

REVIEW ESSAYS

Sam Moyo and Paris Yeros (eds.), *Reclaiming The Land – The Resurgence of Rural Movements in Africa, Asia and Latin America*, Zed Books, London, 2005.

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Introduction¹

In the early 1990s, Rehman Sobhan (1993) argued that after two decades in which agrarian reform was a global non-event, '[v]otaries of agrarian reform' had been reduced to 'a fringe group of romantic throwbacks left over from the 1950s and 1960s' (1993: p.3) He offered a broad overview of post-Second World War experiences in Asia, Latin America and Africa, and distinguished between radical and non-egalitarian reforms in terms of their effect on eliminating class differentiation and modes of domination in the countryside. He concluded by arguing that '[t]he political mobilization needed to realize radical reforms in the contemporary developing world remains *elusive*' (1993: p.133, my emphasis). Nearly ten years later, Deborah Bryceson (2000), after discussing the post-Second World War academic literature on the peasantry, suggested that '[p]easant theory is on the retreat' (2000: p.29); that it was critical to bring peasants 'back into theoretical and policy debates' (2000: p.30); and that the ongoing reproduction of the peasantry in Latin America, Asia and Africa through contradictory processes of formation and dissolution seemed to give them an 'enduring presence' (2000: p.6). She concluded also by referring to an elusiveness, speaking about the multifaceted survival strategies of the peasantry under conditions of global neo-liberalism that make the peasantry – conceptually – 'more *elusive* than before' (2000: p.30, my emphasis). These brief comments on the status of the peasantry and agrarian reform provide an important historical and theoretical backdrop to the volume under review.

Reclaiming The Land is a collection of topical essays that seeks to address and capture this elusiveness, but also to transcend it in the sense of demonstrating the significance of the peasantry in the modern world, particularly their critical role in bringing about progressive social change. In this regard, it is noteworthy that a world-systems theorist such as Wallerstein (2002), in a recent analysis of potential anti-systemic movements internationally, failed to make any reference to the (seemingly still illusionary for many) peasantry. The volume under review argues convincingly that the agrarian question remains unresolved in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and it explores the contemporary forms of agrarian change. The editors emphasise, first of all, global

socio-economic changes that have resulted in the re-configuration and differentiation of rural popular classes and that involve them in diverse livelihood strategies; and, secondly, rural politics especially in the form of militant social movements – rooted in the semi-proletarianised peasantry and landless proletariat – that are, contrary to the views of other social analysts, ‘the leading forces of opposition to neoliberalism and the neocolonial state’ (Moyo and Yeros 2005: p.9). They are particularly interested in the politics of the agrarian question, rather than more ‘economistic’ concerns about accumulation and production. Moyo and Yeros are most widely known for their work on Zimbabwe, with the former being generally recognised as the foremost specialist on land and agrarian issues in that country. Recent events in Zimbabwe, entailing ‘the first radical shift in agrarian property rights in the post-Cold War world’ (Moyo and Yeros 2005: p.3), provided the direct stimulus for the intellectual production of this collection, yet the editors downplay the exceptional status of Zimbabwe in relation to broader international trends.

This review essay assesses the contribution of this book to furthering our understanding specifically of agrarian and land processes in present-day Zimbabwe. This overall aim is pursued through three lines of inquiry. First of all, I provide a review of the volume (excluding the Zimbabwean chapter). In the process I raise some important methodological and theoretical points, as well as illustrate how this comparative work gives us important leads in deepening our understanding of agrarian change in Zimbabwe. Secondly, I focus on the chapter on Zimbabwe (by Moyo and Yeros) and examine whether it has furthered our grasp of the complexities of national and rural dynamics in Zimbabwe in the light of other recent works on the same or similar subject. Thirdly, I briefly conclude by considering how the theoretical and empirical work of Moyo and Yeros relates to key sociological concerns, and how a more sociological perspective might enrich our understanding of agrarian issues. In focussing on Zimbabwe, I engage with an acrimonious but important debate amongst Zimbabwean Left scholars about state formation and political change (Moyo 2001; Yeros 2002b; Raftopoulos and Phimister 2004; Moore 2004; Raftopoulos 2005).

Besides the stimulating introduction provided by Moyo and Yeros, the volume is divided into three main sections: on Africa, Asia and Latin America. Each section is introduced by a continental overview written by a respected agrarian specialist, namely, Bernstein, Aguilar and Veltmeyer, respectively. The African section (140 pages) is the longest and has chapters on Ghana, Malawi, South Africa and Zimbabwe; the Asian section (75 pages) is considerably shorter with only two country chapters, on India and the Philippines; and the Latin American section (125 pages) has two chapters on Brazil, and one each on Columbia and Mexico. The continental overviews, to varying degrees, are overly selective in their national foci (as recognised by Aguilar in the case

of Asia) and thus do not necessarily provide us with a full picture of diverse national trajectories. It is also unclear whether the country chapters are sufficiently representative of continental agrarian processes and conflicts. For instance, in the case of Latin America, nations with well-known militant rural struggles form the basis of the chapters. Hence, some critics may dispute the overall claim by the editors about 'the resurgence of rural movements' in the South and East as a valid empirical generalisation. It is also debatable whether each chapter makes a contribution of significance in enlightening us about agrarian dynamics within its respective national context and, beyond the Zimbabwean chapter, assessing this is best left up to other reviewers. Indeed, the real significance of all the chapters may lie elsewhere, in illustrating – rather than proving – in a socially contingent (rather than uniformly flat) manner the global trajectories of agrarian processes that the editors stress in their introduction. In this regard, in his chapter Bernstein speaks of 'general themes from which specific histories create complex variations' (2005: p.82), leading thus to particular paths depending on the socio-historical-national context but embodying more universal processes. These specific national trajectories are outlined, in a very uneven and often only partial manner, in the various country chapters.

'The Peasant Movement Has Been Resurrected From The Dead'

In their introduction to the book (Chapter 1), Moyo and Yeros provide the theoretical and world-historical context for the chapters that follow. They do so by linking conceptually the agrarian and national questions, what Neocosmos has called the 'two fundamental *democratic* questions in Africa today' (1993: p.9 my emphasis). Interestingly, many of the arguments by Moyo and Yeros about the peasantry and agrarian reform are similar to Neocosmos's earlier thoughts, yet in their work on Zimbabwe they have been criticised (see below) for largely ignoring 'democratic questions'. It is also notable that the editors are currently based in countries (Moyo in Zimbabwe and Yeros in Brazil) that are presently experiencing significant forms of rural struggle and agrarian change. This is not to suggest an (improper) analytical bias on their part; rather, it helps us to understand their particular sensitivity to the main concerns addressed in the book. Further, in their analytical formulations of rural politics and change, they have been clearly influenced by James Petras (and Veltmeyer) and his work on Latin America. In recent years, Petras has consistently and exuberantly spoken about 'the rising influence of peasant movements' (1998: p.1) with a national socio-political agenda struggling against neo-liberal regimes in Latin America, and he suggests that these peasant-led movements are 'challenging the traditional belief that the urban working class leaders are the designated vanguard of historical change' (1998: p.8). Simultaneously, Petras is particularly dismissive of NGOs (and urban civics generally), labelling them as 'instruments of neoliberalism' (1997: p.7) that undermine the anti-system

struggles of radical rural movements. He rejects the anti-statism of civil society formations and highlights 'the conflict between classes over state power at the national level' (1997: p.15). Petras's position, including a state-centred theory of social change, is manifested in the theoretical perspective of Moyo and Yeros. In general, this approach entails the strident defence of a modernist (class-based) historical materialism. This perspective, I suggest, is both the strength and weakness of the editors' conceptualisation of agrarian change.

Moyo and Yeros argue that land and agrarian questions are often 'treated synonymously' with respect to regions such as Asia, Latin America and Southern Africa where large-scale farming and landlordism exist, but that there is an important conceptual distinction. Thus, 'the resolution of the agrarian question is tied up with industrial transformation', whereas the land question is 'directed more immediately to the issue of land redistribution and the related issues of land tenure and land use' (2005: p.24). Simultaneously, agrarian reform without land reform is highly improbable even in parts of Africa where general dispossession of the peasantry did not take place under colonialism. The editors do not intentionally seek to update or modify the classic agrarian question but their analysis implies that it needs to be reconsidered if not reformulated. The classic question was concerned with the transition to capitalism, and Bernstein (2003) elsewhere labels this as the 'agrarian question of capital'. He claims that this transition has occurred globally and that the agrarian question has been resolved at this level, but that stalled capitalist industrialisation in the peripheries has left the classic question unresolved in these regions but now largely redundant given the existence of capitalism as an all-pervasive world-system. Bernstein speaks about an 'agrarian question of labour' in the context of the subordinated integration of the South and East in international commodity chains and markets under neo-liberalism. This revised question concerns the 'fragmentation (or fracturing) of labour' (2003: p.211) in the peripheries, with 'ever more disparate combinations of wage- and self-employment (agricultural and non-agricultural petty commodity production)' (2003: p.217) as reproduction strategies. This crisis of rural livelihoods, which involves increasing proletarianisation, may (or may not) lead to struggles specifically over land such as those discussed in the volume under review. In a similar vein, Moyo and Yeros argue that the transition to capitalism in the South and East (what they refer to as the 'periphery') has been marked by the incompleteness of primitive accumulation and industrial development arising from a disarticulated and extroverted pattern of accumulation; and by the 'truncated nature' (2005: p.8) of proletarianisation deriving from ongoing conditions sustaining semi-proletarianisation.

Moyo and Yeros constantly stress that this failed transition, despite decades of post-colonialism, has been characterised by unfulfilled national sovereignty and self-determination entailing the incompleteness of the National Democratic Revolution (NDR) rather than – I would tentatively propose as an

alternative viewpoint – the persistent failings of an actually-existing (and hence ‘completed’) NDR. Full-scale NDRs, according to the editors, have not occurred in the peripheries because of their subservient position in relation to the imperialist centre, as shown by the pronounced inability of their nation-states to fulfil ‘even the minimum of modern social demands, namely the guarantee of the costs of social reproduction’ (2005: p.38) and by their ongoing economic crises, political instabilities and repressive tendencies. It would appear that, for Moyo and Yeros, full national self-determination (and ultimately the NDR), along with the resolution of the agrarian and national questions, are by definition ruled out in the South and East by the very existence of capitalist imperialism, based on some version of a one-stage theory of (prolonged) social revolution. Implicit in their analysis is a somewhat a-historical and idealised (and possibly romanticised) notion of a fulfilled NDR (a term they never adequately conceptualise) as a necessary and eventual end product of social struggle, instead of an understanding of ‘actually existing’ NDRs embodied in historically-variable social formations. This teleological depiction of history, entailing forward movement that will ultimately progress along a particular pre-determined trajectory, is epitomised by the sub-title to the chapter on Zimbabwe, ‘towards the National Democratic Revolution’. This condition of negativity (a revolution yet to be fulfilled) is privileged methodologically in explaining the social crises currently besetting the periphery, such that their historical understanding of the Zimbabwean crisis (in Chapter 6) becomes almost subservient to this teleological explanation or is at least significantly structured by it. Running throughout the course of the argument by Moyo and Yeros is the flawed methodological assumption that at some future date the agrarian and national questions will be resolved and the NDR fulfilled.

In the ongoing debate about globalisation, the editors quite correctly side with the argument that globalisation is not homogenising the world and making the nation-state redundant, because it has ‘highly uneven and polarizing tendencies’ (2005: p.10) that involve – for Moyo and Yeros it would seem – processes (primarily) of state re-functioning rather than state re-structuring. As a result of this unevenness, ‘capitalism has subordinated agriculture to its logic worldwide, but without creating, by necessity, home markets capable of sustaining industrialization’ (2005: p.14) in the South and East, thus forestalling capitalist development and the resolution of the classic agrarian question. A corollary is the subservient integration of the periphery into the globalised but ‘centrally-based corporate agro-industrial complex’ (2005: p.17) in terms of both production and marketing systems, and the subsequent international division of labour in agriculture with peripheral states battling for markets for traditional exports and also involved in non-traditional goods and land uses such as horticulture and eco-tourism run by corporate capital. In the process, market forces have been unleashed and state support for peasants ‘in the sphere of both production and reproduction’ (2005: p.18) has been

removed, thus reproducing semi-proletarianisation and poverty in ways largely functional to global capital. The current market-led agrarian reform agenda involves accumulation from above and, as with earlier state-led models under Cold War conditions it is a manifestation of geo-political and localised class conflicts. Indeed, the editors see class struggle as the 'engine' powering history and society.

In highlighting the ongoing significance of the nation-state in the periphery, Moyo and Yeros properly conceptualise the reconfigured state as a dialectical rendezvous point for the contradiction between global and national (class) struggles and between national classes. In doing so, they give significant causal weight to neo-imperialism and to the centre-periphery relation in explaining the unfulfilled NDR and corresponding social crises, and thereby (possibly) over-privileging external determinants. Yet, as will be noted in their analysis of Zimbabwe, they fail to give sufficient theoretical emphasis to the form of the nation-state and focus more on its potential functions (and functionality) in advancing the NDR in the face of global neo-liberalism. Moyo and Yeros (see below) at times recognise contradictions and struggles within the state, yet overall they seem dangerously close to an instrumentalist notion of the nation-state, in which any particular (form of) state can – at least potentially – at different times significantly advance the struggle of different classes. It is likely for this reason that their Zimbabwean critics claim that they analytically misrepresent the Zimbabwean state by failing to sufficiently consider its 'authoritarian anti-imperialism' (Raftopoulos 2005: p. 14).

Moyo and Yeros argue that the peasantry, referring to small-scale agriculturists operating in the system of commodity production embedded within capitalism, 'does not constitute a class ... but inherent in it are the antagonistic tendencies of proletarian and proprietor' (2005: p. 25). The peasantry is differentiated between rich, middle and poor with only the middle peasantry embodying pure petty commodity production as neither hirers nor sellers of labour power. The reproduction of the peasantry through accumulation strategies is uneven and unstable, involving (simultaneously) contradictory processes of proletarianisation, semi-proletarianisation and even re-peasantisation. Semi-proletarians, involving the functional dualism of the peasant-worker grouping, engage in a mixture of farm-based petty commodity production and (urban or rural) wage labour, and this is not a transitional state but continues to be a pervasive socio-economic condition in the periphery (see also Neocosmos 1993). For instance, structural adjustment intensified landlessness (and thus proletarianisation) but also increased the demand for land and land-based natural resources because of the diminished prospects for off-farm sources of income, and rural inhabitants are often inclined to 'reproduce functional dualism on their own' (Moyo and Yeros 2005: p.32) as a survival option. The negative notion of the peasantry as 'not a class' is not particularly helpful when it comes to (static) analyses of class structure, yet it

seems that the editors are more concerned – and aptly so – with (ambivalent) processes of class formation and the reconstitution of the peasantry under neo-liberalism.

In this context, Moyo and Yeros examine the current politics of the peasantry and argue that its heightened significance cannot be derived from an unmediated reading of the (relatively undeveloped) productive forces in the periphery. Detailing the complex processes that mediate the relation between socio-economic conditions and political action, and that would involve ‘thick descriptions’ of peasant experience is clearly beyond the mandate of this volume, although Fernandes’s chapter on Brazil offers intriguing insights. A richer analysis of land occupations and rural movements requires this, yet to their detriment the editors seem to be somewhat dismissive of post-modernist localised peasant studies. In fact, their modernist meta-theoretical approach seems to subordinate experiential reality to the demands of a theory which prioritises a political-ideological struggle (the NDR) that may be more in the (romanticising) minds of the editors than in the (embittered) hearts of the subjects of their study. At the same time, Moyo and Yeros rightly claim that the dominant (and even radical) conception of civil society and the ‘urbanization of democratic theory’ (2005: p.37) found within the social sciences have downplayed the importance of rural struggles and their significance in democratising the nation-state in the South and East (see also Moyo 2001).

The editors assert that the politics of peasant-workers is diverse and multi-faceted, often involving both rural (farm) and urban (workplace) experiences and grievances, thus adding considerable complexity to matters of political consciousness that a range of organisational formations – like ‘progressive’ trade unions and political parties – have failed to grasp and articulate (and, as mentioned above, the editors also do not explore). Even membership-based farmer associations have ‘generally fallen hostage to bourgeois elements within them, which have eschewed advocacy of land issues and development policies aimed at smallholder accumulation’ (2005: p 42). Hence, there has been a political vacuum in the countryside that peasants and rural proletarians have sought to fill either on a spontaneous or more organised basis. This has sometimes meant an avowed rejection of either working with the state or more dramatically of capturing state power, together with more of an emphasis on autonomous and democratic self-mobilisation within civil society as epitomised by the Zapatista uprising in Mexico. Moyo and Yeros claim that this anti-politics position is problematic for various reasons: civil society is generally co-opted as a ‘tool of neoliberalism’ (2005: p.43); the nation-state continues to be a critical nexus of power in processes of social transformation; and the internal contradictions of the state have been productively exploited by rural movements, for instance in the Philippines. The editors provide a useful overview of these present-day rural movements, highlighting their social base, leadership, tactics, strategy and ideology.

The emphasis throughout the volume is on the land occupation strategy, and they note that under neo-liberalism there has been a 'shrinking of civilized political space' (2005: p.39) as defined by global capital: civil politics embodies not just property-friendly politics but now also market-friendly politics, and the rural movements fall squarely within the 'uncivil', notably in terms of the earlier notion of the civil. This is a significant point that Yeros (2002a) develops extensively in his doctoral thesis, where he examines historically the globalisation of civil society, or what he calls 'civilization', and he argues that uncivil rural politics has led to social revolutions and extensive agrarian reform since the Second World War. Thus, it has been the 'uncivil' agency of 'the landless and land-short' that 'has been the basic source of agrarian reform historically' (Moyo and Yeros 2005: p.53), and popular-led agrarian reform has driven state-led and market-led agrarian reforms globally. This is a stance that is repeatedly substantiated by an edited volume (Ghimire 2003) that looks at civil society and agrarian reform in the South and East. More generally speaking, Yeros and Moyo argue that rural semi-proletarians and proletarians are the most significant force for change in the contemporary globalised world, though 'not by virtue of being exploited by capital, but by being expelled from it' (2005: p.55). This is a fascinating theoretical point that regrettably is left undeveloped. For example, are semi-proletarians in any form ever 'outside' (or expelled from) capital, understood as a set of contradictory social relations? (see Holloway 2003). Nevertheless, Moyo and Yeros claim that the national and agrarian questions in the peripheries are intimately intertwined and that the rural movements, including the land occupation strategy, are contributing to their simultaneous resolution. Thereby they are advancing the NDR within the limits imposed by global imperialism. Yet, as noted earlier, the underlying notion that the national and agrarian questions will be finally laid to rest (at the end-of-history?) is a form of historical determinism.

It is unclear whether any of the contributors to the volume (perhaps except Veltmeyer) would necessarily agree in a significant way with the perspective provided by Moyo and Yeros and thus with the theoretical context in which their specific work appears, although Bernstein takes issue with some of their more specific comments on Zimbabwe. For his part, Bernstein (Chapter 2) offers a broad periodisation of the historical path of agrarian changes in sub-Saharan Africa in order to understand their current specificities. He also notes particular macro-regions within the sub-continent, such as settler colonial capitalism (including Zimbabwe), yet in all regions indirect rule institutionalised the 'customary' and thereby inhibited the commoditisation of land and class formation within the countryside. Interestingly, Moyo (2004) has noted increasing land concentration and centralisation outside settler capitalism in the post-independence period, and this has led to a marked land question in these other regions of sub-Saharan Africa. Bernstein shows that state-led agricultural policy in late colonialism and early post-colonialism

sought to 'modernise' the peasantry and to create a class of petty capitalist farmers, but land tenure remained 'largely unchanged' (2005: p.78). Mafeje (2003) offers an alternative version of events, claiming that in these non-settler regions there is no land question but only an agrarian question. In so arguing, he would likely question Bernstein's (and Moyo's) understanding of ('unchanged') land tenure under customary arrangements, by asserting that customary tenure based on 'the African mode of social organization' (2003: 19) provides usufruct rights that continue to ensure widespread access to land for petty commodity producers.

During the neo-liberal era, Bernstein continues, the crisis of livelihoods has intensified in the rural areas with social reproduction dependent on dwindling contributions from both agriculture and off-farm employment/self-employment. Yet the systemic crisis in African agriculture has been experienced unevenly, and it has involved deepening differentiation within the worker-peasant class, further land concentration and alienation, and the greater involvement of petty bourgeois elements in expanded agricultural accumulation. These class dynamics are not overtly expressed but are manifested in generational, gender, regional and ethnic conflicts. Bernstein argues that 'there is little experience in modern African history of popular rural political *organization* on a broader scale centred on agrarian and land issues' (2005: p.88, his emphasis) compared to Latin America and Asia, yet this general observation is left largely unexplained. This is a point that Moyo also highlights in relation to Africa in an article written just prior to the land movement emerging in Zimbabwe in early 2000 (Moyo 2000). According to Bernstein, the most vivid confrontations are localised defensive actions against land dispossession arising from, for example, infra-structural or development projects but without any clear ideology and political programme, with the recent case of Zimbabwe being an exception.

In general, Bernstein is 'more cautious' than Moyo and Yeros 'about a global tidal wave of land struggles' (2003: p.217). He also claims that, by independence in Africa, generalised commodity production was established throughout the sub-Saharan region in the sense that the 'basic social relations and compulsions of capitalism were internalized in peasant production' (2005: p.75). This takes us back to the argument by Moyo and Yeros about the expulsion of the semi-proletariat and the social reach of capitalism. For example, Seth (2003) like Bernstein argues that capitalism has encompassed the globe such that any opposition to capital exists in the 'interstices of capital' (Seth 2003: p.48), and thus is not external to capitalism but is subsumed into it. What this means for Bernstein's particular argument is that Africa's (including Zimbabwe's) current agricultural crisis and unresolved agrarian question – even if understood in a global context – cannot be 'attributed exclusively to a (malign) exterior' (2005: p.87). By implication, a sensitive understanding of agrarian processes in Africa cannot be reduced to either external (for example,

neo-liberalism) or more internal (for example, nationalism) determinants or a combination thereof based on a positivist notion of 'external' relations and interaction, because the global and the local are 'internally' fused and embedded within the same dialectical processes.

Regrettably, the four African case studies do not capture the full diversity of regions outlined by Bernstein but they certainly illustrate and elaborate on some of his key points. Amanor (Chapter 3) argues that land in Ghana is effectively owned not by the state but by chiefly authorities that, as 'customary custodians' (2005: p.105), officially represent the rights of peasantry in land, and this inhibits the formation of independent peasant associations. The peasantry is 'weakly organized' (2005: p.116) and formal efforts to legally defend their land interests are repulsed by the state. Thus, peasant struggles to enhance their livelihood options are often more spontaneous and uncivil. The establishment of forest reserves and modern agribusinesses for export-orientated activities has increasingly commoditised land and led to land expropriation and, as their 'moral right' (2005: p.114), peasants have sought to repossess or access this land for agricultural and natural resource usages. This has included the destruction of timber saplings and informal timber marketing activities, the cutting of plantation seedlings and illegal harvesting of fruits at night, as well as 'squatting' or occupations on portions of expropriated land. Amanor argues that peasants have found themselves pitted against a broad alliance of chiefs, the state and corporate interests.

The chapter by Kanyongolo (Chapter 4) on Malawi focuses more specifically on (largely unorganised and uncoordinated) land occupations. Customary land tenure systems have been constantly devalued as a productive form of land investment, and land reform has favoured large-scale commercial farming based on freehold title that has further entrenched dominant class interests. An un-cohesive and demobilised civil society, notably urban-based NGOs that espouse liberal rhetoric and trade unions with weak rural structures, has failed to offer progressive support (as in Zimbabwe) for rural 'counter-systemic actions' (2005: p.126) that have been often censored by the state. Employing notions emanating from critical legal theory, and consistent with the Moyo and Yeros argument, Kanyongolo shows how occupations go contrary to market-driven land reforms and are effectively de-legitimised by the legal and judiciary regimes, rather than being considered as a 'legitimate democratic strategy for redressing injustice' (2005: p.118). The spatial distribution and social composition of land occupations in Malawi shows considerable diversity, such that 'land occupiers have not always been poor peasants' (2005: p.129) but at times have included traditional power elites as participants or supporters. The land movement in its internal organisation also tends to reproduce the patriarchal structures of rural society (a point that needs considerable research in Zimbabwe) and occupations adjacent to the industrial centres raise the prospect of alliances with the urban proletariat.

Sihlongonyane's work on South Africa (Chapter 5) looks at the land occupation tactic in the context of the neo-liberal policies of the ANC that stress production rather than equity and that seem 'antithetical to the alteration of agrarian power relations' (2005: p.148) or even to more limited land redistribution. This tactic, along with a range of informal market activities, is in many ways a survival strategy employed by the landless and unemployed in both peri-urban and rural areas, and is particularly beneficial to women as it enhances their access to land and natural resources. Civil society since 1994 has been in large part demobilised and has subsequently failed to significantly push for land reform from below. Yet a loosely organised but fragmented constellation of community-based organisations and progressive NGOs is emerging and this includes the increasingly militant Landless People's Movement. This struggle though is 'largely defensive in nature' and 'is not underwritten by a coherent political programme for social change' (2005: p.157). Sihlongonyane argues that land seizures as a form of grassroots pressure for agrarian change should not be conceptualised as a 'blanket strategy' (2005: p.159) but should be employed selectively alongside other tactics including negotiation.

Aguilar's overview of Asia (Chapter 7) looks at the diversity of land struggles and direct peasant action in the form of a classificatory grid distinguishing between levels of organisation, forms of engagement with the state (or disengagement) and the nature of oppositional forces. In general, this action is characterised 'by the goal of acquiring a piece of cultivable land and, where it has been denied, the right to control production and the disposal of the output' (2005: p.210). The extensive occupation of state land in the Southeast Asian highlands (such as in Thailand) is a defence against grinding poverty by landless peasants by preserving petty commodity production and thereby warding off de-agrarianisation and proletarianisation, although also seeking off-farm income to sustain their livelihoods. This action occurs independently of the state and is thus said by Aguilar to be 'a form of challenge to state power' (2005: p.210), and at times the state has been forced to officially regularise these land seizures. He says that, in doing so, the state has effectively (if inadvertently) extended its authority in the countryside, an interesting twist of events that is worth exploring in the case of the fast track resettlement scheme in Zimbabwe. Land occupations have also been pursued 'within the reformist space of the state' (2005: p.222) as peasant groups 'exploited cracks and obstructions in the implementation of agrarian reform to claim possession of land' (2005: pp.217-18). This has sometimes led to conflicts between non-hegemonic classes, such as between the agrarian proletariat and petty commodity producers in the case of the occupation of large estates.

Unsanctioned and illegal land usages also contributed to the demise of collective agriculture in China and Vietnam as households sought to acquire and cultivate private plots, and hence establish petty commodity production. This undoing of collectivisation in China coincided with the government's

post-Mao move towards a market economy, and it has resulted in the formation of an absentee landowner class. This is an intriguing point that provides an angle into understanding the dynamics that led to the land occupations in Zimbabwe. It suggests that simultaneous (class) action 'from above' and 'from below' may interact in a symbiotic and dialectical fashion, advancing the land reform process. Conspiratorial claims about 'top down' manipulation, which is a common argument by the critics of Moyo and Yeros, become more problematic in this light. In Vietnam, indebtedness in the face of a 'simple reproduction squeeze' (Aguilar 2005: p.224) has compelled many peasants to sell their land-use rights and this has resulted in rural proletarianisation. The market commoditisation of peasant land is rapidly advancing in both post-collectivised and never-collectivised nations of Asia. Aguilar (similar to Bernstein) argues that the classic agrarian question, understood in national terms, is largely redundant because of the globalisation of class relations, yet 'specific contexts require their own appropriate solutions and responses' (2005: p.231).

In this context, Pimple and Sethi (Chapter 8) look at land occupations in India where the land question 'remains far from resolved' (2005: p.237). A standing alliance between the landed elite and the state has meant that state-implemented land redistribution in the past has been limited, and now landlessness and poverty is on the increase under conditions of neo-liberalism and privatisation of the land tenure regime. Small farmers are losing more land to forests and are being denied access to the natural resource base within state forests as these lands are leased to industrialists for timber felling and tourism ventures. Further, village commons or common property resources on which the landless and agricultural labourers often depend are becoming scarcer because of land commoditisation. Land occupations however are sporadic and unorganised, in part reflecting a 'lack of adequate country-wide political mobilization among the landless' (2005: p.246). This is the case despite the existence of significant nationwide peoples' and workers' movements in India and in some areas local 'grassroots forest protection movements' (2005: p.243) that adopt tracts of land for their own usage. Most of the more militant examples of land occupations discussed by the authors are of more historical interest than of contemporary relevance, and thus to speak of a recent 'resurgence' is problematic. Pimple and Sethi conclude by arguing that there is 'an urgent need to build the social legitimacy of the right to land' and that this requires 'the transformation of institutional structures of subordination' (2005: p. 253) that maintain rural poverty.

Likewise Feranil, in his chapter on the Philippines (Chapter 9), argues that 'the persistence of agrarian conflicts reveals the continuing need to address the land question' (2005: p.257) particularly as the state-led (supply-driven) re-distributive model of land reform has been replaced by a market-led (demand-driven) agrarian strategy under neo-liberalism. During the Aquino

regime with its market-friendly land policies, peasant organisations openly engaged with the (non-monolithic) state and worked with pro-reform state legislators and bureaucrats in policy formation, and this implied reform from above. Yet, 'policy alone does not determine outcomes' (2005: p.263) and thus this engagement had 'variegated tendencies' (2005: p.258) and outcomes in the face of anti-reform initiatives by the traditional agrarian oligarchy and modernising landlord-entrepreneurs. In fact, radical initiatives in the form of land occupations (reform from below) were repressed and this consolidated the position of the landowning classes. Thus, these land seizures did not amount to 'an alternative land reform programme implemented outside the state' (2005: p.268). Feranil notes the array of strategies pursued by differing parts of the peasant movement and civil society post-Aquino, including working with the state and outside the state in an environment now more favourable to the ruling classes. The state has sought to harness and co-opt autonomous peasant groups in agrarian programme implementation. And, simultaneously, these groups seek to use the narrowed space available to expand the programme, including employing the legal system against recalcitrant landowners. Peasant groups, with a rights-based approach or 'rightful resistance' (2005: p.271), continue to challenge landlord power in local authoritarian enclaves, including occupations, demonstrations and rallies. According to Feranil, these measures are not simply weapons of the weak nor do they entail seizing state power. Rather, they lie somewhere between the two extremes, in trying to push the state to radicalise the agrarian programme. The dynamics between the state and the peasantry in the Philippines, at least superficially, resemble events in Zimbabwe. A comparative study of land reform processes in these two nations would likely provide important analytical insights into the relationship between state and society as well as internal contradictions and fissures within the nation-state.

In his overview of Latin America (Chapter 10), Veltmeyer (along the lines of Moyo and Yeros) conceptualises land occupations as 'a tactic of class struggle' (2005: pp.285-6) and as a strategy for gaining permanent access to land. He discusses the debated notion of the disappearance of the peasantry as a socio-economic category (as does Bryceson) and as a political force in the world today, and concludes that the peasantry 'constitutes the most dynamic force for anti-systemic change' in Latin America (2005: p.294). Landlessness in the region continues to prevail. For instance, he provides the stunning statistic that, in 1998, 90 percent of arable land was concentrated in large land holdings and the smallest 50 percent of farm units occupied only two percent of the land. Ongoing processes of land concentration and centralisation entailing 'primitive accumulation' have led to massive urbanisation and the transference of rural land struggles 'to the periphery of the new urban metropolises' (2005: p. 291) including 'squatting' on unused urban land areas.

Veltmeyer details the history of agrarian reform in the region and speaks about three paths, as do other agrarian theorists. First of all, state-led reform (as studied by Sobhan) dominated the scene from 1950s onwards as states sought to thwart social revolution. This entailed expropriation of land without compensation, land redistribution and rural development initiatives. Subsequently, some land reform programmes have been preserved if not consolidated but others reversed, including in Chile and Nicaragua, depending in large part on the balance of forces between the peasantry and the state. This point highlights the contradictory tensions inherent in all agrarian processes, and raises doubts about an inevitable march toward the NDR. Once started, governments in Latin America often sought to prevent the radicalisation of their own reform initiatives, and peasant movements tended to split with some fragments becoming 'a transmission belt for state policy' (2005: p.297). Further, redistribution led to considerable internal differentiation within the peasantry, including the emergence of rich peasants-cum-rural capitalists, self-sufficient peasant farmers and a rural landless proletariat. Market-assisted reform involving the promotion of land markets and land titling dominated state policies throughout the region during the 1990s, and it entailed a model of agrarian development that emphasised social capital rather than natural capital embedded in land. This focus on social capital reduced pressure on the state to expropriate and redistribute land, and emphasised agricultural productivity and modernisation. It also spoke of the social empowerment of the peasantry and thereby masked and displaced notions of class struggle. These reforms have severely restricted the market situation of small producers and have devastated peasant economies, and thus are unlikely to diminish the political significance of land occupations.

Latin America is currently witnessing significant forms of autonomous peasant-led grassroots movements that have overtaken in significance the 'new' social movements of urban poor and issue-orientated social organisations that arose during the 1980s in the context of global civil society initiatives. However, since the mid-1990s, strategic alliances have been formed between urban civil society and rural movements. As Moyo and Yeros show, this trend differs significantly from the case of Zimbabwe, yet they argue that forming such alliances, at a time when the ruling party is trying to inhibit them, is critical to advancing the NDR.

In the face of massive concentration of land ownership in Brazil over the past decades and the non-implementation of agrarian reform, the land occupation movement has become particularly militant, as peasants have been excluded from the space of agrarian policy making. Fernandes (Chapter 11) argues that through land seizures, expropriated peasants 're-socialize themselves, struggling against capital as well as subordinating themselves to it' because through occupations they 'reinsert themselves into the capitalist production of non-capitalist relations of production' (2005: p.318). This conceptualisation

returns us to the point by Seth about the reach of capital and to the Moyo and Yeros claim about the expelled condition of the peasantry in their struggle to re-access land. Regrettably, considering this theoretical point is beyond the scope of the review essay. Fernandes nonetheless argues that land occupations are a socio-spatial struggle against proletarianisation and a manifestation of class conflict. Established peasant settlers in frontier areas that have been expropriated by encroaching large landowners have undertaken these occupations, along with the landless that seize portions of land owned by the agrarian bourgeoisie and *latifundios*.

These occupations may entail, as in the history of Zimbabwe, broad and organised territorialised movements or more spontaneous isolated movements that are not part of a wider political project. Fernandes offers intriguing insights into the formation, organisation and tactics of this form of popular struggle, viewing seizures and encampments on land as a 'space of political socialization' (2005: p.321). Saving the occupation against threat of eviction is part of the 'logic of resistance' and sustaining the encampment is a 'form of pressure to demand the settlement' (2005: p.333). Detailed case-study analyses of specific land occupations in present-day Zimbabwe are yet to be done, but the analysis by Fernandes provides informative conceptual leads. In recent years in Brazil, most official land resettlements have simply involved formal recognition by the state of seized lands, yet the state has also sought to criminalise this form of resistance. The neo-liberal agenda in contemporary Brazil further expresses how 'the government attempts to resolve the agrarian question exactly on the terrain of the enemy: the territory of capital' (2005: p.338). Mattei's chapter (Chapter 12) looks specifically at agrarian reform in Brazil under neo-liberalism, and finds it seriously wanting in tackling rural poverty and squalor. He argues that any real reform involves restructuring rural modes of domination by 'destroying the power of the traditional agrarian oligarchies, as well as reordering the production model controlled by the large agro-industrial corporate network' (2005: p.346). And this requires the convergence of progressive rural and urban social forces.

Ampuero and Brittain (Chapter 13) claim that the global neo-liberal model of development has reinforced the power of the national oligarchy in Columbia and that this class continues to dominate the state to the exclusion of rural workers and small landholders in national development processes. Historically, land reform has been used by the state to (ineffectively) disarm the opposition in the countryside, including the guerrilla movement. This 'peasant-led armed struggle' (2005: p.368) defends rural settlements from paramilitary forces, including those involved in the cultivation of coca alongside more traditional crops, and it seeks to establish alternative agricultural models in 'liberated' areas. The authors detail various policy documents of the guerrilla army (the FARC-EP) concerning agrarian transformation and the dismantling of the neo-liberal agrarian strategy. Mexico has also witnessed significant

uncivil claims to land, notably amongst Indian peasants as discussed by Bartra and Otero (Chapter 14). These struggles for land and autonomy, which the chapter details in considerable historical depth, involve an 'inseparable' mixture of 'material (land) and identity (culture) demands' (2005: p.383). This raises complex questions about the relation between a strictly indigenous (ethnic) movement and broader alliances with the rest of the Mexican peasantry and, in this light, the authors try to develop a theory of political-class formation that involves both economic and cultural dimensions. The recent Chiapas uprising involving Zapatista Indians, and subsequent ongoing events, demonstrates that the Mexican Indian peasantry has been politically constituted as a class. Bartra and Otero conclude by arguing that 'for each Indian peasant there are two mestizos, almost always as poor. Therefore the rural struggle of Indian peoples is interwoven with that of the peasantry as a class. It has always been so... [T]he peasant movement has been resurrected from the dead' (2005: pp. 406-7).

This collection of essays is an essential contribution to the burgeoning academic literature on agrarian and land questions. The sketches drawn on the global canvas by the editors (and authors) clearly reveal common agrarian processes and trajectories throughout the East and South. Moyo and Yeros have successfully captured analytically these global processes, yet in a contingent and historically specific manner. Clearly, the expansion of global capital demands that historical materialists continue to understand capitalism as a world-historical system and, necessarily, this involves venturing into the methodological realm of mega-theory with all its snares and pitfalls. Thus, despite my specific criticisms of their modernist perspective, Moyo and Yeros should be commended for their defence of high-order theory and for seeking to develop it with reference to agrarian processes. As well, the comparative approach of the volume deepens our understanding of national agrarian dynamics, as I illustrated at points with regard to Zimbabwe. The overriding emphasis on the politics of the agrarian question, including class reconstitution and struggle, is an excellent countermeasure to more 'economistic' renditions, although accumulation/production ('economics') and struggle ('politics') are embedded in the same social processes. However, a more focussed attention on specific modes of domination in the countryside would have enriched the analyses contained in the volume, including the chapter on Zimbabwe. Neocosmos for instance stresses the repressive power of the state in rural areas, and argues in the case of apartheid South Africa that a 'transformation of the social relations ... in the interests of the majority of the oppressed is not just a question of ...land redistribution. It is a question of democratising the social relations under which land is held and exploited. It involves of necessity a democratic restructuring of the land tenure system(s) and a democratisation/abolition of the chieftaincy' (1993: p.65). Oppressive modes of rural

domination, in a multitude of forms, continue to exist throughout the South and East, and should be central to our analyses of agrarian processes and reform.

More importantly, after studying all the chapters, the reader is still left with the perplexing feeling that perhaps the resurgence of rural movements is not as considerable as the editors assert, or at least it is marked by considerable unevenness including absence. In this regard, it may be the notion of ‘movement’ that is particularly problematic rather than the notion of ‘resurgence’. The predominant understanding of ‘movement’ privileges programmatic organisational action, yet many of the chapters in the volume explicitly downplay this and speak of rural resistance and opposition – including land occupations – that are largely spontaneous and unorganised. In other words, across the global periphery, there may be lots of ‘motion’ but much less in the form of ‘movement’. A final point concerns the very notion of ‘periphery’ that is often used, notably by the editors themselves. This term is regularly associated with world-systems theory that over-privileges the imperialist metropolis and gives it primary explanatory value while the ‘periphery’ has a more residual analytical status (Mamdani 1996). Considering that the volume seeks to (presumably) counteract this form of (Euro-centric) analysis by emphasising the (un-peripheral/un-residual) role of popular-led agrarian reform in shaping world history, a more neutral term than ‘periphery’ would have been conceptually advisable.

Zimbabwe – ‘Towards the National Democratic Revolution’?

This brings us to the most controversial chapter in the book (Chapter 6), on the land occupations in Zimbabwe. Moyo and Yeros argue that the land occupation movement in Zimbabwe is ‘the most notable of rural movements in the world today’, that it has obtained ‘the first major land reform since the end of the Cold War’, that it has been ‘the most important challenge to the neocolonial state in Africa’ under neo-liberalism (2005: p.165), and – perhaps most controversially – that it has a ‘fundamentally progressive nature’ (2005: p.188). Their more strident critics would claim that such statements entail – almost perverse – value judgments made by ‘patriotic agrarianists’ (Moore 2004: p.409) or ‘left-nationalists’ (Bond and Manyanya 2003: p.78) who fail to conceptualise analytically or even highlight empirically the increasingly repressive character of state nationalism in contemporary Zimbabwe, designated as an ‘exclusionary’ nationalism (Hammar et al., 2003) or an ‘exhausted’ nationalism (Bond and Manyanya 2003). In an article that touches on the Zimbabwean chapter of *Reclaiming The Land*, Raftopoulos and Phimister argue that this authoritarianism involves an ‘internal reconfiguration of Zimbabwean state politics’ (2005: p.377) and now amounts to ‘domestic tyranny’ (2005: p.356), and they speak about a ‘number of African intellectuals on the Left’ (including Moyo and Yeros, but also Ibbo Mandaza) who have ‘leapt to the defence of ZANU-PF’ (2005: p.376) and its re-distributive

economic policies. For their part, Moyo and Yeros claim that their critics (who they call neo-liberal apologists for imperialism or ‘civic/post-nationalists’) demote the significance of national self-determination and the agrarian question in Zimbabwe, and end up moralising (as I guess liberals are fond of doing) about the recent land movement by focussing on its excessive violence and eventual co-option by the ruling party and state. They therefore argue that it is essential to conceptualise the land occupations in the context of a re-radicalised (and revitalised) state nationalism and the ongoing movement of the NDR.

This debate amongst the Left, which has been the explicit subject of a number of recent papers, has pronounced political overtones, and is indeed linked at times by the protagonists to the current tensions (almost chasms) within the national politics of Zimbabwe that involve ‘competing narratives of Zimbabwe’s national liberation history’ (Hammar and Raftopoulos 2003: p.17) as well as fundamentally different conceptions of the current crisis. On the one hand, there is a nationalist discourse that speaks of a land crisis and that stresses national sovereignty and re-distributive policies, and on the other, there is a more liberal discourse that refers to a governance crisis and that emphasises human rights and political democratisation (Hammar et al., 2003; Sachikonye 2002). The first discourse focuses on the external (imperialist) determinants of the crisis and the latter on its internal (nation-state) determinants (Freeman 2005). Yet both discourses have roots in the notion of the NDR, with the former prioritising the ‘national’ and the latter the ‘democratic’ (Moore 2004: p.41). For example, Mandaza² (who has links with the ruling party) says that during the late 1990s post-nationalist forces in alliance with foreign elements were engaged in a subterranean ‘social crisis strategy’³ that sought to make Zimbabwe ungovernable, and that the (supposedly radical) intellectual representatives of these forces sought to prioritise issues of governance and democracy ‘at the expense of addressing the National Question’.⁴ Thus, the civic nationalism of these theorists (such as Raftopoulos) is portrayed as civil society warring against the state, and as seeking to undermine economic (re-distributive) nationalism rightly propagated by a beleaguered nation-state in the periphery.

Labelling each other as either left-nationalists or neo-liberals amounts at one level to intellectual misrepresentation and character assassination. Yet it is also suggestive of important theoretical differences within the Left. For example, Raftopoulos has been influenced by a Leftist tradition including the works of Stuart Hall and E. P. Thompson,⁵ and he might consider himself a radical democrat, whereas the joint work by Moyo and Yeros is more inclined towards a modernist class perspective. This debate, in which I will not get embroiled directly, brings to the fore the many tensions, contradictions and ambivalences embodied in the socio-political processes characterising present-day Zimbabwe, and raises fundamental questions for sociologists about how to

conceptualise the ‘social totality’. Although not defending Raftopoulos and others, whose work I have critically reviewed elsewhere (Helliker 2004) for its failure to offer rigorous class analyses, I argue that Moyo and Yeros – in studying Zimbabwe – have an overly structured conception of the totality, deriving in large part from their modernist perspective.

A considerable part of the argument by Moyo and Yeros entails a (fairly innocuous) political-economic history of pre-1980 Zimbabwe as a white-settler capitalist nation in order to show why independence failed to consummate the NDR, as well as an analysis of key political and social developments between 1980 and 2000 (again largely standard interpretations). It is doubtful whether any of their critics would find major fault with their historical analyses; in fact, Raftopoulos and Phimister (2004), in analysing the development of the Zimbabwean crisis, conclude (as do Moyo and Yeros) that the current accumulation process – including subsequent to 2000 – is particularly beneficial to the emerging black bourgeoisie. Moyo and Yeros, in their historical narration, speak about the petty-bourgeois character of the liberation movement; about how the black petty-bourgeoisie, having been ‘shut out of the white private sector’, began after independence to ‘redirect its accumulation strategies through the state’ (2005: p.172) and also touted economic indigenisation within the financial and agricultural sectors; about the devastating effect of neo-liberal structural adjustment on petty commodity farmers in the communal lands; about how (predominantly white) agrarian capital branched into non-traditional high-earning export crops like horticulture plus wildlife eco-tourism as part of extroverted economic liberalisation; and about the de-mobilisation by the ruling party of its social base soon after independence and how by the mid-1990s both urban and rural organisations ‘had been well civilized to the requirements of neocolonial capitalism’ (2005: p.181; see also Yeros 2002a).

Yet, by the late 1990s, there had emerged a macro-economic crisis (with the IMF withholding any further balance of payments support) and a broad-based political opposition in the urban areas (trade unions, civics, the NCA and the MDC) questioning the legitimacy of the ruling ZANU-PF party. This crisis reverberated within the ruling party and state, spurred on by the openly political demands for compensation by the ruling party aligned (but largely marginalised) war veterans. By the year 2000, in the face of imperialist aggression or at least disengagement, the ‘balance of class forces within the ruling party was tipped in favour of radical nationalist solutions’ (Moyo and Yeros 2005: p. 188) to agrarian and land questions. Although state nationalism had been re-radicalised, the emphasis by the authors is on the ‘continuity in the nationalism’ (Yeros 2002a: p. 243) throughout the post-independence period rather than a significantly reconfigured (and narrower) nationalism in recent years as proposed by their critics.

Moyo and Yeros trace the land reform process during the first twenty years of independence, claiming that 'the land cause had never been abandoned' by the semi-proletariat (2005: p.182) and that the land-short constantly pressurised the state for reform through, amongst other tactics, 'uncivil' land occupations. The history of land reform and land occupations in Zimbabwe provided by the authors draws extensively on Moyo's influential earlier work. Occupations occurred in some form or other during all periods of land reform. From 1980-1992, when the market method predominated under the Lancaster House Agreement, there were initially low profile but high intensity occupations that received substantial support from the leaders of the liberation struggle. But as this period progressed, and as the initial thrust of land distribution tapered off because of the increasing embourgeoisement of the ruling party and the fiscal crisis of the state, a rift began to grow between ZANU-PF and its rural (peasant) base. Low intensity occupations continued, but the state's response was to treat the occupants as squatters and to have them removed. The following period from 1993 to 1999 marked the beginning of the challenge to the market method with legislative amendments facilitating the compulsory acquisition of commercial land (with compensation) along with threats to do so on a significant scale (notably in 1997). However, land redistribution progressed slowly and agrarian policy focussed more on modernising master farmers or facilitating small-scale capitalist farming, while the party elite also became extensively involved in commercial farming through leasehold arrangements. Occupations proceeded apace during the time (of structural adjustment) and reached a climax in 1998 with high-profile community-led occupations during the International Donors Conference. The land occupations from 1980 to 1999 involved loosely organised and fragmented forms of un-civility, and differed significantly from the recent 'fast track' or Third Chimurenga occupations in this regard.

Like other agrarian specialists on Zimbabwe (Sachikonye 2002, 2003; Marongwe 2003), Moyo and Yeros note various differences in character between the latest round of land occupations and earlier ones, including the active involvement of the state in driving the 'fast track' land movement. In the end, though, they claim that the 'essence' of the occupations has 'remained the same' (Moyo 2001: p.321). They also weave together a story of unbroken rural action by the semi-proletariat that portrays the current land occupations as a 'climax' of constant and consistent struggles over land (Moyo 2001: p.314) and as dramatically addressing the national question and advancing the NDR. This claim seems very close to romanticising the peasantry (the Subject of history?) and insinuating that, against all adversity and despite negligence on the part of other social classes, the land-short forever sought to advance the NDR, that they 'never abandoned the revolution'. This is what Moore refers to as the 'peasants have taken charge of history' narrative (2001: p.257). Similar to a remark I made in the previous section, this seems consistent with the 'old left

trap of turning some group amongst the marginalised or exploited into the fetishised vessel of ... [the analyst's]... personal hopes by projecting some sort of dehumanising ontological purity... on to the chosen group' (Pithouse 2003: p. 127). Without wanting to romanticise the land movement in Zimbabwe, Bernstein (2003: p.220) claims that it represented an 'objectively progressive' expression of the new agrarian question of labour, because land occupations as a reproductive strategy addressed the unfinished business of the NDR.

Yet critics such as Jocelyn Alexander (2003) would argue that this entails a restricted notion of the NDR, such that 'to focus narrowly on the occupations alone misses the point that what they marked was not just an unprecedented assault on the unequal distribution of land [Bernstein's progressive content] but also an extraordinary transformation of the state and political sphere' (2003: p.104) in an undemocratic direction. Moyo and Yeros downplay the re-structuring of the state in an authoritarian direction (see also Hammar 2003 and Chaumba et al., 2003), and what is emphasised throughout is the functionality of the state in legitimising and strengthening the land movement in the direction of the NDR. Despite their recognition of nation building as a process in the early independence period of reconstruction, they fail to adequately make problematic the notion of the nation in the current context of crisis but treat it (and the national question) rather a-historically, or more of a product than a process. As a result, they fail to look critically at the Zimbabwean state's 'discursive authority' and practices to understand how national discourses fix the meanings of (an otherwise ambiguous and uncertain) nation (see Doty 1996). Simultaneously, they are outright dismissive of alternative renditions of the nation (for example, a civic nationalism) because of the supposed imperialist character of these renditions. At times, for Moyo and Yeros it appears that simply labelling a specific social group or practice as 'imperialist' (or 'neo-liberal') has some sort of magical explanatory value that limits the need for further investigation. Interestingly, prior to the 'wave' of democratisation throughout Africa during the 1990s, Shivji (1989) theorised about the NDR and human rights, and argued (unlike Moyo and Yeros today) that the furtherance of the NDR necessitated a distinctive anti-authoritarian (and thus democratic) thrust that privileged the right of the popular classes to organise independent of the repressive nation-state. In this respect, Neocosmos (1993) repeatedly emphasises the critical link between 'democratisation from below' (1993: p.8) and both land and agrarian reform, and he argues that democratic struggles are 'the primary issue' (1993: p.15) in ensuring progressive reform. This lacuna in the work of Moyo and Yeros is particularly surprising given that in the past Moyo has shown a marked sensitivity to the fact that 'basic democratic principles have not underlain land policy formulation' (1999: p.21) in Zimbabwe since independence.

As noted earlier, Moyo and Yeros argue that the occupations in Zimbabwe had a fundamentally progressive character. The overriding social base of the

movement was the rural-based semi-proletariat but it expanded to include the urban proletariat and petty bourgeois elements, and this involved bridging the urban-rural divide in a 'tense but resolute cross-class nationalist alliance on land' (2005: p.189). Initially, the movement had a working class thrust, in opposition to the (relatively retrogressive) post-national alliance of civil society – a mixed political bag including urban-based trade unions and white commercial farmers – that made no significant demands for redistribution of resources and had no agrarian reform programme. War veterans, with links in both the semi-proletariat and state bureaucracy, were able to effectively organise, mobilise and lead the movement. Yet they never sought to establish democratic peasant-worker organisational structures during the course of the occupations, nor did they challenge the institution of chieftaincy as a modern form of indirect rule. As a result, state bureaucrats, aspiring black capitalists and ruling party leaders were able to develop hegemony over the movement, and they claimed ownership over the land revolution based on their liberation and indigenisation credentials. In this regard, 'the black elite employed the state apparatus to retain its power and prepare the ground for its reassertion in national politics', and this entailed undermining 'any source of working-class organization outside elite ruling-party control, in both town and country' (2005: p.192, 193). The balance of class forces within the nationalist land alliance shifted dramatically against the semi-proletariat as the black elite dominated the policy making process and steered land reform in a direction that favoured its bourgeois interests, an outcome which is very common in historical reform processes globally (see Sobhan 1993). Thus, while re-peasantisation has been a dominant aspect of the land redistribution process through new petty commodity producer establishments under the A1 resettlement scheme, middle and large black capitalists are 'in political alliance under the banner of indigenization, seeking to appropriate the remaining land and also to tailor the agricultural policy framework to their needs' (2005: p.199). The (initial) anti-imperialist potential of the land occupations has thus been subverted, and there is the danger of a 'full reversal' (2005: p.194) of the agrarian reform process because of the comprador aspirations of the black bourgeoisie.

Moyo and Yeros assert that the strategy of state-led land reform 'did not go far enough *within* the ruling party and the state to safeguard the peasant-worker character of the movement or to prepare the semi-proletariat organizationally against the reassertion of the black bourgeoisie' (2005: p.193, their emphasis). This claim is very provocative (and worth exploring) in terms of theorising about the nation-state and political change, yet regrettably it is not clearly formulated let alone substantiated, if only because Moyo and Yeros – according to Moore – have 'no theory of the state' (2004: p.415). It might in fact be argued that the opposite is the case, and that the agrarian change strategy went too far within the state and was thereby captured by what Raftopoulos

labels as the state ‘commandism’ of ZANU-PF (Raftopoulos 2005: p.5). The argument by Moyo and Yeros though is part of their more general state-centred theory of change, and is explicitly a reaction to society-centred theories that romantically depict independent civil society expressions (anti-politics or independence from political society) as the critical nexus for social transformation. Baker (2002) has critically discussed this position with reference to both Eastern Europe and Latin America, but it is a position that Holloway has strongly adopted. Holloway (2003) argues that focussing popular struggles on and against the state (or capturing state power) is tantamount to subordinating opposition to the logic of capitalism, and that progressive forces should not take state power but dissolve it. This anti-politics or anti-power involves thus a non-instrumentalist conception of social revolution. Holloway claims that to struggle through the state involves continuity rather than rupture, and that the fetishised forms of social relations under capitalism depict falsely the state as the ‘centre point of social power’ (2003: p.57).

For Moyo and Yeros, however, this ‘breaking with the state’ is not ‘a sufficient condition for autonomous self-expression’ as both state and society are expected to be civil to the needs of capital. Hence, they argue that ‘breaking with the civility of *capital*’ – including subverting entrenched property rights in land – is the ‘requirement’ (2005: p.179 their emphasis) for independent progressive movements. On this basis, they thus stress that the land movement involved a challenge to the specifically neo-colonial (and comprador) character of the Zimbabwean nation-state. Regrettably, in de-emphasising (or in refusing to acknowledge) how this same movement reinforced (and reconfigured) the authoritarian form of the state, the dialectical moments in this movement are not properly captured by the authors. According to Moyo and Yeros, it was during this last period of popular land reform, from the year 2000 onwards, that un-civility ‘obtained radical land reform *through the state and against imperialism*’ (2005: p.179 their emphasis). They seem though to have a rather undifferentiated notion of imperialism and fail to consider more regional forms of imperialism, notably the pan-African sub-imperialism of South African capitalism (Neville Alexander 2003). They also appear at times to conflate imperialism and capitalism, and thereby assume that ‘against imperialism’ is necessarily ‘against capitalism’.

Moyo and Yeros clearly celebrate the specific form of uncivil action embodied in the land movement, involving what Mandaza approvingly calls the ‘abrogation of that principle that governs capitalism per se: the inviolability of the right of private property’.⁶ This position is consistent with well-argued claims made by theorists based in the South and East about alternative roads to modernity and ‘indigenous traditions of civility’ (Kaviraj 2001: p.322). Indeed, Chatterjee argues that the ‘squalor, ugliness and violence of popular life’ cannot be imprisoned ‘within the sanitized fortress of civil society’ and that there might be some ‘strategic use of illegality and violence’ (2002: pp.70, 71).

Thus, Yeros in his thesis raises serious doubts about the prospects of 'civil solutions to neo-colonialism' (2002a: p.161). He argues for example that the main trade union federation in Zimbabwe (the ZCTU) and the peasant farmers association (the ZFU) capitulated to civilisation or became civilised, such that the 'rural grievances of the semi-proletariat ... remained in uncivil terrain' (2002a: p.213). Further, the 'civil domain, by definition, cannot be broadened by civil society. The onus lies on progressive uncivil politics in the periphery' (2002a: p.249).

Thus, although the land movement has now been largely hijacked and reinserted into the political project of the black agrarian bourgeoisie, it has (or had) a progressive content in relation to the NDR. For example, the new agrarian structure has (or had) the potential to broaden the home market as a basis for a more articulated pattern of accumulation involving an introverted agro-industrial production system, thus contributing to the resolution of the agrarian and national questions (see Bernstein 2005: p.91 here). The potential benefits of land redistribution in resolving the accumulation and production aspects of the agrarian question have also been emphasised by Moyo (2000) elsewhere. But, in examining the current period, most analysts claim that the fast track programme has not had a significant impact (economically) on the land question (considering ongoing landlessness and land congestion in the communal areas) and that the 'broader agrarian question still needs to be defined and addressed' (Sachikonye 2003: p. 238; see also Mbaya 2001 and Freeman 2005). Indeed, Moore (2003) has disputed the nature and extent of the link between land and economic production and accumulation. He argues that, despite what the ruling party claims, the current economic crisis is not necessarily rooted in the land question and that fast track has not stimulated the (still stalled) primitive accumulation process in Zimbabwe. He further claims that 'the imperative for speedy resettlement [since 2000] did not come from an aroused peasantry, but in the politics of a regime facing economic crisis, [and] the loss of allies within almost all sectors of civil society' (Moore 2001: p.262).

In fact, it is the politically progressive aspect of the land movement that is most contentious. Moyo and Yeros note that land redistribution over the past few years has undone racial property rights in rural areas and has redressed historical injustices by giving significant number of peasants land. In so doing, it has undermined the racial manifestation of the class struggle in Zimbabwe, thus laying the basis for the next – and presumably more class-based – phase of the NDR. Mandaza argues in a similar vein: on the one hand, the emergent African bourgeoisie is bound to benefit most from the land reform process, yet this will simultaneously open up the struggle 'tomorrow between the black bourgeoisie and the underclass of society'.⁷ As noted earlier, this is largely a teleological depiction of Zimbabwean society and history.

But what the critics of Moyo and Yeros roundly denounce is their underestimation (or underplaying) of state violence. Thus, Moyo (2001: pp.325-330)

argues that the short-term pain of authoritarian and violent practices during the occupations must be weighed against the longer-term benefits for democratisation in advancing the NDR. Mandaza likewise argues that it is a 'politically reactionary position... to deny the principle of land redistribution simply because the methods being employed are said to be bad'.⁸ For Raftopoulos and Phimister (1995: p. 376), this means that 'democratic questions will be dealt with at a later stage, once the economic kingdom has been conquered' (see also Moore 2003). This age-old question about means and ends in political struggle, and its implications for agrarian change in contemporary Zimbabwe, is deserving of ongoing study.

Moyo and Yeros claim that the NDR in Zimbabwe is now at a critical juncture, and that its further progress requires bridging the yawning political gap between the urban and rural semi-proletariat and proletariat under conditions of reinstated civil and political liberties. They call for a 'new class-based nationalism against the racialized, bourgeois nationalism of the indigenization lobby, and against neoliberal democracy politics' (2005: p. 201). This argument that the next phase of the NDR is clearly at hand (or at least is somewhere around the corner) and thus is in the process of unfurling due to its inherent make-up, and that it demands (almost by necessity) a particular programmatic alliance amongst progressive forces, seems to be their answer to the classic Leninist question of 'what is to be done', and it is consistent with their deterministic notion of the social totality. It clearly goes contrary to what they would likely consider to be 'post-modernist' renditions of the dilemmas currently facing the Left internationally. For instance, Hardt and Negri (2001) identify a nebulous multitude as the agency of emancipation in the contemporary world, and they speak of a global authority (Empire) and simultaneously downplay the nation-state as a centralised authority. As a result, they are bitterly criticised because 'strategic guidance' (like that offered by Moyo and Yeros for Zimbabwe) is not forthcoming (Callinicos 2003: p. 136). Likewise, Holloway fails – in fact refuses – to chart the strategic way forward. He claims that 'the knowing of the revolutionaries of the last century has been defeated' (2003: p.89), and that the old certainties of the Left are no longer tenable. In other words, changing the world without taking power is an open-ended and indeterminate process. In that sense, the Leninist question may be the wrong question altogether.

Sociology and Agrarian Reform

Callari and Ruccio (1996), in noting the challenges of post-modernism to historical materialism, speak of different tendencies and divergent conceptions of the 'social totality' within Marxism historically. On the one hand, they refer to a 'modernist systematicity' (1996: p.23) that over-privileges ontological order and determinism and that enacts closure on what are open-ended and incomplete social spaces. On the other hand, they identify a more anti-systemic

(meaning less-structured) trend within Marxism that stresses openness, formation and disorder or a contingent (and even un-sutured) social totality. This tension within historical materialism highlights the ambivalence of the human condition and of social relations, but Callari and Ruccio claim that, throughout most of its history, Marxism has unfortunately embraced a 'modernist systematicity'. In other words, the contingencies and contradictions (or the dialectics) of the human condition (the concrete totality) have been theoretically represented as an overly structured (and deterministic) abstract totality. It is this dominant representation by historical materialism that has been (quite rightly) the object of criticism by post-Marxists. Yet the argument by Callari and Ruccio implies that the seeds of post-Marxism/post-modernism are inherent within the history – and theory – of Marxism, in the second totality based on contingency.

In this context, it is abundantly clear that Moyo and Yeros in many ways are sensitive to the dialectical processes of 'the social'. For instance, they highlight the conflicting economic-political processes that seem to be pulling the peasantry in opposing directions, involving both re-peasantisation (through land occupations) and proletarianisation (through land concentration). They also note the contradictory tendencies within the land movement in Zimbabwe, speaking about both its retrogressive and progressive moments. A key point they emphasise is that the land movement had the real potential (at least initially) to democratise the countryside, a point that their critics fail to appreciate in their overriding (and one-sided, un-dialectical?) emphasis on authoritarian nationalism. Yet, these contradictory processes – in the work of Moyo and Yeros – are largely sacrificed on the altar of an overly structured totality. The openness and contingency of these processes, including the class agency that they rightly bring to the fore, are subsumed under the notion of the National Democratic Revolution and the trajectory of this social process. In this regard, Bernstein (2003) makes a very telling point, in speaking about a 'dialectical (rather than romantic) view of history' (2003: p.220). Moyo and Yeros of course are not agrarian romantics but are serious scholars seeking to make sense of highly complex agrarian processes globally and locally. Regrettably, they enact methodological closure on the social dialectics embodied in their (otherwise) insightful analyses. In theorising about social change in the modern world, Holloway makes the absolutely critical point that, as historical materialists, 'we must reject the notion of a dialectic which reconciles everything in the end' (2002: p.159).

There is a clear tension in the work of Moyo and Yeros, but unfortunately they tend to edge ever so close to a modernist systematicity. In this context, their critics claim that Moyo and Yeros simply reproduce the (un-dialectical) nationalist teleological depiction of Zimbabwean society and history propagated by the ruling party. But such an argument crudely conflates particular points of consistency in representation/argumentation with universal

agreement. Besides an overly structured totality, Moyo and Yeros also have an overly-realist conception of ‘the social’ rather than a more ‘constructionist’ conception as often found within sociology. The relationship between structure and agency seems unmediated, as if the latter can simply be read from the former, and thus claims about reductionism have been made about their form of analysis (Raftopoulos and Phimister 2004). In this respect, what Bartra and Otero label in their chapter on Mexico as a theory of political class formation, along the lines it seems of E. P. Thompson, would involve looking deeply into the realms of the experiences of the worker-peasant. Moyo and Yeros would likely agree with the importance of this, but they tend to posit certain forms of consciousness to the peasantry that are consistent with the trajectory of the National Democratic Revolution. The general conclusion that seems to arise from this review essay is that the insightful analyses contained in *Reclaiming The Land* would have been further enriched if the ‘elusive’ notion of the National Democratic Revolution were ‘expelled’ from the volume.

Notes

1. I would like to thank Brian Raftopoulos for his comments on an earlier version of this review essay.
2. Regrettably, Ibbo Mandaza has failed to publish any academic literature in recent years. However, it is widely known that Mandaza writes the weekly column ‘The Scrutator’ in *The Zimbabwe Mirror*. All quotations from Mandaza in this review essay are from this column.
3. *The Zimbabwe Mirror*, 25 June to 1 July 1999.
4. *The Zimbabwe Mirror*, 28 April to 4 May 2000.
5. Personal communication with Raftopoulos, 20 September 2005.
6. *The Zimbabwe Mirror*, 12 January to 18 January 2003.
7. *The Zimbabwe Mirror*, 14 July to 20 July 2002.
8. *The Zimbabwe Mirror*, 27 October to 2 November 2000.

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