
Digging up capitalism's rural soil in Africa and projecting a radically different social system

Nancy Andrew*¹

¹Les Afriques dans le Monde - Sciences Po, Bordeaux IV (LAM - Sciences Po) – CNRS : UMR5115,
UMR – France

Résumé

Based in part on South Africa and the radical reform programmes in Zimbabwe and Sankara's Burkina Faso (a renewed reference point for some), this paper looks at why these experiences were not able to deliver the significant social change they promised through the lens of the countryside and considers the type of state that is instead necessary for revolutionary social development.

When the ANC began to share power with the former apartheid regime in 1994, it also took over the reins of the same capitalist system that has continued to produce if not intensify, racial and social inequalities in many ways, believing that growth linked in part to further integrating the economy in the global market would fund its version of social democracy. Instead, along with an expanded black middle class, social divides have increased, development has been extremely uneven and land ownership has barely budged after 25 years. Yet rather than targeting the predatory system whose effects on the black population generate so much frustration and recurrent forms of struggle, opposition tends to focus on corruption in and around the state and 'lagging' formal democracy or, on the secondary and somewhat false dichotomy of 'more (capitalist) market' vs 'more (capitalist) state', whether in populist or more 'Marxisant' currency.

The lack of deeper social transformation throughout the country after radical land redistribution in Zimbabwe, as well as the failure of South African land reform are both important indicators of the ways that private property relations, whether or not customary tenure also exists on the margins, anchor the same social order, stifling large sections of people who live and work in rural areas or forcing them to migrate, if not siphoning their labour power into projects generally *against* social development in their interests.

In light of past experience and changed 21st century conditions of imperialism today, the paper stresses the need for new study and debate contributing to the struggle for alternatives to the existing social system, connected to a radically different type of state and future. This would project a revolutionary struggle for land and for agricultural production, in which the rural poor themselves, with the pivotal conscious participation of women, become a critical section of the people mobilised to develop new agriculture and the social and economic basis needed throughout society - among other things, a basis for overcoming rather than fostering inequalities, for transforming oppressive social practices, ideas and 'traditions', as well as for getting out from under the deadly grip of world capitalist relations.

*Intervenant

Mots-Clés: Agrarian revolution, land reform, social democracy, South Africa, ANC, Zimbabwe, state, capitalism, social relations