded as Byres'. In contrast to Byres, they contend that '… the agrarian question of advanced capitalism has never been solved: *economic progress has been as congenital an ailment as economic backwardness*' (*ibid.*: 98–99, original emphasis). There is little doubt that economic progress in the North is premised on continued economic backwardness in the South, and they are undoubtedly two sides of the same coin. But this does not mean that we can equate them as ailments. They are not identical at all. Besides the fact that there is nothing congenital about these ailments since they are constructed by historical processes and are not innate, Moyo et al. (2013) expect a fanciful commitment to transformation from the North, when the reality points to divergent interests.

The mere assertion of a different meaning for the agrarian question will not have the effect of wiping out the centuries of colonial plunder for primitive accumulation. Their approach is idealistic in suggesting that the concept of the agrarian question actually translates into 'absolving the North of any transformative obligation' (*ibid.*: 99). Their analysis contains a slippage between the reality of uneven development and the concepts of economic progress and backwardness.

Advanced industrialization of agriculture in the North throws up a host of very different problems to the low level of technological development of agriculture in the South. While the two remain intrinsically connected, they are obviously not the same. On the basis of his concept of the agrarian question, it is entirely legitimate for Byres to assert that, '… as the social transformation comes to be dominated by industry and by the urban bourgeoisie, there ceases to be an agrarian question with any serious implications' (cited in Moyo et al. 2013: 98). Samir Amin (2012: 14) agrees with Byres when he says, 'while it (capitalism) solved the question in its centres, it did so by creating a gigantic agrarian question in the peripheries, which it cannot solve but through the

genocide of half of humankind'. Both Byres and Amin appear to assert the differences between the North and the South in respect of the resolution of the agrarian question. For Byres the agrarian question ceases to have relevance in the North with the overwhelming dominance of industry and the urban bourgeoisie. They diverge in the sense that Amin provides a direct link between the resolutions of the agrarian question in the North to its devastating impact in the South where the agrarian question remains of crucial importance. The clarity of this analysis reveals an appreciation of the differences in the North and the South, which Moyo et al. do not acknowledge.

Industrialization as a route towards resolving the agrarian question is not a myth at all, and there is nothing agrarian about the automated agricultural industries of the North. What really do Moyo et al. (2013) expect for the resolution of the agrarian question in the North, and how do they accommodate the vastly different historical experiences in their analyses? The mere assertion that the agrarian question has not been solved under advanced capitalism does not take us very far on the road to understanding the nature of contemporary global capitalism with all its inequalities and uneven development.

Any consideration of the agrarian question needs a clear definition of the peasantry. Thus, when Moyo et al. (2013) refer to the peasantry as an untested agent for development, to whom exactly are they referring? Unless, they see the peasantry as a homogenous mass, how do they accommodate the actual differentiation of the peasantry into poor, middle, and rich peasants, as well as a myriad of intermediate forms and sub-categories. In reality, there are many varieties of people making their living out of various sources of subsistence, all intertwined in a complex rural mosaic. Of course, these categories do not necessarily refer to levels of wealth but to particular social relations to the means of production.

Globally, there are vast differences in the extent to which peasants have been integrated into markets through exchange and the appropriation of surpluses. There are also huge diversities in the use of non-family labour, and the nature of subjection of peasants to higher political authorities also varies considerably (Hendricks 2003: 428). A peasant path referring to different sections of the peasantry will have very different consequences. Trying to capture all of these differences in one catch all concept is both theoretically suspect and empirically meaningless.

Peasants do not constitute a hermetically sealed entity apart from the wider society, and studying them as an exclusive, self-contained unit has its problems because they are so integrally connected and intertwined with wider social relations. Theorists of the agrarian question have been preoccupied with the difficulties of categorization stemming from the extent of differentiation in the countryside within the context of change under capitalism. Moyo et al. (2013) are content to sweep all these evidential, theoretical, and historical nuances aside in an elaboration of a singular peasant path. In contrast to this singularity, Archie Mafeje (1977, 1985) argues that it is spurious to separate peasants from proletarians because the two are so intimately connected in the process of social change. Peasants are invariably also migrant or seasonal workers, and their dual or multiple dependencies render a singular identity quite inappropriate.

In this particular regard, Moyo et al. (2013) argue that '… the peasant path does not necessarily imply the unleashing of a new round of social differentiation and land alienation, which may be regulated by state support'. I disagree, as I think it does. In practice, adopting a peasant path implies that some (who knows which?) peasants may be given the wherewithal to undertake proper farming, probably with some state support. Peasants are aspirant capitalists, because all of them, virtually without exception, would be concerned principally with capitalizing their agriculture. As soon as there are opportunities for modernizing production, often through the availability of new technologies and new markets, peasants almost always respond with alacrity. Relying on the ingenuity of the peasant to make a decent living out of farming or to prosper through accumulation lies very awkwardly alongside efforts to regulate them as their proposition suggests.

The question that needs to be asked in this respect is how Moyo et al. (2013) would prevent the inevitability of social differentiation under conditions of global capitalism, without repressing the more successful peasants on their paths towards capital accumulation. This is precisely the problem with the elaboration of the peasant path. Successful peasants invariably aspire to become capitalists, unless their argument is that the law of value does not apply to a self-enclosed peasant economy. It is impossible to sustain this argument in the context of international capitalism. The question to Moyo et al. (2013) is whether they regard the so-called peasant economy as having a logic or dynamic of its

own, outside of the penetrating influence of expanding commodity production? If they do, then they would have to elaborate a position very close to that of Chayanov, but this elaboration, critical as it ought to be, is itself missing from their article. Besides cryptic references to Chayanov, there is no systematic elaboration of the implications of his theoretical approach. So cavalier are Moyo et al. (2013) in their assertion that we should restore Chayanov's emphasis of the peasant that they completely ignore Utsa Patnaik's conceptual critique of its fallacies (Patnaik 1979; see also Bernstein 2009: 65).

Moyo et al. (2013) use the peasant path as both a single interpretative frame for understanding agrarian relations in the South as well as a proposed route out of underdevelopment and towards sustainable livelihoods. The question is: can such singularity embrace the many complex variations in modes of subsistence and operation for rural dwellers in the South? This one-size-fits-all approach is inappropriate in the context of contemporary capitalism. According to them, '… as a new wave of rural movements emerged to bring the land and peasant questions back to the agenda … eminent Marxist scholars would respond by waging ideological war against most basic demands of the new movements, land reform, for not meeting their high socialist standards'. But they do not mention who these scholars are—this elliptical style does not allow for open debate and vibrant discussion of these critical issues for the future of countries in the South. If indeed an ideological war is being waged, then the best possible response to it is to expose it for what it is, and such an exposition requires the courage of a frontal attack. In this regard, Moyo et al. (2013) are pointedly critical of Henry Bernstein's (2004) attempt to reformulate the agrarian question by bifurcating it into an agrarian question of labour and of capital.

I agree wholeheartedly that we should subject this bifurcation to critical scrutiny, especially as it applies to Africa and what it means in terms of practical politics. To start, his rendition of the classical agrarian question refers to only one of its many dimensions, namely, the contribution of agriculture to the development of industrialization and the various paths of transition to capitalism embedded in this relationship. He ignores the other dimensions, especially the political rendition of this question focusing on the prospects of an alliance between peasants and workers captured in the symbol of the hammer and sickle.

Bernstein (2007: 40) makes a sweeping generalization, '… there is no longer an agrarian question of capital on a world scale', which cannot go unchallenged. In direct contrast, Archie Mafeje (2003: 22) argues that:

> … the problem of African agriculture is not the land question or land tenure systems—except in Southern Africa and a few land deficit countries … For the rest of the African continent, the agrarian question is the crucial issue … 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 economic imperative to liberate women from male domination. This is not only their democratic right but also a liberating force in the agrarian sector as well. Not only are women the majority of agricultural producers in sub-Saharan Africa (nearly 70%) but their full potential has not been realised under the restrictive and male-based lineage mode of organisation …

As if to recognize the weaknesses in his approach, Bernstein (2007: 40) concedes that '… the agrarian question—as a basis of national accumulation and industrialisation—has not yet been resolved in many countries of the South'. The problems here are both empirical and conceptual. If indeed the agrarian question has not been resolved in many countries of the South, and it is quite clear that many African countries will fall into this category, then on what empirical basis is the claim being made that the agrarian question of capital does not exist at all on a global scale? After all, it is precisely these so-called late industrializing countries which face much more complex questions in relation to agriculture and the development of capitalism. Even though the capitalist market has penetrated virtually all areas in Africa, this does not mean that the agrarian question is passé. Bernstein does not empirically outline the countries he mentions where the agrarian question persists, nor does he provide any analysis on how his assertion that there is 'no agrarian question of capital' affects these countries. It is clear that his assertion is not applicable to large parts of the South.

Moyo et al. (2013) complain about the apparent scholarly contempt for the peasantry. It is true that Marx and Engels expected the peasantry to disappear with the expansion of capitalism and that they would be swept aside by inexorable spread of commodity relations in agriculture. It is also true that the Soviet model of economic development, in line with a great deal of Marxist thought, expected a linear progression from feudalism through capitalism to socialism, and that peasants were

entirely expendable in these transitions. They were regarded as mere vestiges of pre-existing modes of production, and therefore, doomed to extinction.

It is furthermore true that Marx referred to peasants in a condescending manner as a 'sack of potatoes'. The apathy of peasants had long been an issue of concern for Marx and Engels. Especially for the latter, it was a question of practical politics, of how to win the support of the rural population for an urban based party dominated by working class interests. Marx had intimated the prospects of an alliance in two classic works, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* and in *Class Struggles in France*, yet it was Engels who took on the peasant problematic head on when he said '… it is not in our interests to win the peasant overnight only to lose him again on the morrow, if we cannot keep our promise'. Marx, Engels, and a host of subsequent Marxist authors were wrong about the disappearance of the peasantry. Peasants have persisted, stubbornly refusing to budge from their land and often interacting with markets on modern bases to ensure their livelihoods. But ought the analytical response to their persistence merely confirm their survival, or should there instead be a critical interrogation of their current role under conditions of advanced capitalism? There are new waves of dispossession occasioned by land grabbing, in which local elites are often complicit, and which therefore, suggests that it is not simply a binary relationship between invading capital and hapless self-sufficient peasants. It is much more complicated.

Moyo et al. (2013) spend an inordinate amount of time castigating the so-called myth of industrialization. In its stead, they provide no alternative perspective on historical change or on social transformation. While they acknowledge that, 'industrialization remains necessary to the advance of humanity … but not on the terms of monopoly capital', they provide no analysis whatsoever of how their peasant path is meant to contribute or relate to this process. Their view is so riveted to the rural as well as to the national, that they have lost sight of social relations in society as a global totality with very many aspects of diversity, difference and cleavage. Hence their perfunctory mention of industry.

In contrast, after surveying the problem of underdevelopment for many decades, Archie Mafeje (2003) concludes that African governments have to, 'think about other ways of financing industrialization, which is fast becoming the *sine qua non* for the future of the continent'.

If the agrarian question is defined as active resistance to the squeezing of the peasant for the benefit of industrialization, then the critical question is not only between advanced industrial countries of the North and the underdeveloped countries of the South, but also between rural and urban-dwellers within different countries. Their analysis does not reflect this complexity. Instead, industrialization is not located in their analysis in any coherent manner. In the same way as many Marxists are disparaging of peasants in relation to their understanding of the mechanics of social change, Moyo et al. (2013) do not as much as mention the role of the urban classes. They contend that there needs to be a rethink of the fundamentals of modernity, but they do not offer an alternative analysis, except in the form of slogans about an undefined peasant path. The question is: how can the emancipatory impulses of the countryside and the towns construct a new modernity, one that asserts the humanity of both rural and urban people?

In an uncritical way, Moyo et al. (2013) suggest that national sovereignty ought to be restored to its 'proper place in the classical agrarian question' without reference to the manner in which the national project has been perverted in many of the former colonies. Nationalist historiography was based on the singular narrative of the anti-colonial struggle, steeped in heroic stories of overcoming villainous foreign aggressors. The narrative is often compellingly epic. A rural boy (almost invariably boys) emerges from the tradition of tending livestock to be educated, often at missionary schools, to organize the overthrow of colonial rule. Yet, the heroes of the anti-colonial struggle far from representing the antithesis of colonialism through an assertion of national sovereignty have instead tended to mimic their former rulers, sometimes in the most obscene consumerist ways.

In their abiding optimism, Moyo et al. (2012: 3) argue that 'it was this nationalist critique that opened the way for a holistic understanding of the agrarian question under imperialism'. I agree, but this unfortunately is not the end of the story. Instead, the opportunities presented by these national struggles for liberation have been diverted, defeated, and compromised often by a comprador class in the peripheries of the South acting at the behest of capital. There is a radical disjuncture between the rhetoric of freedom in the struggles for national liberation and the reality of ongoing exploitation and domination by capital. Both the rhetoric and the reality should be subjected to critical scrutiny. There is now

overwhelming evidence that the fruits of Uhuru have not been realized by the majority of people in the colonial world. Navigating a route out of this situation requires an analysis and struggle which takes into account the limits of national independence and how the abiding social questions ought to be addressed.

There is clearly a need to reflect critically on notions of nationalism and the nation which are inclined to de-emphasize class (and other) differences, often with violent consequences for those who do not fit its essentialist definitions. Instead of invoking these well-worn nationalist formulae, the question we should be asking is: how are we to avoid the mistakes of the past and how are we to address the patent inadequacies of the national project? Of course, it is essential that the South ought to carve out a sphere of sovereignty for itself and in this way challenge Northern control under neo-colonialism. However, the experience of the post-colonial phase must lead us to ask how we are going to hold national leaders accountable so that the critical questions of social delivery are not compromised by corruption? Asserting a nationalist position, as important as it is in relation to global capital, cannot ignore the internal class dynamics of societies in the South, without also facilitating further oppression by nationalist rulers. Other cleavages of caste, race, ethnicity, region, gender religion and are also critical in this regard.

Moyo et al. (2012: 8) are correct to point out that the demand for land is central to the agrarian question in the South, since 'land continues to be seen as fundamental to the social reproduction of the household, while the same demand has also expanded to urban areas for the purpose of housing as well as urban agriculture'. But their account is entirely one-sided and does not address the overarching reality of nationalist repression in the South. Movements towards the so-called illegal occupation of land, whether urban or rural, are constantly under attack. Often in the name of national sovereignty, evictions, demolition of structures, forced removals are the order of the day. It is this reality of ongoing pauperization and extreme oppression which Moyo et al. tend to ignore in their presentation of the case for national sovereignty, premised largely on the peculiarities of the Zimbabwean experience. A much more nuanced appreciation of the necessity for local struggle for land within particular country contexts reveals huge cleavages between the state and the mass of the population.

Towards a Conclusion

There is no doubt that a fundamental reorientation of global scholarship is necessary so that the South can recover its voice and articulate its interests appropriately. There is also no doubt that Moyo, Jha and Yeros have a done a sterling job along a whole host of fronts in this respect. However, debates within the South have to be promoted in order for the intellectual community to grow and mature. The critical questions I have raised with the approach adopted by Moyo et al. are outlined in the spirit of developing a self-referring and respecting community of scholars committed to fundamental change in an unequal world. Insofar as these are questions for Moyo et al., they are also designed to contribute to a sharper understanding of the problems we confront, both as scholars of South and as residents of countries of South.

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