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‘African Peasants and Revolution’ revisited

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'African Peasants and Revolution' revisited

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This short essay begins by revisiting John Saul's landmark article in the first issue of the *Review of African Political Economy* in 1974, which was, inevitably, very much of its historical moment. The author suggests that Saul used an ideal-typical conception of 'peasants' combined with a particular view of 'incomplete' capitalism established by colonial rule in Africa and continuing since political independence. He then proposes, in highly selective and abbreviated fashion, an alternative approach to understanding the social conditions of existence of African 'peasants' and the politics of Africa's agrarian questions. He illustrates his argument with special reference to the current moment of globalisation and neoliberalism. 'Globalisation' serves as shorthand for the restructuring of capital on a world scale since the 1970s (and not least 'financialisation'), while he uses 'neoliberalism' to refer to the political and ideological project of promoting the interests of capital in such restructuring at the expense of the interests of labour. He concludes with some broad historical theses about 'African Peasants and Revolution'.

Keywords: capitalist social relations; classes of labour; peasants; revolution

[L'article « Les paysans africains et la révolution » revisité.] Ce court article commence par revisiter l'article fondateur de représenté, de manière évidente, une grande partie de sa renommée. Je suggère que Saul a utilisé une conception idéale-typique des « paysans » combinée avec une vision particulière d'un capitalisme « incomplet » établi par les règles coloniales en Afrique et continuant depuis l'indépendance politique. Je propose ensuite, d'une manière très sélective et abrégée, une approche alternative à la compréhension des conditions sociales de l'existence des « paysans » africains et à la politique des questions agraires africaines. J'illustre mon argument en faisant référence au moment actuel de mondialisation et de néolibéralisme. La « mondialisation » est utilisée comme abréviation pour la restructuration du capital à une échelle mondiale depuis les années 70 (et en particulier la « financiarisation »), tandis que j'utilise le terme « néolibéralisme » pour désigner le projet politique et idéologique de promotion des intérêts du capital dans une telle restructuration, au détriment des intérêts des travailleurs (Bernstein, 2010a). Je conclus par des thèses historiques larges sur « Les paysans africains et la révolution ».

Mots-clés : relations sociales capitalistes ; classes de la main-d'œuvre ; paysans ; révolution

'African Peasants and Revolution'[1]

John Saul's seminal article, 'African Peasants and Revolution', was very much of its conjuncture. At the international level, the theme was influenced by the centrality of 'people's war' in Vietnam to the international left in the 1960s and 1970s, and consideration of its

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'lessons' for armed liberation struggles with a rural base in central and southern Africa (Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, Zimbabwe) and elsewhere in the continent (Guinea-Bissau, Eritrea).[2] In the African context, Saul embraced a model of 'people's war' as exemplified by the national liberation struggle led by FRELIMO, which disclosed the possibility of empowering peasants as revolutionary subjects able to contribute to a progressive resolution of the agrarian question. In this respect, Mozambique was contrasted with Tanzania, which experienced the intensifying generalisation of a bureaucratic/'commandist' version of rural development policy.

Saul did not endorse a populist version of 'peasant' agency but implied a dialectical view of it. For example, Tanzania revealed 'clearly some of the problems of peasant-based structural transformation' (1974, 60), which Saul traced through key tenets of spontaneity and voluntarism in Nyerere's thought. Given the intrinsic shortcoming of TANU's brand of populism, as articulated (dominated?) by Nyerere, it was unsurprising perhaps that the frustrations of voluntarism gave way to commandism, exemplified by the order for (compulsory) villagisation in 1974. That order both expressed and reinforced tendencies within TANU to '*bureaucratization* of the leadership (or, more accurately, its crystallization as a privileged class around the apparatus of the state' 1974, 61), and signified the degeneration of *ujamaa* as a programme, or at least aspiration, of rural transformation.[3]

Degeneration was marked by the turn to commandism noted, and by the failure to develop any adequate cadre policy and practice necessary to deal with great variations in local socioeconomic conditions and the preoccupations of different peasantries (and of peasant strata or classes?). By contrast, the character of FRELIMO as a revolutionary party was not just a matter of ideological radicalism and organisational coherence but, more importantly, of its practices in creating and governing liberated areas in the course of its guerrilla struggle. Those areas were key both to military success and to initiating 'a comprehensive and practical programme of socio-economic transformation', moving towards alternative ways of organising economic activity through cadres respectful of local conditions and able to incorporate and adapt indigenous practices of cooperation (1974, 56–57). In short, Saul suggested that the leadership of a revolutionary party was a necessary condition of mobilising and channelling the political energies of 'peasants' – a Leninist stance, in effect, albeit strongly inflected by Chinese and Vietnamese experiences of 'people's war'.[4] One can suggest further that issues of progressive resolution (or otherwise) of the agrarian question following independence/national liberation – the central concern of Saul's article of 40 years ago – were also influenced by interest in the politics of agrarian change in contemporary China and Vietnam, by contrast with the near complete lack of analysis on the left of the experience of Stalinist collectivisation in the USSR and its aftermath (Bernstein 2009).[5]

For Saul, the socio-economic conditions of African farmers were characterised by their 'peasantization' under colonialism, to occupy an intermediate position between 'primitive agriculturalists' and 'commercial farmers'. They shared with the former access to land and family farming as central to their subsistence/reproduction, and with the latter integration in markets. The processes of market integration produced the 'structural subordination' of African peasantries in the interests of colonial surplus extraction. At the same time, there were few 'feudal' or comparable structures of exploitation in pre-colonial Africa unlike elsewhere in the Third World; there was less population pressure on land; and the relative recentness and incompleteness, in world historical terms, of peasantisation

> has left standing, perhaps more firmly than elsewhere, important vestiges of pre-capitalist social networks and cultural preoccupations – particularly a range of variations on kinship

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> relationship and upon the theme of ethnic identification – which mesh closely with the survival of the subsistence agricultural core of the system. (Saul 1974, 49)[6]

African peasantries were also highly varied by region and mode of colonial incorporation. While subject to the 'normal' dynamic of peasant class differentiation, this process was inhibited by the peripheral nature of Africa's location in world capitalism, as was the pace of proletarianisation. Persisting 'pre-capitalist social networks and cultural preoccupations' were manifested typically in a more or less parochial politics of clientilism (see also Leys 1970), which then extended beyond particular rural locales via the 'tribalism' generated by colonial divide-and-rule strategies and uneven development, and subsequently deployed by the petty bourgeoisie that entered government with political independence.

In his view of 'peasants' – in which pre-capitalist elements were central – Saul sought

> to keep the term 'peasant' flexible ... to include migrant labourers ... justified by the stake which such migrants retain in, precisely, *the family economy* ... The logic of the migrant's position within the overall system remains the same as that of the cash-cropper – at least in the short run, while both *remain peasants*. (Saul 1974, 46, my emphasis)

This, of course, touches on the long-standing debate of the social character of those who reproduce themselves by 'hoe and wage' (Cordell, Gregory, and Piché 1996) – or wage and hoe like those 'worker-peasants' who feature so prominently in analyses of southern Africa. Here I note only that Saul's decision to include migrant workers among 'peasants' reflects a conception of 'blocked' capitalist transition, marked by the 'survival' of a generalised (or ideal-typified) 'family economy', to which I counterpose, in what follows, the formation of 'classes of labour' in rural Africa.

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Economic sociology of reproduction in rural Africa

Since the colonial period, a fundamental capitalist dynamic – commodification of the means of subsistence – has been at work in African countrysides, most of whose people today constitute 'classes of labour': 'the growing numbers ... who now depend – directly *and indirectly* – on the sale of their labour power for their own daily reproduction' (Panitch and Leys 2000, ix, my emphasis). I prefer the term 'classes of labour' to the inherited vocabulary of proletarianisation/proletariat (and semi-proletarianisation/semi-proletariat), as it is less encumbered with problematic assumptions and associations in both political economy (e.g. functionalist readings of Marx's concept of the reserve army of labour) and political theory and ideology (e.g. constructions of an idealised [Hegelian] collective class subject); see further below.

Classes of labour might not be dispossessed of *all* means of reproducing themselves, but nor do they possess *sufficient* means to reproduce themselves, which marks the limits of their viability as petty commodity producers in farming ('peasants') or other branches of activity. The dynamic of capitalist class relations is necessarily *internalised* in the circuits of 'household' production and reproduction, even if not manifested in the formation of large capitalist landed property and agrarian capital in most rural zones in Africa outside the zones of settler colonialism.

Classes of labour in Africa, as elsewhere in the 'South', have to pursue their reproduction through insecure and oppressive – and typically increasingly scarce – wage employment and/or a range of likewise precarious 'informal sector' ('survival') activity, including farming; in effect, various and complex *combinations* of employment and self-employment.

Many do this across different sites of the social division of labour: rural and urban, agricultural and non-agricultural, as well as wage employment and self-employment: 'footloose labour' indeed (Breman 1996).

This defies inherited assumptions of fixed, let alone uniform, notions (and 'identities') of 'worker', 'peasant', 'trader', 'urban', 'rural', 'employed' and 'self-employed'. It also contributes to the fragmentation of classes of labour in various ways, two of which are of special salience for the present discussion. First, social differences of a typically hierarchical, oppressive and exclusionary nature – of which gender is the most ubiquitous and which often also include ethnicity and religion – fragment classes of labour. The 'structural' sources of exploitation and inequality inherent in all capitalist production (petty and grand, informal and formal) combine with other forms of social inequality and oppression to create divisions within classes of labour. Second, relative success or failure in labour markets and salaried employment is typically key to the viability (reproduction) of petty commodity production in farming (and hence class differentiation in the countryside). This has long been the case in many farming zones in Africa.

In current conditions of (neoliberal) globalisation, there are tendencies of (i) 'deagrarianization' – 'the growing proportion of rural incomes derived from non-farm sources' (Bryceson 1999, 172); (ii) diminishing farm size, or area cultivated, and with fewer 'inputs' (other than labour), especially by poorer farmers (Ellis 2006); (iii) shortages of arable land, especially in areas of better soils, wetlands and/or transport links to urban markets, due to various combinations of intensified pressures on reproduction and demographic concentration, including in-migration to more favoured farming areas (Chimhowu and Woodhouse 2006); and (iv) increasing conflict over land (Peters 2004).

There is a kind of scissors effect at work for those in rural Africa (the great majority) whose reproduction is secured from combinations of own farming and off-farm wage and self-employment, alongside the collapse of employment opportunities in the 'formal' economy and of real wages. This accounts for the massively swollen numbers in the 'informal' economy, exerts additional pressure on the reproduction of farming (and through farming) and hence intensifies the pursuit of means of livelihood both on and off the land.

At the same time, of course, the 'crisis of African agriculture' is not distributed equally across those who farm or otherwise have an interest in farming and access to land. Some with recognised claims on land are otherwise too poor to farm: they lack capital to secure inputs, command over labour through the social relations of kinship – typically mediated by patriarchal relations of gender and generation – or market, and/or access to credit that is affordable and timely. On the other hand, those able to reproduce relatively robust, agricultural petty commodity enterprises, and *a fortiori* to expand the scale of their farming, typically do so with reproduction/investment funds derived from wage employment, and also buy labour power.[7]

Stating these theses so schematically at least has the virtue of highlighting two of their most contentious aspects. One is the view of Africa as characterised by capitalist social relations, in contrast with the position that:

> The predominant social relations are *still not capitalist*, nor is the prevailing logic of production. Africa south of the Sahara exists in a capitalist world, which marks and constrains the lives of its inhabitants at every turn, but is not of it. (Saul and Leys 1999, 13, my emphasis)[8]

If sub-Saharan Africa is 'still not capitalist' (an explicitly teleological formulation), then what is it? The approach recommended here focuses on 'actually existing capitalism' – generalised commodity production – in Africa (as elsewhere). A key theoretical foundation

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for this approach was specified, in the context of an analysis of Africa, by Peter Gibbon and Michael Neocosmos (1985):

> to suggest that a social formation is capitalist by virtue of being founded on the contradiction between wage-labour and capital is not to assert that all – or even the majority of – enterprises in this social formation will conform to a 'type' in which capitalists and wage-labourers are present ... What makes enterprises, and more generally social formations, capitalist or not, is ... *the relations which structurally and historically explain their existence* ... What has to be shown in order to 'prove' the(ir) capitalist nature ... is that the social entities and differences which form the social division of labour in such formations are only explicable in terms of the wage-labour/capital relation. (Gibbon and Neocosmos 1985, 169, my emphasis)

Of course, the investigation of this approach entails a much more complex economic sociology of capitalist relations in African countrysides than can be detailed here, including – on different scales from the local to the international – forms of production and labour regimes in farming, social divisions of labour, labour migration, rural–urban divisions and connections, organisational forms of capital and markets, and state policies and practices and their effects (Bernstein 2010b). The variable contributions of small-scale farming to the reproduction of classes of labour is one factor in explaining their extremely heterogeneous composition and characteristics. To paraphrase Lenin (1964, 33): 'infinitely diverse combinations of elements of this or that type of labour are possible.'[9]

A second, and connected, aspect is that the only class categories this approach deploys are those definitive of the capitalist mode of production: capital, labour and their distinctive combination in petty commodity production (Gibbon and Neocosmos 1985). This does not mean that these are the only social categories necessary to analyse the dynamics of reproduction in African countrysides (see further below), but it does signify a break from views of 'peasants' in Africa (as elsewhere) as pre-capitalist, non-capitalist or – as in many accounts of 'resistance' – anti-capitalist.[10] Such views, in various forms and across a range of ideological positions, tend to rest on ideal-typical notions of 'the peasantry', including in 'peasant studies' of Marxist inspiration on which John Saul (1974) drew.[11]

Just as Saul constructed a model of rural politics based on his outline of the socio-economic conditions of 'peasant' existence in Africa, I complete this brief presentation of a much larger and more complex argument with some observations about the political sociology of African countrysides.

Class politics in the countryside

I begin with Étienne Balibar's formulation that in a capitalist world, class relations are '*one determining* structure, covering *all* social practices, without being the *only* one' (quoted by Therborn 2007, 88, emphasis in original). In sum, class relations are *universal but not exclusive* determinations of social practices in capitalism. They intersect and combine with other social differences and divisions of which gender is the most widespread, and which can also include oppressive and exclusionary relations of race and ethnicity, religion and caste. This applies to the economic sociology of class relations and dynamics, as indicated, and *a fortiori* to the political sociology of class and its themes of class identities, consciousness and collective political practice, which involve a series of further determinations that affect political agency.

A key issue in the political sociology of (fragmented) classes of labour is indicated by Mamdani's potent observation that the 'translation' of 'social facts' into 'political facts' is always contingent and unpredictable, especially because of 'the many ways in which power

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fragment[s] the circumstances and experiences of the oppressed' (1996, 219, 272). Existentially, 'circumstances' are not experienced (self-)evidently and exclusively as class exploitation and oppression *in general* but in terms of identities such as 'urban/rural dwellers, industrial workers/agricultural labourers, urban craftsmen and women peasants, men/women, mental/manual labour, young/old, black/white, regional, national and ethnic differences, and so on', in the list of examples given by Gibbon and Neocosmos (1985, 190).

Let me illustrate briefly Mamdani's distinction between the 'social facts' and the 'political facts' in the context of Zimbabwe in the 1990s. The complexities and contradictions of the 'social facts' include, if not exhaustively: struggles over land within areas of 'peasant' farming and especially perhaps their frontiers; the dynamics and effects of patterns of substantial rural–rural migration since independence – discourses of 'squatting' and associated practices of eviction were not confined to the spaces of large commercial landed property (Nyambara 2001); the extent to which, and ways in which, the gathering crisis of the reproduction of labour during the 1990s added to such tensions instances of urban–rural migration in search of land to farm; the effects of shifts in land use, and claims on land, generated by new branches of export production and by the stratagems of eco-tourism capital and its practices of displacement and eviction (Hughes 2001); how all these processes are shaped by, and shape, class and gender differentiation in the countryside (Cousins, Weiner, and Amin 1992); and, not least, the social location of farm workers in Zimbabwe's (ethnicised) class structure (Rutherford 2001a).

The 'political facts' include how all the above are mediated through the often fragile political alliances and erratic practices of local accumulators and the similarly erratic, and contested, interventions of the local state, in which 'native'/'stranger' distinctions, 'squatting' and eviction also feature (Hammar 2001); the continuous if 'low-profile' local land disputes and occupations from the moment of independence, moving to 'high-profile/high-intensity' occupations in 1997–98 (Moyo 2001); the multiple ambiguities of ideological representations of farm workers, and their political sources and effects (Rutherford 2001b); the insertion of 'war veterans', as a nationally organised political force, in this intensification of land politics in the late 1990s and their role in the moment of February 2000 (Moyo 2001); the reasons why, and means by which, Mugabe's politically embattled regime (finally) declared its support for, and sought political benefit from, sweeping land redistribution, after 20 years of vacillation and inconsistency.[12]

These illustrations point to a wider aspect of modern African history that helps define its specificities, and which cannot be derived from general models of 'peasant economy' nor assumptions of 'persistent' features of pre-capitalist social relations of 'community', 'tribe' and 'traditional authority'. 'Community' – at different scales from village to 'tribe' – is a corporate status based on lineage and ethnicity that was defined, and indeed imposed, by colonial authority. It then serves as a collective claim to specific land on the basis of shared identity and inheritance, usually articulated through chiefs as bearers of the 'community' inheritance, even when the rights of chiefs or other 'traditional authorities' to allocate land within the 'community' are contested. It is evident, first, that the social composition and character of rural communities is now very different from that of their historic and 'imagined' origins. Second, 'community' does not preclude hierarchy and inequality and indeed may justify them as part of the moral order, as Lonsdale (1992) argued for pre-colonial Kikuyu political theory. Third, tensions and conflicts over land at a local level often connect with various levels of the politics of bureaucracy and patronage, from district and provincial government to the central state.

Ideal(ised) constructions of chieftancy and other offices of 'traditional leadership' suggest that they manifest authority prescribed by political hierarchy (rather than class

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differentiation). Such authority is exercised on behalf of the 'community' (or 'tribe'), and its legitimacy may be conditional on proper performance of this pastoral function, thus central to a given moral economy. It is clear from many instances, however, that the authority of 'traditional leaders' is reshaped, and contested, by long and complex histories of commodification and how they intersect with similarly complex political histories. Chiefs may be perceived by some subject to their authority as part of the problem of access to land, rather than as part of the solution. This can happen, for example, when in practice and however masked in discursive ambiguity, the authority of chiefs has shifted from claims over (and responsibilities to) 'their' people to jurisdiction over particular areas of land and their allocation.[13] This includes the sale or leasing of land (Chimhowu and Woodhouse 2006) *and* to a far wider range of 'strangers' than in the past, when the construction of 'stranger' was someone of different place of origin, hence identity, but similar social character and purpose who was looking for land to clear and cultivate and/or to graze their livestock. Now 'strangers' include accumulators/investors of diverse provenance, scale and purpose from commercial farming to logging to eco-tourism.

Colonial constructions of 'tribal' identity, 'customary' land tenure and (patriarchal) political authority, and their connections and legacies, serve as idioms through which class tensions may be played out as 'civil war within the tribe' (Mamdani 1996), as well as in struggles between (cross-class) corporate entities – ethnic group, clan, rural 'community' – over resources of arable and grazing land, water and forest (hence potent 'contradictions amongst the people'). Moreover, such struggles are typically articulated by those claiming the political legitimacy of 'tradition' to represent the interests of their clan or 'community', and who themselves may be drawn from, or form alliances with, elements of urban-based or displaced classes: retrenched workers; the petty bourgeoisie, whose interest in rural land has been intensified by their own crises of reproduction in recent decades; and, of course, 'big men' located in the apparatuses of the state and its networks of political patronage.

The recent 'comeback' of chiefly politics in conditions of (neoliberal) globalisation provides an ironic contemporary footnote to longstanding debate of 'tribe', ethnicity and the like.[14] With all the havoc of the last three decades – the pressures on the reproduction of classes of labour, the implosion of the project of state-led development, the 'second scramble' for the best arable lands (and means of irrigating them), timber, minerals and maritime fisheries of sub-Saharan Africa and, indeed, its 'nature' (Bernstein and Woodhouse 2006) – does the new assertiveness of chiefly politics register a 'persistent', and indeed resurgent, manifestation of 'pre-capitalist' social relations and ideology? I think not, but rather that it manifests some of Africa's historically specific forms of commodification and accumulation, of capitalist class dynamics, in new conditions.[15]

In short, the 'proliferating tensions and struggles between generations and genders, or between groups labelled by region, ethnicity or religion, are intimately tied up with the dynamics of division and exclusion, alliance and inclusion that constitute class formation' (Peters 2004, 305). They are struggles with their own class dynamics, if in 'invisible and unarticulated ways' (Peters 1994, 210). Understanding this is best approached by the propositions outlined (above) of the 'actually existing capitalism' of African countrysides, and of class relations as universal but not exclusive determinations of social practices in capitalism. There is a further implication, of course. In light of these propositions, it is not 'pre-capitalist' arrangements, identities, beliefs and so on that distinguish the social and political practices of 'peasants' from those of 'proletarians' – a view which tends to simplify and idealise (or demonise) the latter and to resonate, in effect, a teleological conception of the development of capitalism and its class struggles.

Conclusion

I conclude with several sweeping and compressed ('world-historical') theses that aim to locate the propositions advanced in this paper. First, and as indicated by Saul (above), with all their variations (and inequalities) African pre-colonial social formations did not resemble the great pre-capitalist agrarian class formations of Eurasia. This meant that colonialism in Africa did not encounter peasantries of the kind it did in Asia (and that it helped create in Latin America).[16]

Second, direct colonialism in Africa mostly occurred when industrial capitalism was dominant in the capitalist world system, that is, within the period of modern imperialism and after colonial rule was imposed in Latin America and much of Asia (and indeed after most of Latin America had become politically independent). Moreover, direct colonial rule in most of Africa was of relatively limited duration. I suggested that dynamics of commodification and their effects are central to understanding agrarian and rural social change in Africa from colonialism onwards, albeit subject to a great deal of historical unevenness and variation, of course, with pressures on reproduction intensifying in the current moment of globalisation, structural adjustment and subsequent neoliberal shapings of African formations. Those dynamics of commodification and the range of social forms and contradictions they generate warn against ideal-typical or essentialist notions of 'peasants', hence by extension their application to 'peasants and revolution'.

Third, conceptions and investigations of 'peasants and revolution', and *a fortiori* 'peasant revolution', are best confined to those great upheavals when the impact of capitalist development on agrarian class structures marked by 'feudal' and/or colonial forms generated extreme crises of reproduction of classes of peasant labour, and where social contradictions were often further catalysed by protracted national liberation struggles or similar processes of 'people's war'. The period par excellence of Eric Wolf's world-historical 'peasant wars of the twentieth century' was drawing to a close by the 1970s, with the African liberation struggles noted earlier located in its final phase (Bernstein 2003).[17] It is also the case that modern sub-Saharan Africa provides few instances of broader-scale political organisation centred on agrarian and land issues, by contrast with Latin America and Asia with their long histories of rural social movements and rebellions, peasant leagues and unions, and agricultural workers' associations and struggles, often allied with, or mobilised by, political parties of the left.

Fourth, there are strong arguments that the 'classic' agrarian question of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe, and its adaptations in the twentieth-century Third World, no longer apply in today's conditions of globalisation (the latest stage of imperialism).[18] Connected with this, if not reducible to it, is that there is little basis for contemplating the return of 'peasant revolution' in any inherited sense, although there is some legacy of its currents and hopes in more radical (populist) versions of 'peasant resistance' and 'the peasant way' by advocates of *La Vía Campesina* (VC). VC describes itself as the 'International Peasant's Movement' and the 'International Peasant's Voice', and claims to be the largest transnational social movement in the world, a 'pro-poor peasant movement made up of more than 200 million members in 79 countries'.[19] It, and similar movements, are also less prominent in Africa (see Edelman 2003) than in Asia and Latin America, even though the secretariat of VC is currently based in Zimbabwe.

Of course, none of this means that rural struggles are absent in Africa today. An important area of more recent work on 'rural social protest' in Africa, at its best, confronts and explores the multiple contradictions and complexities of African countrysides and their political sociology.[20] The principal focus in this literature is on various forms of resistance, typically analysed from a position of sympathy with struggles 'from below' against the

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oppressions of colonial states and their successors. This in itself shifts from the position 40 years ago of John Saul, who was less concerned to 'take the part of peasants' in the manner of Gavin Williams (1976) than to ask how their experiences of exploitation and oppression could be harnessed to an emancipatory project of socialist development, for which leadership by a revolutionary party was essential. And it was undoubtedly harder, outside the periodic cases of armed struggle, to find the social base for such parties; nor did subsequent experience sustain earlier hopes on the left that armed liberation struggles based in the countryside provided a foundation for progressive resolutions of the agrarian question following independence.

I have suggested that historically specific forms of 'actually existing capitalism' in the colonial period and since produced fragmented classes of labour in the countryside rather than 'peasantries', with a minority of successful farmers, that is to say, petty commodity and small-scale capitalist producers. Most of those described as African 'peasants' are today members of classes of labour with a rural base. This has implications for how we frame the object of a political sociology of the countryside (and beyond) and take on its exacting demands of analysis, how we investigate and assess the conditions and prospects of progressive change that is needed so desperately.

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Notes

1. This article derives from an unpublished paper (Bernstein 2010b) which further developed some of the main lines of argument presented here. I am grateful to the editors for the opportunity to publish a revised version on the special occasion of the 40th anniversary of ROAPE. In some respects, this short essay is a companion piece to an earlier article in the *Review* (Bernstein 2003).
2. South Africa is omitted because of the principally urban character of the struggle against apartheid from the 1970s, although the salience of rural social and political dynamics, not least through migrant labour systems and associated constructions of ethnic (especially Zulu) politics, was powerfully restated by Mahmood Mamdani (1996).
3. At that time, analysis of the formation of a bureaucratic bourgeoisie in Tanzania was being pioneered by Issa Shivji (1976).
4. See Saul (2005) for his later reflections on Nyerere and his legacy (Chapter 7), and on the trajectory of Mozambique after liberation, shaped objectively by the 'pitiless circumstances' of its external environment and the 'particularly dependent economy' it inherited, and subjectively by 'fetishizing (with Eastern European encouragement) the twin themes of modern technology and "proletarianization"' (39). Mamdani (1996) groups both Tanzania and Mozambique after independence among 'radical' regimes that reproduced the bifurcated colonial political structure of 'citizen and subject' through widespread (if often ineffectual) commandism in the countryside, whereas 'conservative' regimes incorporated the 'decentralized despotism' of tribal/chiefly governance established by colonial indirect rule.
5. Perhaps this topical preoccupation of the 1970s also explains the lack of any reference to Mau Mau in Saul's article? Mau Mau was the emblematic anti-colonial 'peasant war' (if not exclusively rural) of sub-Saharan Africa before those of 'late' decolonisation in the 1960s and 1970s. In surely the most compelling analysis of 'peasant war' in the continent, John Lonsdale demonstrated how, in the conditions of settler colonialism in Kenya, Kikuyu 'had to wrestle with their parochial political culture of wealthy self-mastery, linked to land, and their pressing need for a wider power to shepherd the poor against the threefold slavery of the highlands, the shanties of Nairobi and an arbitrary state' (1992, 425). The 'moral challenge of class formation was faced and in part declined, with former [pre-colonial] civic virtues continuing to flourish amid

unfinished constructions of new ones' associated with anti-colonial nationalism (302). Mau Mau also took on the character of Kikuyu 'civil war' (see below), that is, one shaped by class relations – including those of pre-colonial provenance – but also by the 'linked arenas' of tribe, gender and state (292) and how they contributed to structures and experiences of exploitation and oppression. Further, Mau Mau proceeded without anything resembling a Leninist organisation, and without the international links and support that later liberation movements drew on. Maybe Kenya's Land and Freedom Army, defeated by systematically brutal suppression, could have provided the most powerful instance of the limits of 'spontaneity'? And of the influence of 'pre-capitalist' beliefs and practices (much emphasised by colonial propaganda as evidence of rebel atavism)?

6. Links between kinship, ethnicity and subsistence farming were given a very different twist by another political scientist at the University of Dar es Salaam. Goran Hyden's (1980, 1983) central notions of an 'economy of affection' and African peasantries 'uncaptured' by colonial capitalism were trenchantly criticised on the left, for example, by Mahmood Mamdani (1985).
7. On the systematic neglect of rural labour markets in African 'peasant' farming, see Oya (2013), who also emphasises their gendered character, as does Bridget O'Laughlin (1996) in an outstanding analysis of Mozambique.
8. Bernstein (2004) interrogates various versions of 'blocked' or incomplete capitalism in sub-Saharan Africa.
9. On the formation and dynamics of classes of labour in other guises than that of the 'classic' industrial proletariat, see the illuminating studies and arguments of Marcel van der Linden (2008) and Jairus Banaji (2010).
10. On conceptions of 'resistance', see Bernstein (2014, 9, 19–20). How 'resistance' might entail embracing some forms of commodification rather than others is explained and illustrated by O'Laughlin (2002).
11. And which was profoundly shaped by the outstanding work of Eric Wolf (1966, 1969); Bernstein and Byres (2001) provide a systematic review of 'peasant studies' from the 1960s to 1990s.
12. This last point is remarked by Saul (2005, 142). Land reform in Zimbabwe since 2000 provides a distinctive opportunity to examine the deeper social contradictions of the land question without reducing it to the nature of the Mugabe regime and its actions. Mamdani's attempt to explore this opportunity, first published in the *London Review of Books* (2008), generated a wave of hostile responses from liberal critics (in the letters column of the *London Review*) and from many on the left (Jacobs and Mundy 2009). Both kinds of critics typically proceeded on the mistaken assumption that the purpose and/or effect of Mamdani's intervention was to 'defend' Mugabe. The same kind of misconception has attached to Scoones et al. (2010), on which see Scoones (2014).
13. Noted, for example, by Aninka Claassens, a leading critic of South Africa's Communal Land Rights Act, through which 'Traditional leaders will derive their power not from the freely given support of their people, but from their control over people's land' (*Cape Times*, 10 February 2004). In the past century or so in sub-Saharan Africa, class formation (including the emergence of a class of effectively landless labour; see Iliffe 1987, 162–163), changes in political structures and processes, and demographic growth (from the 1920s), has led, however unevenly and implicitly, to the commodification of control over land, even in the absence of formal private property rights and pervasive idioms of the 'customary' deployed by all those seeking to control, claim and obtain access to land from positions of relative strength and weakness. On 'vernacular land markets', see Chimhowu and Woodhouse (2007); and for a typology of rights in land comprising the 'neocustomary' in 'a continuum from decentralised (family) to centralised (e.g. chieftancy) authority structures' and various forms of 'statist land tenure' regimes, see Boone (2014, 65, 67, and *passim*), whose principal interest is to identify and explain the kinds and scales of political conflicts generated by different land tenure regimes.
14. For example, on Ghana (Amanor 2005; Grischow 2008), on Sahelian West Africa (Ribot 2000; an account influenced by Mamdani 1996), on Botswana (Peters 1994) and on South Africa the debate generated by the Communal Land Rights Act of 2004 (Cousins 2007). Whitehead and Tsikata (2003) consider the 'implications of the re-turn to the customary' for women's rights to land. Not surprisingly, 'traditional authorities' in South Africa, organised politically in CONTRALESA, have been vehement opponents of some of the specific legislation proposed to implement the commitment of the constitution to gender equality, for example concerning 'African customary marriages' and domestic violence (Lodge 2002, 174, 214).

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15. See Gavin Capps' (2010) original and powerful concept of 'tribal landed property' as a capitalist category, whose emergence and mutations in Bafokeng he explores over a long period of South African history.
16. Including the greater development of the productive forces (and means of communication) in Asia, emphasised by Jack Goody in his remarkable comparative sociology of the historic formations of sub-Saharan Africa and Eurasia. The most accessible introduction to Goody's work, its preoccupations and inspirations, is his interview with Pallares-Burke (2002).
17. It is striking that of Wolf's six case studies of 'peasant wars of the twentieth century' (1969), only two concerned situations of direct colonial rule, namely Vietnam and Algeria, the others being Mexico, Russia, China and Cuba.
18. Different, indeed conflicting, versions of such arguments can be found in Bernstein (2003), McMichael (2006) and Moyo, Jha, and Yeros (2013).
19. http://viacampesina.org/en/index.php/main-issues-mainmenu-27/sustainable-peasants-agriculture-mainmenu-42/1493-building-a-peasant-revolution-in-africa, accessed February 9, 2014.
20. See the illuminating survey focused mostly on the colonial period by Allen Isaacman (1990), which retains considerable value 25 years later; also the excellent survey of conflicts over land by Pauline Peters (2004).

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