

Sam Moyo and Paris Yeros (eds) Reclaiming the Land: The Resurgence of Rural Movements in Africa, Asia and Latin America, Zed Books, London New York, 2005, pp 426. ISBN 1 84277 424 7.

The land issue has been a problem since indigenous communities started interacting with the outside world and subsequent colonialism that dispossessed the majority natives of their much required resource. The book analyses these historical issues and present contending agrarian issues. Very few book have addressed the agrarian question in this exceptional and comprehensive way. This is a much-needed volume for academics and practitioners in agrarian reform. The text is an excellent and remarkable contribution to comparative understanding of the nature and dilemmas of agrarian issues in Africa, Asia and Latin America within the framework of neo-liberal agenda and globalisation. The contributors are experts in themselves as researchers and academics in agrarian issues. The fourteen articles depict originality and offers valuable insights to agrarian questions.

The introduction by Sam Moyo and Paris Yeros is a detailed and well informed in terms of the context in which land and agriculture both historical and present processes is taking place. The relationship between the agrarian question and national question denotes a positive correlation despite the prevalence of globalisation and the neo liberal agenda. The authors envisage post liberal period were, "it is perhaps ironic that rural movements have become 'natural' leaders of progressive change, not by virtue of being exploited by capital, but being expelled from it. But under the circumstances of severe political co-optation among the exploited and the crisis of social reproduction among the expelled, it is no surprise that the rural movements are coming of age and taking up militant position."p.55-56.

Part A of the book deals with African situation. A well-articulated article by Henry Bernstein surveys agrarian questions in Sub Saharan Africa from the period of colonialism through SAPs era to present globalisation. During the colonial era creation of labour reserve through land alienation, imposition of colonial structures through oversea expansion concessionary companies brutal history of reserve extraction/plunder distorted the agrarian set up. This continued as legacies of late colonialism that include parastatal development corporations export crop

promotion, land use planning and conservation regulations, rudimentary macro economic planning and project/scheme state investment and management are visible. The late colonial model of state economic development was assimilated by newly independent governments citing nation building. This led to “ virtually every country on the continent entered into negotiations with international financial institutions (the IMF and the World Bank) to seek debt rescheduling and other financial support in return for adopting and implementing ‘structural adjustment’ policies and pursuing their advantage in globalising commodity and financial markets.”p. 79. The author exposed various web/variations of politics over land, noting “tensions and conflicts over land driven by the kinds of general processes outlined, involving a range of social actors and individual and collective practices, and marked by often strongly local features-complex variations of time and place-are widespread in Africa’s countryside’s, and appear to be intensifying.p.88-89. Factors inhibiting growth in agricultural production were analysed and recommended the role of the state as inimical ‘the widening of the home market also needs state support to build the infrastructure for dynamic accumulation...in small holder sector.’p.91. The author alerts that “it is increasingly untenable to ignore the proliferating tensions and conflicts over land in Sub-Saharan Africa today in the context of a generalized crisis of reproduction, however varied, complex and contradictory the social forces and forms of struggle over land may be”. p.92.

Kojo Sebastian Amanor dwelling on Ghanaian case study examines the impact of land alienation as a result of the creation of forest reserves, concessions and agricultural schemes. He offers a detailed account of history of land administration from colonial to independence. The chapter also reviews the process of resistance to alienation by peasantry. The process involved both legal and illegal channels oftenly leading to back lashes. The tequiniques used involved sabotaging state plantations, night harvesting on palm plantation and small mining gangs. The resistance was and remains largely spontaneous and parochial. Large-scale farmers who are government appointees have dominated an effort for farmers to organise themselves and this has derailed achievement of objectives for the majority.

Fedelis Edje Kanyongoro analyses the Malawian experience in challenging neo-liberal order through land occupation. He noted that land occupation is one of the basic tequiniques used by both urban and rural poor to engage private owners and the state. The author explained the historical background to land alienation that was largely attributed to colonialist and subsequent postcolonial state’ land region. He analyzed the social for land occupation, strategies and allowances that were involved in the movement for emancipation. Major factors that facilitate occupations were noted. His conclusion offers insights for Southern Africa “Landlessness and land hunger in Malawi are bound to grow in the foreseeable future. As a result, land occupations will increase in frequency and scale, thereby contributing the struggle for substantive, not

rhetorical, social and economic transformation based on the principles of restitution and redistribution". p.137.

Mfanisani Fana Sihlongonyane offers insights on land occupations in South Africa examining major debates on land occupations that have been heavily infused with racial politics. The historical processes of struggles for land besides invasion has been squatting and land seizures. Sihlongonyane detailed historical issues to land moves on to analyse the contemporary social mobilisation, tactics and alliance in and around land reform. The removal of Apartheid laws led to massive movement of people the need for land by blacks that have previously been segregated. But the author rests the future of the fight by noting, "what is certain is the groundswell of grassroots demands for land. As these demands may be, they have common points of convergence, especially against the destructive effects of neo liberalism. They have also differences in approach, strength and attitudes towards government and towards one another. This suggests that the social movements in South Africa have some considerable way to go before they find unity and resolve to identify and fight their common enemy". p.160-161.

Sam Moyo and Paris Yeros explored the Zimbabwean situation with the objective of seeking what might be a national democratic revolution within the neo-liberal era. The authors explored the political economy of neo colonialism with its seeds having been sown by white settler capitalism to a large extent and also black capitalism through native purchase areas. At independence the black bourgeoisie came to share power with the established white settler capital. The authors exposed how the neo-colonial states' inter-capitalist conflicted leading to new tendencies and alliances. Land occupants were singled out as the driving force behind land reform in Zimbabwe and historical surveyed through periodisation to expose the tactic. The movement in Zimbabwe was ugly organised. The current onslaught on Zimbabwe by financial institutions /power and isolation is likely to negatively affect Zimbabwe with repression of civil society and emergence of black bourgeoisie in policy making process against interests of peasants and workers the danger is imminent which is " full reversal into a process re-compradorisation and recolonization under a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, and ultimately the failure to fulfil the development potential of the new agrarian structure".p.194. Transforming the society through prioritization of agrarian reconstruction, resistance of civil political ideology reconstruction of the working class, emergence of trade unions to some formal and informal rural and urban sectors remains. For Zimbabwe, the authors offered a valuable insight. "The agrarian question is far from resolved in Zimbabwe, despite radical land reform. Introverted accumulation requires the articulation of a new development vision, which not only condemns neoliberalism but also formulates an economic framework for sustainable accumulation of the periphery as a whole as well as a political strategy

for its realization. It is only then that the principle of national self determination will begin to be wrested from its imperial grip".p.201-202.

Part B exposes Asian experience in Agrarian reform. Filomeno V. Aguilar, Jr offers an overview of the Asian experiences. The major struggles have been to acquire land for cultivation, the right to control production and marketing of output. Largely in Asia visible land occupations have been on the highlands with special land for agricultural purposes. The author examined the retreat from collective farming/agriculture that had dominated most countries with centralised planned economies. Aspects of neoliberalism on agrarian issues were questioned, where some may not be beneficial to some rural producers, individual or group action through formal/informal land markets against the state or hegemonic classes or competition with other peasants and members of the rural proletariat. Of importance to note is that "in a situation of economic chaos and untold complexity, the moral imperative of sharing land with the needy appears to be the only unifying impulse, drawing NGOs and bureaucrats to support and organise land occupations...The politics of the struggle for land cannot be distanced from this necessity, and neither ought we to forget that every struggle is partial. We need to learn from peasants who find and exploit the cracks". p.231-232

Manar Pimple and Manpreet Sehli dwells on the Indian case study. In society dominated by caste systems the higher caste enjoyed greater access to land though having dwindled in the urban areas in rural society its central. Historical background has promoted highly conflictual situations between customary law and application of neo-liberal land policies. They highlighted the land under contestation i.e. forests under state control, village commons, and public spaces within villages. Land occupations have been less organised and reasons were well put across. Struggles for the authors date back to the pre-independence, though post-independence government distributed land but the process was never complete. Case studies in India were well put across. For India it remains "land access for the poor in restricted India is not only by physical constraints, but more so by the legal and institutional mechanisms that are designed to deprive the majority of land". p.252. For the betterment of those in need " a just and fair distribution of land resources, therefore, is of utmost importance. The alliance that is emerging between landless movements in India and the MST in Brazil, as well as with Via Campesina, is a new sign of global solidarity that hinges on a new vision of a humane new world. Yes, another world is possible".p.253.

Salvador H. Feranil on the case of Philippines provides interesting insights on the interaction between the state and the landless and rural poor on agrarian reform. The chapter explored the emerging strategies and potential of local peasants collective action and land occupation in

challenging the limits of land reform. Using the political economy approach the author analysed the processes of democratisation and liberalism within the agrarian reform framework. He provided interesting insights into the future agrarian reform and the centrality of alliances.

Henry Veltmeyer surveyed the dynamics of land occupations in Latin American countries within a historical and theoretical perspective. Noting how western intervention particularly by USA has stalled the movements. Outlined three paths towards land reform i.e. state led land reform; market assisted land reform, grassroots land reform. For him the problem is far from being over noting, "the Latin American experience suggests that this phenomenon of land occupations can best, if not only be understood as a protracted and ongoing class struggle in the countryside...in the contemporary era of neo-liberal capitalist development and globalisation the peasantry remains a significant factor of social and political change in rural society".p.308.

Bernardo Mancaro Fernandes discusses the Brazilian case study. He distinguished various types and forums of processes of occupation what the government have attempted to do in trying to solve the problem. The researcher bemoans the lack of adequate research on problems and impasse that have emerged in current agrarian discourse. Lauro Mattei- dwelling on the same case study evaluated and shaded light on perspectives of Agrarian reform under liberalism. He offered a historical background to land policy and reform in Brazil. He cited the centrality of land reform given the existence of large number of landless rural families and the abundance of land where there is no production. They analysed Cardoso's government and the extent to which it has tried to solve the problem and noted that the problems seem to have remained. The author recommended, "the more recent idea of a market assisted agrarian reform is even less likely to deliver land to the 4.5 rural families that are landless or near landless, as it has displaced responsibility for land reform onto society and specifically onto the farmers which dominate it...the rural struggles for agrarian reform must combine with the urban social struggles (for urban reform, employment wages and shelter) with enough social strength to destroy the economic and political power of the antiquated Brazilian rural oligarchies, which prevent the opening up of a new horizon of national development".p.356.

Igor Ampuero and James J Britain in the case of Colombia explored the political economy of Colombia noting that issue of land has been secondary as there has been move of people to urban areas hence economy shifting from agriculture to natural resource extraction. But for those in agriculture they have not been spared by persistent conflict over land to produce for the market and illicit agrarian produce. War and struggles have been waged by large scale, rural based and peasants to access production land. Contestations have continued and the state for the authors has only two options, "either to address the urgent development needs in the area of agriculture,

education and health, as outlined by the FARC-EP; or to persist with its policy of direct social, economic, political and cultural violence through state and paramilitary forces". p.378.

Armando Batra and Gerardo Otero analysed the land problem in Mexico. The authors analysed the emergence of Indian peasants who are the indigenous people of Mexico and this indigenous ethnicity and culture are the encoring points for the struggle for land in Mexico. They examined the institutional dispossession of land from the indigenous and analysed various alliances for struggles for land and waged wars for emancipation. But presently, "the peasant movement has been resurrected from the dead, with an imagination, combativeness, capacity for programmatic integration, and breath of convergence that had not been seen since the early 1990s".p.407.

For any one wanting to understand agrarian issues in the developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America the book is mandatory and highly recommended. All things considered the book offers a brilliant survey of agrarian questions in developing countries. Recent capitalist system and imperialism is unable to provide solution to agrarian question, which has contributed to both rural and urban poverty. In essence it appears rural populace and the urban poor have come to a realization that neo-liberalism is impeding their development to the benefit of the proponents of neo-liberalism and globalisation.

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