

# **DESIRABLE LAND TENURE REFORMS IN AFRICA AND ASIA REV I**

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1. This document focuses on the land tenure reforms that would be required over a large part of Africa and Asia in the event that future developments are designed to benefit the whole of society, its popular and working classes in particular and, of course, the peasants (over half the population of Asia and Africa), and seek the reduction of inequality and the radical eradication of "poverty". This option is one which the institutions and mechanisms that are actually generating poverty refuse to promote.

This development paradigm involves combination of a "mixed" macro economy (combining private enterprise with public planning) based on the democratisation of market management and the state and its interventions, and a decision to opt for agricultural development based on peasant family farms.

The implementation of this set of basic principles, for which it would clearly be necessary to define specific methods for each country and phase of development, would lead to the formation of an "alternative" on a national scale. It would, of course, have to be accompanied by an evolution to support it both regionally and globally through the construction of an alternative globalisation that would be negotiated rather than imposed unilaterally by dominant transnational capital, the collective imperialism of the triad (the United States, Europe, and Japan) and United States hegemonic tendencies.

We only aim to deal here with a single aspect of this complex problem, namely, the rules governing access to the use of farmland. These rules must be created in a way that "integrates rather than excludes", that is to say, a way that allows all farmers the right of access to land, which is a fundamental condition of the continued existence of a "peasant society". This basic right is certainly not enough by itself. It would have to be supported by policies enabling peasant family farms to produce their goods in a way that would ensure the growth of national production (which in turn would guarantee a secure food-supply for the country) and a parallel improvement in the real income of all the peasants concerned. It is a question of implementing a range of macroeconomic proposals and adequate forms of politically managing these, and ensuring that negotiations on the organisation of international exchange systems are subject to the requirements of the former. These aspects of the problem will not be discussed here.

2. As the access to land depends on tenure status, the "reforms" related to this are the subject for discussion here.

The language used in this area is often imprecise due to the lack of sufficient conceptualisation. In French the terms "réformes foncières" (land reforms), "réformes agraires" (agrarian reforms) and sometimes "lois concernant le domaine national" (state land laws), "transformations des modes d'exploitation" (transformation of farming methods) and in English the terms "land tenure", "land system" are often used interchangeably.

First of all, two types of "tenure status" (or systems of land tenure) must be defined: those based on the private ownership of farm land and those that are not.

(i) *Land Tenure Based on the Private Ownership of the Land*

In this case, the owner has, to use the terms of Roman law, *usus* (the right to use an asset), *fructus* (the right to appropriate the returns from the asset) and *abusus* (the right to transfer). This right is "absolute" in the sense that the owner can farm his land himself, rent it out or even abstain from farming. The property may be given away or sold and it forms part of assets that can be inherited.

Certainly, this right is often less absolute than it appears. In all cases use is subject to public order laws (such as those prohibiting its unlawful use for the cultivation of stupeficients) and increasingly to environmental regulations. In some countries where an agrarian reform has been carried through, a limit has been established for the maximum surface area an individual or family can own (see below). The rights of tenant farmers (duration and guarantee of the lease, amount of land rent) limit those of the owners in varying degrees to the extent of affording the tenant farmer the major benefit of the protection of the state and its agricultural policies (this is the case in France). Freedom to choose his crops is not always the rule. In Egypt, from most remote time, the state agricultural services establish the proportion of land allotted to different crops depending on their irrigation requirements.

This system of land ownership is modern, inasmuch as it is the product of the constitution of ("really existing") historic capitalism which originated in western Europe (England) in the first place) and among the Europeans who colonised America. It was established through the destruction of the "customary" systems for regulating access to land, even in Europe. The statutes of feudal Europe were based on the superposition of rights to the same land: those of the peasant concerned and other members of a village community (serfs or freemen), those of the feudal lord and those of the king. The assault on these rights took the form of "enclosures" in England, imitated in different ways in all European countries during the course of the 19th century. Very early on, Marx denounced this radical transformation which excluded the majority of peasants from access to use of the land, turning them into proletariat emigrants to the towns (forced by circumstance) or, in the case of those who stayed into farm labourers or tenant farmers, which he regarded as numbering among the type of measures of primitive accumulation that dispossessed the producers of property or the use of the means of production.

The use of the terms of Roman law (*usus* and *abusus*) to describe the status of modern bourgeois ownership perhaps indicates that the latter had distant "roots". In this case, those of land ownership in the Roman Empire and more precisely those of pro-slavery latifundist ownership. The fact remains that as these particular forms of ownership have disappeared in feudal Europe, we cannot talk of the "continuity" of a "western" concept of ownership (itself associated with "individualism" and of the values it represents) which has, in fact, never existed.

The rhetoric of capitalist discourse about itself - "liberal" ideology - has not only produced this myth of "western continuity". It has, above all, produced another even more dangerous myth, namely that of the "absolute and superior rationale" of economic management based on the private and exclusive ownership of the means of production which it considers farmland to be. In fact, according to conventional economics, the "market", that is to say the transferability of ownership of capital and land, determines the optimal (most efficient) use of these "factors of production". So, according to this principle, land becomes "merchandise like any other", transferable at the "market" price, in order to guarantee that the best use is made of it both for the owner concerned and society as a whole. This is nothing but mere tautology yet it is the one upon which all ("vulgar" which is to say acritical to use Marx's terms) bourgeois economic discourse is based. This same rhetoric is used to legitimise the principle of land ownership by dint of the fact that it alone can guarantee that the farmer who invests to improve his yield per hectare and the productivity of his work (and that of any employees)

will not suddenly be dispossessed of the fruit of his labour and savings. This is not the case and other forms of regulating the right to use the land can produce similar results. In sum, this dominant discourse uses the conclusions that it sees fit to draw from the construction of western modernity in order to propose them as the only necessary "rules" for the advancement of all other peoples. To make the land everywhere private property in the current sense of the term, as practiced in capitalist centres, is to spread the policy of "enclosures" the world over, in other words, to hasten the dispossession of the peasants. This course of action is not new; it began and continued during earlier centuries of the global expansion of capitalism in the context of colonial systems in particular. Today the World Trade Organisation (WTO) intends only to accelerate the process even though the destruction that would result from this capitalist approach is increasingly foreseeable and predictable. Resistance to this option by the peasants and peoples affected would make it possible to build a real and genuinely human alternative.

(ii) *Land Tenure Systems not Based on the Private Ownership of the Land*

As we can see, this definition is negative – *not* based on private property – and therefore cannot designate a homogeneous group since access to land is regulated in all human societies, however, it is regulated either by "customary authorities", "modern authorities", the state or more specifically, and more often, by a group of institutions and practices involving individuals, communities and the state.

"Customary" administration (expressed in terms of customary law or known as such) has always (or almost always) ruled out private property (in the modern sense) and always guaranteed access to land for all of the families (rather than the individuals) concerned. In other words, those that are part of a "village community" which is distinct and can be identified as such. Yet it has (almost) always never guaranteed "equal" right to land. In the first place, it most often excluded "foreigners" (usually the vestiges of conquered peoples), "slaves" (of differing status) and shared land unequally depending on clan membership, lineage, caste or status ("chiefs", "free men", etc.). So there is no reason to heap excessive praise upon these traditional rights as a number of anti-imperialist national ideologues unfortunately do. Progress will certainly require them to be challenged.

Customary administration has almost never been the system used in "independent villages". These have always been part of stable or changing, sound or precarious state groupings depending on circumstances but very rarely have they been absent. So the rights of use of the communities and families that made them up have always been limited by those of the state which levied taxes (which is why I described the vast family of pre-modern production methods as "tributary").

These complex forms of "customary" administration, which differ from one time and place to another, only persist, in the best of cases, in extremely deteriorated forms and have been under attack by the dominant rationale of world capitalism for at least two centuries (in Asia and in Africa), sometimes five (in Latin America).

In this respect, India is probably one of the clearest examples. Before British colonisation, access to land was managed by "village communities", or more precisely by their upper ruling castes-classes, however, excluding lower castes, the Dalits, who were treated as a kind of collective slave class similar to the Hilotes of Sparta. These communities were, in turn, controlled and exploited by the imperial Mughal state and its vassals (Rajahs' and other ruler's states) which levied tribute. The British raised the status of the zamindars, formerly land revenue collectors, to that of "owners" who thus became large allied landowners in spite of tradition although they upheld "tradition" when it suited them to do so, for example, by "respecting" the exclusion of Dalits from access to land! Independent India has not challenged this serious colonial inheritance which is the cause of the incredible poverty of the

majority of its peasantry and then after of its urban proletariat (cf S Amin, *L'Inde, une grande puissance? (India, A Great Power?)* October 2004). The solution to these problems and the building of a viable economy for the peasant majority is therefore through an agrarian reform in the strictest sense of the term (see below the meaning of this proposal). The European colonisations of Southeast Asia and that of the United States in the Philippines resulted in similar developments. The "enlightened despotic" regimes of the east (the Ottoman Empire, the Egypt of Mohamed Ali, the Shahs of Iran) also by and large established private ownership in the modern sense of the term to the benefit of a new class wrongly described as "feudal" (by most historical Marxist thinking) recruited from among the senior ranks of their power system.

As a result of this, private ownership of the land has since then affected the majority of farm land, especially the best of it, throughout Asia outside China, Vietnam and the former Soviet republics of central Asia and there are only remnants of deteriorated para-customary systems in the poorest regions that are of the least value to the dominant capitalist farming in particular. This structure differs widely juxtaposing large landowners (country capitalists to use the terminology I proposed), rich peasants, middle peasants, poor peasants and the landless. There is no peasant "organisation" or "movement" that transcends these acute class conflicts.

In Arab Africa, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Kenya, the colonisers (with the exception of Egypt) granted their colonists (or the Boers in South Africa) "modern" private properties of a generally latifundist type. This legacy has certainly been brought to an end in Algeria but here the peasantry had almost disappeared, proletarianised (and reduced to vagrancy) by the extension of colonial lands, whereas in Morocco and Tunisia the local bourgeoisie took them over (which was also the case to some extent in Kenya). In Zimbabwe, the revolution has challenged the legacy of colonialisation to the benefit, in part, of new middle owners of urban rather than rural origin and, in part, of "poor peasants communities". South Africa still remains outside this movement. The remnants of deteriorated para-customary systems that survive in the "poor" regions of Morocco or Berber Algeria and the former Bantustans of South Africa are threatened with private appropriation from inside and outside the societies concerned. In all these situations, scrutiny of the peasant struggles (and possibly those of the organisations that support them) is required: are we talking about "rich peasant" movements and demands in conflict with some orientation of state policy (and the influences of the dominant world system on them), or of poor and landless peasants? Can they form an "alliance" against the dominant (so-called "neo-liberal) system? Under what conditions? To what extent? Can the demands - expressed or otherwise - of poor and landless peasants be "forgotten"?

In intertropical Africa, the apparent survival of "customary" systems is certainly more visible because here the model of colonisation took a different and unique direction, known in French (the term has no translation in English) as "économie de traite". The administration of access to land was left to the so-called "customary" authorities, however, controlled by the colonial state (through traditional clan leaders, legitimate or otherwise, created by the administration). The purpose of this control was to force peasants to produce a quota of specific products for export (peanuts, cotton, coffee, cocoa) over and above what they required for their own subsistence. Maintaining a system of land tenure that did not rely on private property suited colonisation since no land rent entered into composition of the prices of the designated products. This resulted in land being wasted, destroyed by the expansion of crops, sometimes permanently (as illustrated by the desertification of peanut producing areas of Senegal). Yet again capitalism showed that its "short term rationale", an integral part of its dominant rationale, was in fact the cause of an ecological disaster. The combination of subsistence farming and the production of products for export also meant that the peasants were paid almost nothing for their work. To talk in these circumstances of a "customary land

tenure system" is going far too far. It is a new regime that preserves only the appearance of "traditions" and often the least valuable of these.

China and Vietnam provide a unique example of an access to land administration system that is based neither on private ownership nor on "customs" but on a new revolutionary right unknown elsewhere. It is the right of all peasants (defined as inhabitants of a village) to equal access to land and I stress the use of equal. This right is the finest accomplishment of the Chinese and Vietnamese revolutions.

In China, and even more so in Vietnam which was more extensively colonised, "former" land tenure systems (those that I have described as "tributory") were already quite eroded by dominant capitalism. The former ruling classes of the imperial power system had turned most of the agricultural land into private or quasi-private property whereas the development of capitalism encouraged the formation of new rich peasant classes. Mao Zedong is the first and without doubt the only one, followed by the Chinese and Vietnamese communists, to have defined a revolutionary agrarian strategy based on the mobilisation of the majority of poor, landless and middle peasants. From the outset, the triumph of this revolution made it possible to abolish the private ownership of land, which was replaced by that of the state, and organise new forms of equal access to land for all peasants. This organisation has certainly passed through several successive phases including that inspired by the Soviet model based on production cooperatives. The limited achievements made by the latter have led both countries to return to peasant family farming. Is this model viable? Can it lead to a sustained improvement in production without bringing about an excess of rural manpower? Under what conditions? What supporting policies does it require of the state? What types of political management can meet the challenge?

Ideally, the model involves the dual affirmation of the rights of the state (sole owner) and of the usufructuary (the peasant family). It guarantees equal distribution of the village land among all of the families. It prohibits any use of it, such as renting, other than for family farming. It guarantees that the proceeds of investments made by the usufructuary return to him in the short term through his right of ownership of all farm produce (which is freely marketed, although the state guarantees a minimum price), and in the long term by inheritance of usufruct to the exclusive benefit of children remaining on the farm (any person who emigrates from the village loses his right of access to the land which is then redistributed). As this involves rich land but also small (even tiny) farms, the system is only viable as long as the vertical investment (the green revolution with no large scale industrialisation) is equally efficient to allow the increase of production per rural worker as is horizontal investment (the expansion of farming supported by increased industrialisation).

Has this "ideal" model ever been implemented? Certainly close to it (for example during the time of Deng Xiaoping in China). However, the fact remains that although this model ensures a high degree of equality within the village, it has never been able to overcome the inequalities between one community and another that are a function of the quality of the land, the density of the population and the proximity of urban markets. Furthermore, no redistribution system has not been up to the challenge (even through the structures of cooperatives and state trade monopolies of the "Soviet" phase).

Certainly more serious is the fact that the system is itself subject to internal and external pressures which undermine its direction and social scale. Access to credit, satisfactory subsidisation are subject to bargaining and interventions of all kinds, legitimate or otherwise. "Equal" access to land is not synonymous with "equal" access to the best production conditions. The popularisation of "market" ideology contributes to this destabilization. The system tolerates (and has even re-legitimised) farm tenancy and the employment of waged employees. Right wing discourse - encouraged from abroad - stresses the need to give the peasants in question "ownership" of the land and to open up the "farmland market". It is quite

clear that rich peasants (and even agribusiness) seeking to increase their property are behind this discourse.

This system of peasant access to land has been administered thus far by the state and the party which are one. Clearly, one might have thought that it could have been administered by genuine elected village councils. This is certainly necessary as there is hardly any other means of winning the support of the majority and reducing the intrigues of the minority would-be beneficiaries of a more markedly capitalist approach. The "party dictatorship" has shown itself to be largely inclined to careerism, opportunism and even corruption. Social struggles are currently far from non-existent in rural China and Vietnam. They are no less strongly expressed than elsewhere in the world but they are by and large "defensive" and concerned with defending the legacy of the revolution - equal right to land for all. This legacy must be defended, especially as it is under greater threat than it may appear despite repeated affirmations from both governments that the "state ownership of the land will **never** be abolished in favour of private property"! Yet today this defence demands recognition of the right to do so through the organisation of those who are affected, that is to say, the peasants.

3. The forms of organisation of agricultural production and land tenure are too varied in Asia and Africa for one single formula of "alternative peasant social construction" to be recommended for all.

By "agrarian reform" we must understand the redistribution of private property when it is deemed too unequally divided. It is not a matter of "reforming the land tenure status" since we are dealing with a land tenure system governed by the principle of ownership. This reform, however, seeks to meet the perfectly legitimate demand of poor and landless peasants and to reduce the political and social power of large landowners. Yet, where it has been implemented, in Asia and Africa after the liberation from former forms of imperialist and colonial domination, this has been done by non-revolutionary hegemonic social blocks in the sense that they were not directed by the dominated poor classes in the majority, except in China and Vietnam, where, in fact, for this reason there has been no "agrarian reform" in the strict sense of the term but, as I have already said, suppression of the private ownership of land, affirmation of state ownership and implementation of the principle of "equal" access to the use of the land by all peasants. Elsewhere real reforms dispossessed the only large owners to the eventual benefit of middle and even rich peasants (in the longer term), ignoring the interests of the poor and landless. This has been the case in Egypt and other Arab countries. The reform under way in Zimbabwe may face a similar perspective. In other situations such as in India, South East Asia, South Africa and Kenya, reform is still on the agenda of what is needed.

Even where agrarian reform is an immediate unavoidable demand, its long term success is uncertain as it reinforces an attachment to "small ownership" which becomes an obstacle to challenging the land tenure system based on private ownership.

Russian history illustrates this tragic situation. The evolution begun after the abolition of serfdom (in 1861), accelerated by the revolution of 1905 then the policies of Stolypine, had already produced a "demand for ownership" that the revolution of 1917 had consecrated by means of a radical agrarian reform and, as we know, the new small owners were not happy about giving up their rights to the benefit of the unfortunate cooperatives created at the time in the 1930s. A "different approach" based on peasant family economy and generalised small ownership might have been possible but it was not tried.

Yet what about the regions (other than China and Vietnam) in which the land tenure system is not (yet) based on private property? We are, of course, talking about inter-tropical Africa.

We return here to an old debate. In the late 19th century, Marx, in his correspondence with the Russian Narodniks (Vera Zassoulitch among others), dares to state that the absence of private property may be a major advantage for the socialist revolution by allowing the transition from a system of the administration of access to land other than that governed by private ownership but he does not say what forms this new system should take and the use of "collective", however fair, remains insufficient. Twenty years later, Lenin claimed that this possibility no longer existed and had been destroyed by the penetration of capitalism and the spirit of private ownership that accompanied it. Was this judgment right or wrong? I cannot say on this matter as it goes beyond my knowledge of Russia. However, the fact remains that Lenin did not consider this matter of crucial importance, having accepted Kautsky's point of view regarding the "*Agrarian Question*". Kautsky generalised the scope of the modern European capitalist model and felt that the peasantry was destined to "disappear" due to the expansion of capitalism itself. In other words, capitalism would have been capable of "resolving the agrarian question". Although 80% true for the capitalist centers (the Triad: 15% of the world's population), this proposition does not hold true for the "rest of the world" (85% of its population!). History shows not only that capitalism has not resolved this question for 85% of the people but that from the perspective of its continued expansion, it can resolve it no longer (other than by genocide! A fine solution!). So it fell to Mao Zedong and the Communist Parties of China and Vietnam to find a suitable solution to the challenge.

The question resurfaced during the 1960s with African independence. The national liberation movements of the continent, the states and party-states that arose from them enjoyed, in varying degrees, the support of the peasant majority of their peoples. Their natural propensity to populism led them to conceive of a "specific" ("African") socialist approach". The latter could certainly be described as very moderately radical in its relationship both with dominant imperialism and the local classes associated with its expansion. It did not raise the question of rebuilding of peasant society in a humanist and universalist spirit to any lesser extent. A spirit that often proved highly critical of the "traditions" that the foreign masters had in fact tried to use to their profit.

All - or almost all - African countries adopted the same principle, formulated as an "inalienable right of state ownership" of all land. I do not believe this proclamation to have been a "mistake", nor do I think that it was motivated by extreme "statism".

Examination of the way that the current peasant system really operates and its integration into the capitalist world economy reveals the scale of the challenge. This management is provided by a complex system that is based both on "custom", private ownership (capitalist) and the rights of the state. The "custom" in question has degenerated and barely serves to disguise the discourse of bloodthirsty dictators who pay lip service to "authenticity" which is nothing but a fig leaf that they think hides their thirst for pillage and treachery in the face of imperialism. The only major obstacle to the expansionist tendency of private ownership is the possible resistance of its victims. In some regions that are better able to yield rich crops (irrigated areas and market garden farms) land is bought, sold and rented with no formal land title.

Inalienable state property, which I defend in principle, itself, becomes a vehicle for private ownership. Thus, the state can "provide" the land necessary for the development of a tourist area, a local or foreign agribusiness or even a state farm. The land titles necessary for access to improved areas are distributed in a way that is rarely transparent. In all cases the peasant families who inhabited the areas and are asked to leave are victims of these practices which are an abuse of power. Still, the "abolition" of inalienable state property in order to transfer it to the occupiers is not feasible in reality (all village lands would have to be registered with the land registry!) and if this were attempted it would only allow rural and urban notables to help themselves to the best plots.

The right answer to the challenges of the management of a land tenure system not based on private ownership (as the main system at least) is through state reform and its active involvement in the implementation of a modernised and economically viable and democratic system for administering access to land that rules out, or at least minimises, inequality. The solution certainly does not lie in a "return to customs", which would, in fact, be impossible, and would only serve to accentuate inequalities and open the way for savage capitalism.

We cannot say that no African state has ever tried the approach recommended here.

In Mali following independence in September 1961, the Sudanese Union began what has very wrongly been described as "collectivisation". In fact, the cooperatives that were set up were not productive cooperatives; production remained the exclusive responsibility of family farms. It was a form of modernised collective authority that replaced the so-called "custom" on which colonial authority had depended. The party that took over this new modern power was clearly aware of the challenge and set the objective of abolishing customary forms of power that were deemed to be "reactionary" even "feudal". It is true that this new peasant authority which was formally democratic (those in charge were elected) was in actual fact only as democratic as the state and the party. However, it had "modern" responsibilities, namely, to ensure that access to land was administered "correctly", that is to say, without "discrimination", to manage loans, the distribution of subsidies (supplied by state trade) and product marketing (also partly the responsibility of state trade). In practice, nepotism and extortion have certainly never been stamped out. The only response to these abuses should have been the progressive democratisation of the state and not its "retreat" as liberalism then imposed (by means of an extremely violent military dictatorship) to the benefit of the traders ("dioulas").

Other experiences in the liberated areas of Guinea Bissau (impelled by theories put forward by Amilcar Cabral) in Burkina Faso at the time of Sankara have also tackled these challenges head on and sometimes produced unquestionable progress that today people try to erase. The creation of elected rural collectives in Senegal is a response whose principle I would not hesitate to defend. Democracy is a never ending process, no more so in Europe than in Africa.

What current dominant discourse understands by "reform of the land tenure system" is quite the opposite from what the construction of a real alternative based on a prosperous peasant economy requires. This discourse, promoted by the propaganda instruments of collective imperialism - the World Bank, numerous cooperation agencies and also a number of NGOs with considerable financial backing - understands land reform to mean the acceleration of the privatisation of land and nothing more. The aim is clear: create the conditions that would allow "modern" islands of (foreign or local) agribusiness to take possession of the land they need in order to expand. Yet the additional produce that these islands could provide (for export or creditworthy local market) will never meet the challenge of the requirements of creation of a prosperous society for all which implies the advancement of the peasant family economy as a whole.

4. So, counter to this, a land tenure reform conceived from the perspective of the creation of a real, efficient and democratic alternative supported by prosperous peasant family production must define the role of the state (principal inalienable owner) and that of the institutions and mechanisms of administering access to land and the means of production.

I do not exclude here complex mixed formulas that are specific to each country. Private ownership of the land may be acceptable - at least where it is established and held to be legitimate. Its redistribution can or should be reviewed, where necessary, as part of an agrarian reform (South Africa, Zimbabwe and Kenya, with respect to Sub-Saharan Africa). I



would not even necessarily rule out the controlled clearance of land for agribusiness in all cases. The key lies elsewhere, in the modernisation of peasant family farming and the democratisation of the management of its integration into the national and global economy.

I have no blue print to propose for these areas so I will limit myself to pointing out some of the great problems that this reform poses.

The democratic question is indisputably central to the response to the challenge. It is a complex and difficult question that cannot be reduced to insipid discourse about good governance and electoral pluralism. There is an indisputably cultural aspect to the question: democracy leads to the abolition of "customs" that are hostile to it (prejudice concerning social hierarchies and above all the treatment of women). There are legal and institutional aspects to be considered: the creation of systems of administrative, commercial and personal rights that are consistent with the aims of the plans for social construction and the creation of suitable (generally elected) institutions. However, above all, the progress of democracy will depend definitively on the social power of its defenders. The organization of peasant movements is, in this respect, absolutely irreplaceable. It is only to the extent that peasants are able to express themselves that progress in the direction known as "participative democracy" (as opposed to the reduction of the problem to the dimension of "representative democracy") will be able to make headway.

The question of relations between men and women is another aspect of the democratic challenge that is no less essential. Peasant "family farming" obviously concerns the family, which is to this day characterised almost everywhere by structures that require the submission of women and the exploitation of their work force. Democratic transformation will not be possible in these conditions without the organised action of the women concerned.

Attention must be given to the question of migration. In general, "customary" rights exclude "foreigners" (that is to say, all those who do not belong to the clans, lineage and families that make up the village community in question) from the right to land or place conditions upon their access to it. Migration resulting from colonial and post colonial development have sometimes been of a such a scale that they have overturned the concepts of ethnic "homogeneity" in the regions affected by this development. Emigrants from outside the state in question (such as the Burkina Be in Ivory Coast) or those who although formally citizens of the same state are of an "ethnic" origin other than that of the regions they have made their homes (like the Hausa in the Nigerian state of Plateau), see their rights to the land that they have cultivated challenged by short-sighted and chauvinistic political movements who also benefit from foreign support. To throw the "communitarism" in question into ideological and political disarray and uncompromisingly denounce the paracultural discourse that underpins it has become one of the indispensable conditions of real democratic progress.

The analyses and propositions set out above only concern the status of tenure or rules on access to land. These matters are certainly central to debates on the future of agricultural and food production, peasant societies and the people that make them up yet they do not cover all aspects of the challenge. Access to land remains devoid of the potential to transform society if the peasant who benefits from it cannot have access to the essential means of production in suitable conditions (credit, seed, subsidies, access to markets). Both national policies and international negotiations that aim to define the context in which prices and revenues are determined are other aspects of the peasant question.

Further information on these questions that go beyond the scope of the subject we are dealing with here can be found in the writings of Jacques Berthelot - the best critical analyst of projects to integrate agricultural and food production into "world" markets. So we shall restrict ourselves to mentioning the two main conclusions and proposals reached:

(i) We cannot allow agricultural and food production, and land to be treated as ordinary "merchandise" and then agree to the need to integrate them into plans for global liberalisation promoted by the dominant powers (the United States and Europe) and transnationalised capital.

The agenda of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), which inherited the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1995, must quite simply be refused. Opinion in Asia and Africa, beginning with peasant organisations but also all the social and political forces that defend the interests of popular classes and those of the nation (and demands for food security in particular), all those who have not given up on a development project worthy of the name, must be persuaded that negotiations entered into as part of the WTO agenda can only result in catastrophe for the peoples of Asia and Africa and simply threaten to devastate the lives of more than two and a half billion peasants from the two continents while offering them no other prospect than migration to slums, being shut away in "concentration camps" the construction of which is already planned for the unfortunate future emigrants.

Capitalism has reached a stage where its continued expansion requires the implementation of "enclosure" policies on a world scale like the "enclosures" of the beginning of its development in England except that today the destruction on a world scale of the "peasant reserves" of cheap labour will be nothing less than synonymous with the genocide of half of humanity. On one hand the destruction of the peasant societies of Asia and Africa. On the other, some billions in extra profit for world capital and its local associates derived from a socially useless production since it is not destined to cover the unsolvable needs of hundreds of millions of extra hungry but only to increase the number of obese in the north and those who emulate them in the south!

So Asian and African states must quite simply be called upon to withdraw from these negotiations and therefore reject decisions taken by the imperialist United States and Europe within the famous "Green Rooms" of the WTO. This voice must be made to be heard and the governments concerned must be forced to ensure that it is heard in the WTO.

(ii) We can no longer accept the behaviour of the major imperialist powers that together assault the people of the South (the United States and Europe) within the WTO. It must be pointed out that the same powers that try to impose their "liberalist" proposals unilaterally upon the countries of the South do not abide by these proposals themselves and behave in a way that can only be described as systematic cheating.

The Farm Bill in the United States and the agricultural policy of the European Union violate the very principles that the WTO is trying to impose on others. The "partnership" projects proposed by the European Union following the Cotonou Convention as of 2008 are really "criminal" to use the strong but fair expression of Jacques Berthelot.

So we can and must hold these powers to account through the authorities of the WTO set up for this purpose. A group of countries from the South not only could but must do it.

Asian and African peasants organised themselves in the previous period of their peoples' liberation struggles. They found their place in powerful historical blocks which enabled them to be victorious over the imperialism of the time. These blocks were sometimes revolutionary (China and Vietnam) and found their main support in rural areas among the majority classes of middle, poor and landless peasants. When, elsewhere, they were led by the national bourgeoisie, or those among the rich and middle peasants who aspired to becoming bourgeois, large landowners and "customary" local authorities in the pay of colonisation were isolated.

Having turned over a new leaf, the challenge of the new collective imperialism of the triad (United States, Europe, Japan) will only be lifted if historical blocks form in Asia and Africa that cannot be a **remake** of the former ones. The definition of the nature of these blocks, their strategies and their immediate and longer term objectives in these new circumstances is the challenge facing the alter-globalist movement and its constituent parts of social forums. A far more serious challenge than a large number of movements engaged in current struggles imagine.

New peasant organisations exist in Asia and Africa that support the current visible struggles. Often, when political systems make it impossible for formal organisations to form, social struggles for the campaign take the form of "movements" with no apparent direction. Where they do exist, these actions and programmes must be more closely examined. What peasant social forces do they represent, whose interests they defend? The majority mass of peasants or the minorities that aspire to find their place in the expansion of dominant global capitalism?

We should be wary of over hasty replies to these complex and difficult questions. We should not "condemn" many organisations and movements under the pretext that they do not have the support of the majority of peasants for their radical programmes. That would be to ignore the demands of the formation of large alliances and strategies in stages. Neither should we subscribe to the discourse of "naive alter-globalism" that often sets the tone of forums and fuels the illusion that the world would be set on the right track only by the existence of social movements. A discourse, it is true, that is more one of numerous NGOs - well-meaning perhaps - than of peasant and worker organisations.

## NOTE

- The analysis and proposals made in this study are only relevant for Asia and Africa. The agrarian question in Latin America and the Caribbean have their own particular and sometimes unique particularities. Thus, in the Southern Cone of the continent (southern Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Chilli), modernised, mechanised latifundism that benefits from cheap labour is the method of farming that is best adapted to the demands of a liberal global capitalist system that is even more competitive than the agriculture in the United States and Europe.
- Further reading:
  - (i) Reference to peasant struggles in Asia and Africa (China, India, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Egypt, Ethiopia, Western Africa, South Africa and Zimbabwe) can be found in:  
S. Amin et al, *Les luttes paysannes et ouvrières face aux défis du XXIe siècle (Peasant and Worker Struggles and the Challenges of the 21st Century)*, Les Indes Savantes, Paris 2004.  
Translations into English, Spanish, Arabic and Chinese currently under way.  
See also:  
S. Amin, *L'Inde, une grande puissance ? (India, a Great Power?)*, October 2004.  
S. Amin, *India, a Great Power ?*, October 2004.  
Site du FTM : <http://forumtiersmonde.net>  
TWF site : <http://thirdworldforum.net>
  - (ii) Cf work by Jacques Berthelot on negotiations and proposals for agricultural integration into liberal globalisation.  
J. Berthelot, *L'agriculture, talon d'Achille de l'OMC (Agriculture, the Achilles Heel of the WTO)*.  
(TWF site), *Quels avenir pour les sociétés paysannes en Afrique de l'Ouest ? (What Future for the Peasant Societies of Western Africa?)*

- (iii) M. Mazoyer and J. Roudard, *Histoire des agricultures du monde (History of World Agriculture)*
- (iv) Cf our proposals for the integration of peasants' right to access to land in the charter of universal rights at:

Web site [forumtiersmonde.net](http://forumtiersmonde.net)  
Section "Current Programmes" the new Agrarian Question