

Original Research

Unique Land Question in Africa Under Neoliberal Globalization

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***Related declarations are provided in the final section of this article.*

Abstract

This paper examines the existence and nature of the land question in Africa under neoliberal globalization. It argues that Africa possesses a unique and complex land question shaped by historical colonial land alienations, postcolonial state developmental policies, and contemporary neoliberal land tenure reforms. The study critically evaluates two opposing perspectives: one denying the existence of a distinct African land question due to the persistence of customary land tenure systems, and another affirming its existence based on growing land concentration, tenure insecurities, and unequal access to land and natural resources. Drawing on political economy and agrarian studies literature, the paper demonstrates that neoliberal reforms have intensified land inequalities, marginalization of peasants, gender disparities in land rights, and externally oriented land use patterns. The analysis identifies three core dimensions of the African land question: unequal land distribution, land tenure insecurity, and inefficient land utilization. The paper concludes that contemporary land struggles across Africa reflect deepening socio-economic inequalities and renewed processes of land dispossession, reinforcing the persistence of a distinct African land question in the twenty-first century.

Keywords: Land question; Neoliberal globalization; Land tenure reform; Land inequality; Agrarian political economy; Africa

Introduction

Over the last two decades, the land question concerned with access to and control of land in Africa has received considerable academic and policy attention as countries have introduced comprehensive land policies and laws to address it. However, land redistribution as a solution to the land question has scantily been considered as a solution to land questions in academic debates and new wave land policies. Land questions derive from the enduring effects of colonial land alienations and postcolonial state developmentalist policies, and, more recently, neoliberal land tenure reforms have extended colonial land alienations rendering it a complex question in the twenty-first century. The African land question is,

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therefore, complex as it is characterised by unequal access to and control of land and natural resources, pervasive land tenure insecurities, and inefficient and extroverted land use processes.

Two distinct perspectives frame debates on the land question in Africa. The first denies the existence in Africa of a unique and complex land question because of the generalized absence of prior historical one-off extensive land alienations alongside widespread "landlessness and a captive agrarian labouring" class akin to the Latin American and Asian experiences (see Mafeje 2003; Mamdani 1986, 1987; Moyo 2008, 14; 2018). Recent extensions of this perspective claim that redistributive land reforms are passé under neoliberalism because the "classic agrarian question of capital as a foundation of national development via industrialization of agriculture and labour absorption into the urban industry has been resolved on a world scale" (Bernstein 2002, 452). Sources of capital external to agriculture have superseded the historic purpose of redistributive land reform (Bernstein 2002; 2004, 202).

The second perspective affirms the existence and complexity of a unique land question in Africa relative to the Latin American and Asian experiences. This land question emerged from extensive land alienations in ex-settler Africa, and from localized and growing incipient processes of land concentration and landlessness in non-settler Africa, including the exploitation of landless labourers by large capitalist farmers who have benefitted from state-led land alienations or spontaneous capitalist processes of land dispossession (Amin 1972; Moyo 2003, 2008; Amanor 1999, 2001; Peters 2004; Arrighi 1973). This is the position I adopt in this essay.

To what extent, then, can we argue for the existence of a unique land question in Africa, particularly under neoliberal globalization? In what follows, it will be argued that Africa has a unique and complex land question characterized by three primary dimensions: unequal land distribution, land tenure insecurities and inefficient land use processes (Moyo 2003, 3; 2008, 5). The first part of the essay assesses the argument that there is no African land question in Africa, especially under neoliberalism. The second part critically examines the argument for a land question in Africa which cuts across the ex-settler and non-settler colonies, and which today is characterized by expanding processes of land concentration, tenure insecurities and extroverted land use processes. The last section offers some concluding remarks.

There is No Land Question in Sub-Saharan Africa

At the centre of current debates on the nature and relevance of the land question in Africa is the argument that redistributive land reforms have been rendered "irrelevant" due to the dominance of speculative finance capital which has engineered a process of "market liberalization" worldwide and initiated a productivity revolution via increased use of biotechnologies for the intensification of agriculture, and hence the "overproduction" that has marked agriculture at a global level despite the presence of pockets of poverty, hunger and malnutrition largely in the global south (Bernstein 2002, 2004; Moyo 2003, 3-4; 2008,

5). In particular, the irrelevance of the land question and reform today is most spectacularly revealed by "the perceived socio-economic destruction of African peasantries and their limited social capacity to wage struggles for radical land redistribution" (Bernstein 2002 quoted in Moyo 2008, 5; Bryceson et al., 2000).

Outside sub-Saharan Africa, according to Mafeje (2003), it is Southern Africa which exhibits a land question similar to the historical experiences of Asia and Latin America characterized by dominant landlord-tenant relations. In Southern Africa, the land and agrarian question are synonymous; they are characterized by the massive presence of landless tenants working for a landlord who they pay for the use of the land either in kind or cash. But beyond Southern Africa, the predominance of customary land tenures ensure secure and "effective occupation" of the land on the basis of lineage principles of access (see Mamdani 1986, 1987; Mafeje 2003). In short, in sub-Saharan Africa land "is not a scarce commodity" (Mamdani 1986, 39). As such, the agricultural crisis in sub-Saharan Africa defined by "low productivity" and food shortages is attributable to backward production techniques and ineffective social relations of production rather than unequal land distribution. There is, therefore, a tendency in this line of inquiry to "exceptionalize" Southern Africa by excising its history from the rest of sub-Saharan Africa. Thus according to Mafeje (2003, 30):

"Although land reform and agrarian reform have come to be treated as coterminous as a result of the Latin-American and Asian experience, it is apparent that this does not apply to sub-Saharan Africa, outside the Southern African settler societies. It is important to note that it does not involve change only in production techniques, as is often assumed, but also in production relations and the social institutions that sustain them." (Mafeje 1999 quoted in Moyo 2008, 21)

Furthermore, in Mafeje's critical contributions to the land debates in Africa, he argued that because colonial capitalist penetration of pre-colonial social formations in Africa "failed to fully disrupt these pre-existing social formations", indeed that these formations survived the colonial and postcolonial expansion of capitalism in Africa, majority of rural peasants in Africa continue to exercise "full control over their land and labour (Moyo 2018, 213)."

Accordingly, he argued that "unequal landholding, capitalist property and labour relations had not sufficiently altered the land tenure system, nor led to the rise of exploitative labour relations (Mafeje 2003 quoted in Moyo 2018, 213)."

Indeed, the unique contribution of Mafeje to the land question debate, Moyo claims, was his insistence that "the tributary mode of production was absent in most precapitalist social formations of non-settler Africa, and that, where variants of this existed, as in some of the Interlacustrine Kingdoms [e.g. Buganda, etc.], these were of limited significance to agrarian class formation and land use intensification" (Moyo 2018, 216). This is why it is claimed sub-Saharan Africa does not have a land question.

But as Mamdani (1986, 39) has argued, equating the land and agrarian questions as they have been conceptualized in Latin America is to universalize that particular experience, to "generalize from one concrete historical situation to others." The result is a lack of appreciation of historical specificity so that "new historical experiences [are understood] through formal analogies with the 'original' experience—that here the peasant confronts no social overlord, and thus there is no land question" (Ibid.). The point is that enduring customary land tenures in Africa at least guarantee access to land for those regarded as members of a particular 'tribe,' as communitarian arguments have argued.

It is, however, instructive that African customary tenure areas face "pervasive" tenure insecurities as a result of inherited colonial land which "declared all land 'public lands' vested in the Governor [later, President] laws (see Shivji 1998, 4), increased social differentiation, incessant land grabbing by domestic and foreign capital, and state land policies which justified land alienations as 'developmental' and promoted new land uses such as tourism, mineral and oil prospecting, and environmental conservation based on the mistaken belief that peasants degrade the land. Furthermore, although agrarian productivity is a reality in sub-Saharan Africa, it worth noting that extreme racialized land inequalities "in Southern Africa was/is itself a structuration of unequal state intervention in support of the agrarian capitalist farmer against the peasantries" which because of its unsustainability "socially, politically and economically" revealed the "really differentiated effort of addressing the productivity problems underlying the agrarian question" (Moyo 2008, 21).

The argument that Africa has no land question is based on the assumption that Africa has abundant land. This assumption has recently spawned an influential strand of research which emphasizes the 'negotiability' and 'flexibility' of customary land tenure systems (see Berry 1993; Peters 2004, 269-271). The argument is that customary systems are flexible, negotiable and dynamic as they evolve in response to population pressures and commercialization of agriculture.

However, the argument on negotiability appears too general, and reinforces Amanor's (1999, 10) critique that communitarian arguments for the virtues of customary land tenures implicitly hold an ideal-typical notion of the latter which ignores effects of 'global restructuring' on local histories. Customary tenure systems with their supposed egalitarianism in land access did not simply survive colonial and postcolonial state intervention and capitalist penetration (Amanor 1999, 10). Instead, "the positive attributes of traditional land tenure systems —the equity, social distribution characteristics and the checks and balances practice through empirical data or case studies" (Ibid.).

Furthermore, the argument that assumes the availability of abundant land in Africa tends to ignore the gender dimensions of the land question especially in the relation to the supposed egalitarianism of customary tenure regimes. The position adopted by Mafeje and Mamdani that there is no land question in Africa is silent on the fact that customary systems of land tenure discriminate against women's land rights more so in the context of renewed processes of land concentration driven by market-based land tenure reformism (see Whitehead and Tsikata, 2003; Ossome, 2014; Razavi, 2007).

The 'communitarian' argument about customary tenure flexibility has also been criticized by those who argue that celebration of the positive features of 'customary' tenure thrives on an "inverted dualism" (Amanor 2001, 11). In arguing for the benefits of customary tenure, "the communitarians fall back on an inverted dualism which mirrors that used in modernization theory, between the traditional and modern sector. It is inverted in the sense that while economic dualism portrayed the traditional sector as backward and the modern sector as progressive, the traditional or customary sector is now being characterized as dynamic" (Ibid.). This tends to misrepresent the history and actual dynamics of customary tenure under colonial and postcolonial rule when state-led land alienations were facilitated by traditional authorities.

A focus on historical processes reveals that there are "situations and processes (including commodification, structural adjustment, market liberalization and globalization) that limit or end negotiation and flexibility for certain social groups or categories" (Peters 2004, 270). There are always winners and losers in the processes of negotiation, emphasizing the importance of situating the land question within a broader political economy framework. For it has been observed that although "'On average, land is more abundant in Africa than in other continents,... most Africans have only very small plots and an increasing number are landless' (Raikes 2000, 66 quoted in Peters 2004, 269).

Available evidence in the past two decades shows "mounting competition and conflict over land and landed resources across the continent" because of increasing land inequalities and the marginalization of peasantries (Peters 2004, 270; 2013). Peters contends that "the pervasive competition and conflict over land calls into serious question the image of relatively open, negotiable and adaptive customary systems of landholding and land use and, instead, reveal processes of exclusion, deepening social divisions and class formation" (Peters 2004, 270)

As such, the colonial and postcolonial legacy of land alienations has intensified competition over land for sustaining livelihoods for the majority of the population at a time when there is limited and shrinking urban job prospects fomented by neoliberal policies. Often complemented by off-farm incomes and remittances, in the absence of alternative employment, peasants have tended "to expand their access to new land and natural resources in competition with coterminous peasant communities and emerging agrarian capitalists" (Moyo 2003, 12). The politic of land also reveals that is a political resource for the mobilization of political constituencies in "political contest between different groups of people: landlords and peasants; state and landlords; peasants and state; men and women; ethnic groups; racial groups and so many other permutations" (Ibid.). Taken together these struggles and conflicts suggest the existence of a unique and complex land question in Africa, but whose existence has yet to be appreciated in land and agrarian studies.

There is a Land Question in Sub-Saharan Africa

This second position justifies the existence of a land question in Africa, and it centres on "whether there exists or not extensive land alienation, leading to the classic problems of

landless and captive agrarian labour in Africa" in the larger context of the agrarian question (Moyo 2003, 8). Using Amin's (1972, 1974) threefold typology of Africa's regional economies based on their differential insertion into global capitalism, it can be observed that ex-settler colonies (Algeria, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia and Kenya) suffered extensive land dispossessions more than that experienced in the concession zones (Central/Equatorial Africa) and the zones with predominantly peasant modes of production (West Africa) (Moyo 2003, 8). Notable is that colonial land policies in Africa have continued to exert their effects and have intensified with postcolonial state developmentalist policies which have extended land expropriation into customary tenures areas.

This is occurring across Africa to the extent that existing and emerging "unequal landholdings undermine sustainable livelihoods at the individual country level" (Moyo 2003, 13). These regional historical experiences suggest that five key historically-specific features in Africa make for a unique land question (Mafeje, 2003). First, Africa did not have feudal-like social formations of the Latin American type, but limited feudal variants existed in Morocco and Uganda; second, indirect rule distorted customary tenure 'procedures' and 'leadership' to suit the colonial project for control of natives; third, the converging character of increased land concentration across settler and non-settler regions; lastly, the enduring effects of colonial "land and livestock expropriations" which have closely tied the land question to the national question (Ibid.). Countries that suffered the most extensive land alienations are Algeria, Kenya, South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Swaziland, Botswana, Zambia, Angola, Tanzania, the latter mostly through postcolonial nationalizations (Moyo 2003, 14). However, specific differences in the experience of land alienations exist across settler and non-settler Africa.

In the ex-Settler Africa, the land question was constructed primarily through extensive land alienations and the creation of labour reserves and the institutionalization of a vast migrant labour system to service the white-controlled agricultural export sector, mining, and public works construction (Moyo and Yeros 2005, 69). This policy was complemented by restricting land sales to outsiders in customary tenure areas by constructing the notion that land is a communal asset and hemming in communal territory through extra-economic coercion (Mamdani, 1996). This was also the case in non-settler Africa, but on a larger scale. But creating customary areas did not prevent the emergence of localized processes of land concentration and alienation driven by internal social differentiation and penetration by external domestic and foreign capitals (Moyo and Yeros 2005, 24).

In Southern Africa, land-based racial inequality is the major problem given its history of extensive land alienations and the 'containment' of the black population in Bantustans endowed with poor-quality land. Extreme race-based land inequality structures shape the allocation of public resources biased toward large-scale capitalist farmers and the marginalization of peasantries. Biased resource allocations "merely justify the concentration of resources in a few large farmers in most of sub-Saharan Africa" (Moyo 2003, 10-11; 2008, 22). In this biased context, land-based struggles have emerged to pressurize states to initiate redistributive land reforms for the benefit of the land-short and landless peasantries.

Subsequent state-led expropriations of indigenous lands post-1945 established pockets of agro-industrial estates secured by superexploitation of labour entailing "subjugated labor and repressed peasant farming through discriminatory commodity markets, shifting production from peasant foods towards commodities dominated by large farmers, with the support of state marketing boards and European merchants" (Moyo et al. 2019, 8-9). By contrast, small-scale peasant production for export dominated in West Africa, and only "micro-rich" export enclaves were established, with the exception of Cote d'Ivoire (Amanor 1999, 18).

In West Africa, despite the absence of extensive land alienations, colonialism restrained labour mobility in order to dragoon young men into working for merchant-controlled plantations oriented towards export crops production. The implementation of this land and labour policy meant "Chiefs were used as the agent of this restructuring, responsible for administering land in the export-crop producing areas and in initiating labour control (forced labour and tax policies that ensured young men migrated to the export-producing areas to gain wages for tax payment) (Amanor 1999, 18). On this basis, unique "land questions associated with migrant labour and migrant farmers rights of access within customary tenure regimes" and "land conflicts" emerged even though West Africa did not experience "extensive land expropriation" (Moyo 2003, 11).

In the postcolonial period, between the 60s and 70s, land alienations occurred mainly through postcolonial state "developmentalist policies" (Moyo, 2008; Moyo et al. 2019, 10) "before the whole continent was resubordinated to intensified primitive accumulation" (Moyo et al. 2019, 10) via neoliberal land titling programmes in which the main beneficiaries were "aspiring domestic bourgeoisies under the wing of foreign capital and World Bank advice, shifting land use to 'non-traditional' crops, such as cut flowers, horticulture and tourism" (Moyo, 2000). Despite the centring of land reform in the SAP-directed 'poverty reduction' agenda, neoliberal land tenure reforms have continued to marginalize expanding peasantries, and have even "prepared the ground for the current land grabbing" in non-settler Africa, particularly from the 2000s onwards (Moyo et al. 2019, 10-12). These new externally-driven land grabs have the potential to deepen "concentration of land ownership, the expansion of land markets, and the increased concentration of agricultural production targeting external food and biofuel markets." (Moyo et al. 2019, 21).

In this context, the argument that there is no land question in Africa neglects the foregoing "empirical trend of a gradually evolving land problem based upon incipient land concentration (Moyo 2008, 15)." Another implication of denying a land question in Africa is the tendency to "relegate land defined as one of the factors of agricultural production at the same level as other inputs such as labour, finance, equipment and so forth, to a non-problem given that numerous peasantries still subsist on land that they control" (Moyo 2003, 9).

According to Moyo (2008, 20), therefore:

"a land question exists distinctively throughout post-colonial Africa because of the historical evolution of the contests and struggles over land access, use and systems of tenure, founded

upon class, gender, race, ethnicity, class and, regional inequities, discrimination and regulation." (Ibid.)

The land question in Africa has been conceptualized as consisting of three key aspects: unequal land distribution, land tenure insecurities and inefficient land utilisation issues (Moyo 2008, 5). First, most evident is the maldistribution of the land which "takes the extreme form of full scale bi-modal land ownership regimes where minorities controlled between 30 and 80 % of national lands, as found in Southern Africa (Moyo 2008, 26-27). Extreme inequality is followed by "A lower degree of inequity in landholdings based upon socially differentiated rural societies in which the indigenous elite own relatively large pieces of land alongside a land short peasantry" (Moyo 2008, 26-27). More moderate land inequalities are found in those countries with a few scattered agrarian enclaves based upon plantation sub-sectors of the European merchant capitalists which co-exist with peasantries in a bimodal agrarian context skewed in favour of peasantries" (Moyo 2008, 26-27).

The picture on land inequalities painted above relates to "freehold and leasehold lands," but note that land inequalities are equally accounted for by the significant "large tracts of land held and used by the state for concessioning to private and state institutions to exploit native forests and wildlife in particular" (Moyo 2008, 27). These are estimated to cover approximately "5% to 40% of total national land area" (Moyo 2008, 27). Land inequalities of this sort create the basis for "*exploitative relation between labour and the large land owners*, whereby the peasantries and migrants provide labour" to the latter, accounting for the sporadic explosion of "*active class and social struggles* over control of land and natural resources between both elites and associated international capital and various land-hungry peasants and poor workers" across the continent (Moyo 2008, 27; Moyo and Tsikata 2015).

In West Africa, unequal land distribution has spawned exploitative "share cropping relations in which former slave, migrants and the land short worked on the lands of their former masters and who then provided them with a portion of the surplus in kind" (Amanor 2002 quoted in Moyo 2008, 28). In turn, sharecropping relations have "expanded into a complex process of land markets and land tenure relations which raise land problems common to those found in the regions of extensive land expropriation" (Ibid.). Ethnic minorities, migrants and foreigners bear the brunt of these exploitative land relations.

But ethnic minorities are also the main losers in land expropriations. Minorities like the San in Botswana have lost land to diamond mining corporations as have the Herero, in Namibia, and the Maasai in Tanzania and Kenya, the latter have been displaced by an expanding foreign-dominated tourist sector and/or control of large tracts by TNCs in Nigeria, Tanzania, Mozambique, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Cameroon (Mkandawire 2002 quoted in Moyo 2003, 14). As such, land inequalities along ethnic and class lines have shaped the distribution of socio-demographic features and inter-ethnic relations and conflicts, creating the basis for land struggles (Ibid.), even across urban Africa.

In urban Africa, the land question is manifest in the expansion of slums which "reflect the intensified quest by the land-short and unemployed for urban, peri-urban and rural land"

(Moyo 2008, 2). Rather than a population explosion, scholars have interpreted rapid urbanization as a symptom of a generalized jobless growth trajectory in Africa. In this context, "a growing (not a declining) number of households continue to depend for their basic social reproduction on access to adequate land (Moyo 2008, 2)." The land question is particularly stark in its urban form especially "in the former settler colonies where racist land ownership patterns [are evidenced in] physical residential segregation of black 'townships' from white 'suburbs' which remain largely so after independence" (Moyo 2003, 14) This is the case in ex-settler colonies like Kenya, southern Africa and Algeria, but land is increasingly evident in other African countries.

Another dimension of the land question is the land tenure question. Characteristic of this dimension of the land question is the pervasive "insecurities over land control by the poor in relation to competing claims over land as well as a 'clash' of land tenure regimes arising from colonial and post-colonial interventionism in the shaping of land property rights (Moyo 2003, 20)." Neoliberal land tenure reform, driven by domestic and foreign capital and rural elites, has led to a skewed land distribution [whereby] "chiefs, loyalists, and the wealthy" have acquired more and better land at the expense of those who need it most: the semi-proletarian classes (Moyo 2003, 20). Land concentration and inequalities are also driven by "demographic pressures" and expropriations "to expand commercial farming and to impose land market regimes," [all which combine] "to diminish land access by the rural and urban poor, particularly those targeting pastoralist areas" in East and West Africa (Moyo 2003, 21)

In the land question literature, there is general agreement that customary land tenure rules discriminate against women in Africa. The debate, however, centres on "why this is so, the ways in which such discrimination occurs, and therefore the most effective solutions for this" (Tsikata 2001 quoted in Moyo 2008, 87). The "social embeddedness" of women's tenure rights has been suggested as the main reason why in precolonial times, women enjoyed significant land use rights except where in contemporary times "processes of agrarian change and codification of customary law" have eroded these rights (Ibid.). At the core of the continued denial of land rights to women are "patriarchal, patrilineal and extended family structures" which determine membership in communities because membership itself determines who is entitled to land access and the bundle of rights one is entitled to (Ibid.).

Land titling programmes targeting customary tenure systems as a means to create land markets in the 1950s and 60s in Kenya and Uganda have undermined women's land rights (Ibid.). Women are thus caught between the rights corroding effects of customary tenure regimes and the market economy (Ibid., 88).

According Lastarria-Cornhiel "usually women lose access or cultivation rights while male household heads have strengthened their hold over land' as a result of the selective use of statutory and customary tenure rules (Lastarria-Cornhiel 1997, 1326 quoted in Whitehead and Tsakata 2003, 73). Experiences in Kenya are typical in this regard. Land titling and registration programmes began in the 1950s established "a new context for claims in the

language of custom and 'men found they were able to manipulate the historical precedents of "custom" to exercise greater control over land to the detriment of women' (Whitehead and Tsikata 2003, 74). Women have therefore doubly lost rights to land, especially use rights as their primary roles relate to supporting social reproduction processes in local communities.

The third aspect of the land question relates to land utilization issues. This aspect relates primarily to two issues: The first concerns "persistent evidence of land use inefficiencies and conflicts which arise from the competing land utilisation objectives dictated by state policies which direct land use patterns through incentives, competition among different agronomic production and socio-political systems" (Moyo 2003, 3). The second concerns the biased deployment of repressive land use regulations targeting the peasant sector and customary tenure areas "for the purported goal of promoting rather dubious environmental, agronomic and physical planning objectives"(Moyo 2003, 3)

The biased deployment of land use regulations in customary tenure areas while loosening regulation in freehold and leasehold areas is "a major source of inappropriate land allocations and land speculation in Africa" (Moyo 2008, 77). Under neoliberalism, despite evidence of smallholder efficiency and uptake of horticulture in Zimbabwe and Kenya, "Large scale farmers, with their disproportionate access to such resources have thus been the main beneficiaries of SAP incentives, sharpening the class and racially based inequalities over access to land and resources, as well as the unequal land utilisation patterns and capacities among small and large farmers (Ibid., 78). Particularly controversial is the "the conversion of farming land to exclusively wildlife and nature based land uses through the consolidation of large scale farms into even larger scale 'conservancies' (Ibid., 72) which deepen inequalities and the exclusion of the peasantry, relegating the latter to poor quality land in the name of promoting ecologically-sustainable land in the "tourism, forestry and biotechnology sectors," more visible in Eastern and Southern Africa (Ibid.).

Increasing externally-oriented land use changes have led to the devaluation of the livelihoods of the majority peasantries and provoked intense conflicts over access to and control of land. But the impacts are heterogeneous depending on the regional economy and political- economic context. But one salient effect is the "undervaluation" of land resources by "largely by allocating land and related resources to commodities with poor returns and domestic linkages (Moyo 2008, 72). The agrarian crisis itself is largely due to the extreme extroverted character of land uses which has caused the "the demise of African agriculture in general, expanded food insecurity and, food import and aid dependence, and the inability of agriculture to accumulate investible resources and finance itself, without resorting to external debt entrapment (Ibid.)."

The land use question is most acute where it is combined with an acute scarcity of arable land as in North Africa, or where land inequalities along race, class and ethnic social hierarchies as in Kenya and Southern Africa prevail, or where customary systems which continue to enjoy local legitimacy exist in conflict with imposed colonial statutory systems as in West Africa (Moyo 2003, 8). New wave land policies across Africa have tended to skirt the distributional question in place of a fixation with land tenure reforms. Meanwhile,

increased land concentration and inequalities can be observed across the whole continent, driving the explosive growth of land struggles and conflicts based on ethnicity, race, class, gender, religion and region, civil wars and wars between states.

More recently, renewed colonial-style "land grabbing" has been escalating since 2008 with the potential to confound the existing distributional biases and deepen extroverted land use processes. Recent scholarly research has observed that the renewed scramble for land and natural resources in Africa is "shifting the land ownership and property relations significantly" to the extent that since 2008 "over 130 foreign investor firms, originating from over 30 countries, [have acquired lands] "from a high of over 50 million ha of large-scale landholdings to around 17 million ha, and entails about 500 'commercial' land deals" (see Land Matrix Data 2012 quoted in Moyo et al. 2019, 4). Recent research findings suggest that "between 8% and 15% of Africa's cultivable land, at an annual rate ranging from 4 to 10.7 million ha" has been alienated to foreign investors, mostly in Eastern and Western Africa (Ibid.). These large-scale land alienations seem to have outstripped "by far the annual rate of colonial land grabs that occurred in Southern African settler colonies at the end of the nineteenth century, although the proportion of land alienated still remains much lower" (Ibid.). In the long-run, these cumulative processes suggest the consolidation of a unique and complex land question in Africa when viewed in the larger context of the agrarian question. Neoliberal land tenure reformism has dominated the land reform agenda given its complementarity to marketization reforms that seek to establish efficient land markets and enhance agricultural export performance. As such, demands for radical land reforms have been suppressed. Radical land reform has reappeared on the agenda only where rural struggles have been radicalized and have opted to operate beyond the rule of law to "illegally" occupy the land as in Zimbabwe since 2000. Land struggles and conflicts abound to challenge these inequitable land distribution, discriminatory land tenure systems and reforms and extroverted land uses which marginalize Africa's semi-proletarianized peasantries. These struggles have emerged to confront the state and capitalist landed interests to address their social demands for land redistribution.

Conclusion

There is both an agrarian and a land question in sub-Saharan Africa which affects both settler and non-settler countries, but with historical and regional specificities. The framework of colonial land policies and postcolonial state developmentalism have shaped the evolution of the land question in Africa. These policies have provoked various land questions primarily concerned with unequal land distribution, land tenure insecurities and inefficient land utilization issues. These issues are the focus of intense, scattered and localized class and social struggles over social justice and equity, citizenship and livelihoods. Existing land questions have been exacerbated by neo-liberal land tenure reforms which have led to new rounds of land dispossession and concentration in Africa. Unequal land distribution and discriminatory tenure reforms have tended to marginalize women's land rights. Urban land questions also exhibit the effects of land inequalities as

seen in the proliferation of slums in the context of urban joblessness. Recent scrambles for land and natural resources driven largely by giant Western firms and state actors portends the deepening of land concentration and marginalization, foreboding a new wave of land dispossessions and concentration alongside inherited property regimes from the colonial and early postindependence period.

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