

# Scholars, activists & farmers join in Harare to address rural social justice

Amber Murrey

2016-02-24, Issue [763](#)

<http://pambazuka.org/en/category/features/96662>

[cc AIAS](#)Participants brought enormously disparate and dislocated struggles into one conversation, demonstrating the prominence, scale, and impact of current agrarian struggles. The discussions were made all the more crucial in the context of international media's dominant focus on urban issues and urban struggles, which further supports an impression that contemporary social struggle is an urban phenomenon.

The African Institute for Agrarian Studies' (AIAS) eighth annual [Agrarian Summer School](#) was held in Harare, Zimbabwe approximately two months after the passing of the school's founder and intellectual pillar, Professor [Sam Moyo](#) (23 September 1954 – 22 November 2015). Professor Moyo's work has inspired two generations of agrarian scholars and activists. It was through his unrelenting collaborations, intellectual dynamism, and political conviction that AIAS was first founded and later became self-sustaining.

In his opening remarks at the 2016 Summer School, Praveen Jha, from Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi, reminded us that Professor Moyo emphasized that our gathering was a Summer School (as opposed to a conference). Doing so, he explained, centralized our engagements as a collective, working, and learning together.

It was in this vein that this year's Summer School brought together three generations of intellectuals. Our aspiration was to work towards "organic growth"—again echoing Jha—and to reclaim knowledge as "transformation." Our energies were directed at reclaiming the very notion and task of transformation, which has been misappropriated by neo-imperial actors and their neoliberal dogmas.

(First pic)

CAPTION: At the Summer School, participants worked to honor Professor Sam Moyo's lifetime commitment to peasant struggles in the global South.

Paris Yeros, from the Federal University of ABC in Brazil prompted an urgency that compelled and sustained our conversations. "We are," he emphasized "in a long phase of expanded super-exploitation." We are in the 521st year of capitalism dependent upon colonialism in its various forms. Our present is prefigured by 350 years of dependence upon slavery. Actually existing capitalism is militarized, corporatized, and neoliberalized. One-third to one-half of the world will never be absorbed into formal, stable employment. This global capitalism is dependent upon a sustained and devastating "assault on the countryside" (again, to echo Yeros). This assault has triggered a rural exodus and caused a global ecological imbalance of irreversible proportions.

The devastation of the countryside is expressed as a persistent crisis of the peasantry in India. Presentations from Santosh Kumar, Manish Kumar, Gupreet Singh, and Amit Kumar addressed the political economy of crisis, farmer suicide, and agrarian distress in the Indian peasantry. A systemic crisis is characterized by a rise in landlessness, widespread use of destructive fertilizers, an increase in mono-crop rice-paddy systems, an overexploitation of land, and rising farmer indebtedness. While the numbers are contested and often underreported, Manish Kumar asserted

that there have been 15,552 farmer suicides every year in the last decade. This is a chilling 43 suicides per day.

This “long phase of expanded super-exploitation” is marked nonetheless by potential for expiration: Capitalism is “obsolescent capitalism,” to evoke the language of Samir Amin.

We seek a new balance between the town and the city, knowing that the last line of resistance—the last line of survival—is land. In 1961, Frantz Fanon wrote, “For a colonized people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and, above all, dignity.” The last line of defense is land in the town and in the city.

## RECLAIMING THE LAND

On the first day of the five-day School, we gathered to celebrate and reflect upon Professor Moyo’s political and intellectual work. Motivated by the tenth anniversary of the publication of Professor Moyo and Paris Yeros’ intervention into contemporary rural social movements in a neoliberal era, [Reclaiming the Land: The Resurgence of Rural Movements in Africa, Asia and Latin America](#), the theme for this year’s School was ‘Progressive Social Forces, Social Movements & Collective Actions in the Contemporary Agrarian Transformations in the South’. A second theme of the School was gender, which I turn to below.

When it was released in 2005, *Reclaiming the Land* was a significant and timely intervention in the political economy of peasant studies. The work remains relevant for contemporary deliberations. In a plenary session that celebrated the book’s anniversary, Yeros placed the work historically, discussing its emergence during a context of powerful rural resistances—among them the Zapatistas in Mexico and armed struggles for land in the Philippines—and in the wake of Zimbabwe’s “Fast Track” land reform program.

The book’s chapters illustrate important contemporary junctures between rural struggles, neoliberal dispossessions, the global agro-food system, and agrarian reform in Southern capitalist peripheries. Taken holistically, the book calls for a renewed emphasis on the national question within agrarian studies. Global theory, Moyo and Yeros assert, must address the particular challenges and pressures placed upon the countryside(s) of the capitalist periphery in a global regime that subsumes national capital within international capital. As activist Sophie Ogotu pointedly stated during the Summer School in the case of Kenya, “Soon you will have a very ‘developed’ country with lots of glass and tall beautiful buildings with big windows. But no air to breathe.”

In the Introduction to the volume, Moyo and Yeros (2005: 2) posit: “can we still speak of a ‘peasantry’ after a quarter-century of structural adjustment?... how can we reconcile the posited ‘disappearance’ of the peasantry with the fact that most progressive and militant movements in the world today are based in the countryside?” These questions provided a provocative platform for discussions at the School: What does “agrarian” mean when there is no coherent, self-reproducing peasant society?

## REPOSITIONING RURAL STRUGGLE

As agrarian scholars, we are aware of a near-perpetual need to push back against a tendency to detach the urban from the rural. A prevailing tendency to de-emphasize the rural presents it as a retroactive space that is at once culturally and socially vanishing and politically and economically de-centered.

Part of our embedded, transformative project was to challenge this rural/urban dichotomy. Jorge Americo’s analysis revealed the “whitening of the agrarian question in Brazil,” where rural-urban migration has been overwhelmingly Black. The movement is colloquially referred to as the “Black exodus.” At the same time, a national narrative seeks to erase, or “invisibilize,” a Black peasantry.

This invisibilizing erases Black claims and rights to land—as if Black urban dwellers appeared from nowhere. In this context, Americo asserts, “The land question in Brazil is a race question.” Our task is to re-trace these rural-urban linkages and to historicize Black migrations.

By 2000, 81 percent of Brazilians lived in urban areas. A maelstrom of Brazilian rural-to-urban migration is endemic urban homelessness alongside a large-scale closure of public space by capital. The collapse of the real estate market as a consequence of under-regulated financial speculation, Stella Paterniani explained, meant that by 2010, there were 290,000 empty buildings in São Paulo. At the same time, 130,000 families were without homes.

Paterniani explained some of the intricate and resisting practices of re-homing through a case study of one abandoned apartment complex in São Paulo. People occupying the complex came together to express a strong collectivity based on their co-habitation. They organized themselves politically and logistically by devising rotating schedules for cleaning public spaces and creating an incentive points-based system to increase participation in public and political events.

Painted on one of the walls of the apartment complex are the words, “The one who does not struggle is dead.” The collective of families came together to re-home a place that had been abandoned by financialized capitalism, yet deemed unlawful for habitation.

Further demonstrating the heterogeneous nature of rural/urban relationships and further challenging facile rural/urban dichotomies or distinctions, Ricardo Jacobs spoke about “an urban proletariat with peasant characteristics” in Cape Town, South Africa. His work with 185 households who occupy urban land for livestock grazing shows that the expected (Marxist) break between urban people and land did not occur, even though people are engaged in wage labor. While not expressed in the same way, Bill Martin’s discussion of Black urban farming in Detroit, Michigan, likewise revealed “an urban proletariat with peasant characteristics.”

Pic II

CAPTION: Over 50 participants attended the School, working collaboratively to address the most pressing agrarian issues of our day.

In responding to some of the questions raised in ‘Reclaiming the Land’, Yeros reflected upon our contemporary moment. We have witnessed, he argued, a shift from the more rural-based social movements of the early 21st century to the more urban-based social movements of the last eight years or so.

This turn is suggested in the sweeping protests in many African urban centers around rising food and fuel costs (2007 and 2008), the “Arab Spring” (2010 and 2011) and the “African Awakenings” (2010, 2011, 2012), the “Occupy Movement” against economic inequality (2011 and 2012), the “15-M Movement” in Spain (2011), anti-austerity movements in Greece (2011), and related socio-economic-political movements in which the occupation of an urban square or an urban center has been a powerful organizing mechanism.

While urban centers have been important sites for recent protest and political mobilizations, there have often been important rural-urban linkages in such struggles. For example, the self-immolation of Tarek el-Tayeb Mohamed Bouazizi (29 March 1984 – 4 January 2011) that ultimately catalyzed the Tunisian Revolution and arguably the Arab Spring, occurred in Sidi Bouzid, a small city (approximately 120,000) south of Tunis before spreading to the mega-urban centers of North Africa and the Middle East. Marcelo Rosa, from the Universidade de Brasília, reminded us that there is no static separation between the rural/urban in the South: Too often yesterday’s rural dispossessed become today’s urban dispossessed. People fighting for urban housing often have extended families in rural areas; these family members are likewise struggling for land and resource justice.

Despite facing considerable constraints and obstacles (including state violence and intimidation of protestors and state appropriations of movements, as demonstrated by Olympio Barbanti’s discussion of resistance in the Amazon), the scale of current rural resistance is considerable—

enough so to challenge Yeros' perhaps preemptive declaration that we have witnessed a shift towards urban-centered struggle. At least, this shift is in no way totalizing.

Part of what made the Summer School so important was that participants brought enormously disparate and dislocated struggles into one conversation, demonstrating the prominence, scale, and impact of current agrarian struggles. These discussions were made all the more crucial in the context of an international media's dominant focus on urban issues and urban struggles, which further supports an impression that contemporary social struggle is an urban phenomenon.

At the School, our discussions of agrarian resistance included struggles that are organized, non-organized, widespread, small-scale, non-movements, grassroots, feminist/womanist, Marxist, populist, and ecological—including struggles that incorporate and/or are incorporated by NGOs and struggles opposed to NGO involvement.

Merle Bowen shared lessons from Quilombo struggles for land rights in Brazil, focusing on the rise of CONAQ, the national Quilombo land movement. Like Maroons, Quilombos are descendants of enslaved people who successfully fled their slave masters and established autonomous communities. Grasian Mkodzongi discussed gold mining on the Great Dyke of Zimbabwe, where artisanal miners have repositioned their craft as "freedom mining." This new understanding, he argues, stresses their agency and autonomy of practice and, as such, is a form of resistance to super-exploitation.

Govind Kelkar disclosed the extent of ongoing rural struggles in Uttar Pradesh, India. The Gulabi Gang (a.k.a. the "pink brigade") is made up of 400,000 women protestors united against caste discrimination, domestic abuse, and corruption. Similarly, the 10-year long Aaroh campaign includes 42,000 women and 15,000 men members who demand legal land ownership. The slogan, Kelkar explained, urges recognition of women farmers: "We work 70 percent of the land, we want 70 percent of it!"

Generational issues were central to Gustavo Belisario's discussion of childhood in a Canaan encampment in Brazil, where a consequence of youth exodus to urban areas has been a concentration of children and the elderly in rural areas. A eucalyptus-producing company previously owned the encampment, where children's work was central in harvesting strawberries, making cement, and taking care of siblings. The Brazilian Ministry of Education embarked on a program to close several rural schools in the area and children came out to protest, occupying the ministry and symbolically marking the walls with their handprints.

Muryatan Barbosa spoke about resistance from the mothers of those killed by the police in Brazil, where the availability of firearms, vast socio-economic inequalities, and the genocidal foundation of the nation-state converge to produce a violence that is, following Fanon, systemic and self-destructive.

PIC III

CAPTION: Participants share knowledge from Black social movements in Brazil.

In his comparative examination of global "land grab" debates in East Africa, Guiliano Martinello discussed women-led protests against Amuru Sugar Works in Uganda. The project will appropriate 40,000 hectares of fertile farmland. Women staged large-scale protests, revealing their breasts in public to symbolize the hunger that will result from the project's land appropriations. Despite endemic hunger in South Sudan, Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, and across the Sahel, Joseph Chiombola explained, the land targeted for mechanization and plantation development is most often "breadbasket land."

As our activist and practitioner colleagues—among them Joseph Chiombola, Massay, Sophie Ogutu, Adwoa Sakyi, and Ngoni Chikowe—reminded us, "peace space is shrinking." My work along the Chad-Cameroon Oil Pipeline demonstrates some of the structural challenges to rural

resistance projects that contribute to this shrinking of space for peace. Connected by an oil pipeline, disparate communities in Cameroon struggle to unite, often without knowledge of the pipeline's ecological and social destructions in neighboring towns. Moreover, neoliberal capitalists operate through obscure processes, involving dozens of agents, agencies, and institutions. This plethora of subcontracting agencies and consortiums means that people often do not know which corporate, financial, or state agency to address with their grievances.

## A COMPREHENSIVE AND SOUTHERN SCHOOL

Much like Professor Moyo's interdisciplinary, politically motivated, and intellectually rigorous scholarship, the annual Summer School emphasizes the need to support meaningful, lasting, and interdisciplinary South-South exchanges. This year's participants were from Brazil, India, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Ghana, Senegal, Mali, Cameroon, South Africa, France, the American south, and more. Our collective endeavor was to bring into practice a Southern Scholarship from and in the South. At the same time, we recognized the need to reach out farther into the South for future Schools, to encourage even broader Southern participation, including from activists and scholars in Colombia, Mexico, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Palestine, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Difficult questions inevitably emerged around the geopolitics of knowledge. Carlos Mielitz introduced the new Higher Education Cooperation Plan of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), which seeks to support the maintenance of South-South connections for meaningful knowledge exchanges on topics related to rural wellbeing and hunger (Mielitz is himself a representative of FAO). This session was powerful for bringing representatives of a hugely influential and powerful institution, the FAO, into a room of activists-academics who have devoted much of their adult lives to confronting the challenges of capitalism's exploitation of the countryside. Our discussion emphasized the need to be critical as we seek meaningful platforms and relationships of exchange.

Several participants delivered presentations nearly exclusively citing Northern academics, demonstrating the globalized dominance of Northern scholarship even in an intentionally Southern intellectual and academic space. Attention was brought to these epistemological gaps during the Q&As. As a collective, we urged ourselves to reconsider the scholarship that we are citing and the scholars whose work we valorize, promote, and draw upon to understand rural social worlds and rural political economy in the South. The School is designed to allow feedback and critique during the last session and it was in this space that we agreed upon an urgent need to be increasingly attentive to Southern voices. We agreed to circulate a resource list of critical Southern scholarships—making connections between other projects, including the *Why Is My Curriculum so White?* campaign.

Confronting global capitalism requires serious and sustained conversations about South-South political and economic relations. Bon Monjane's examination of Brazilian capitalist investments in Mozambique demonstrated the risks of idealizing South-South relations. "South-south cooperation is camouflaged to advance investment and financing," he explained, in the case of ProSavana, a Brazilian agribusiness investor. ProSavana's promotional slogan, "Africans are thirsty for Brazil," seeks to dispossess farmers in the Nacala corridor of Mozambique. The ProSavana project will transform the corridor into an export zone of industrial soybean plantation in what has been referred to as "Africa's biggest land grab."

Alongside the geographical diversity of participants, the School brought together scholars, activists, practitioners, policy-makers, and farmers. Among the activists present was Sophie Dowllar from the World March of Women in Kenya, who was arrested with five of her colleagues in March 2000 for organizing a week of cultural celebration and activities in the Ogiek community in rural Kenya (read an interview with Sophie [here](#)). David Calleb Otieno joined the group from Kenyan Peasant's League (KPL), an organization that is fostering important solidarity links with social justice activists and political refugees across the region.

This diversity allowed us to retain an emphasis on the co-creation of relevant academic theory at the same time that many of our conversations and presentations emphasized the practical applications of these theories in the societies and cultures around us. We had a number of knowledge-sharing and informational sessions on concrete, contemporary activism within various agrarian organizations, including NCOM (Ghana's National Coalition on Mining), International Union of Food (IUF – an organization that unites food, farm, and hotel workers), the World March of Women, and La Via Campesina (an International Peasant Movement).

Tetteh Hormeku, the Head of Programmes at the Third World Network-Africa, presented a documentary film, "National Coalition on Mining (NCOM): Fighting for Equity in Ghana's Mining Sector." NCOM is the only mining collective in Ghana. It arose in response to community exploitation and environmental degradation by Newmont Mines and AngloGold Ashanti. Farmers in the film explain that mining companies "took advantage of our knowledge-gap to mistreat us." After advocacy and community education initiatives from NCOM, "we [the farmers] know a farmer's consent is very important."

Watching the film and listening to the perspectives of Ghanaian farmers, I recalled a scene from an American Discovery Chanel reality TV series tellingly titled, "Jungle Gold." During one episode, a Ghanaian farmer (whose land has been appropriated by two American brothers who have recently come to Ghana to mine its gold) walks boldly into the mining site, demanding sufficient payment for the loss of his land. A Ghanaian guard (hired by the American brothers) pushes the farmer into the mining site's water pit. Meanwhile, the American brothers dismiss the farmer as greedy, claiming that they have already paid him for the land.

In these scenes, the farmer's dispossession is reduced to cheap entertainment. His humiliation is complete. Thinking back to this TV episode emphasized the importance of venues like the Summer School to celebrate agrarian struggle and peasant life even as we acknowledge the considerable capitalist forces and actors repressing, co-opting, and subsequently humiliating rural people.

At one point in the film, a man reflects, "NCOM taught the people that dialogue is better than street protest." At the same time that we observe the range of successes achieved by NCOM, we hear echoes in this statement of a subtle NGO-ization of resistance. Some participants in the School have argued that NGOs too often play a strategic role in perpetuating neoliberal capitalism by capturing resistance and directing it at negotiations (at "dialogue") for survival within capitalism, rather than struggle for emancipation from—or transformation of—the system (see Issa Shivji's powerful article, "The Silences in NGO Discourse"). This problematic was addressed later by Dzifa Torvikey, who interrogated the changing character of social movements through a case study of NCOM. "Is NCOM a social movement?" She asked, addressing the complexities within the organizational structuring of dissent in Ghana.

While the integration of practitioner and activist voices was not seamless or fully proportional in the program of the School, our Q&A sessions and our conversations during breaks were animated and enriched by our differences. Within this unique inclusiveness was a linguistic elasticity. Seemingly everyone present spoke multiple languages. A few of our sessions were translated from Portuguese and it was not uncommon to hear four or five different languages spoken in side conversations throughout the day.

The opening up of a Summer School, what is typically a purely and exclusively academic space and venture, to so many outside of academia required that academic theory be accountable to people who are often much more grounded in agrarian struggles. My most meaningful and insightful exchanges during the School were those conversations held over lunch and dinner, often with activists and farmers who offered insights into, for example, the current transformation of the food market in Zimbabwe and its contributions to rising hunger or the rising threat to social movements and civil life by the passing of sweeping anti-terrorism laws across the African continent.



## GENDER AND THE AGRARIAN QUESTION

We maintained a steady focus on the historical and material actors and forces that produce and sustain global capitalism (imperialism), the differentiation of struggle (including an awareness of the social, gendered, economic, political, “ethnic,” and caste inequalities within rural societies), the intersection of oppressions, and material hardships produced within agrarian places and bodies.

Many of our conversations emphasized the need to place gender at the center of the “land question” in the South. This placement moves beyond “add gender and stir” approaches more popular in the neoliberal corporate academy, governmental policy, and established developmental organizations.

Rather, this emphasis, Dzodzi Tsikata (from the Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER) at the University of Ghana and current president of CODESRIA) stressed, is a long-term gendered approach that moves beyond models of neoliberal developmentalism. To achieve this (re)conceptualization of gender and agrarian studies, Tsikata argued, we seek a “transformative feminism.” Note again the emphasis on recapturing the language of “transformation.” In this transformative feminism, race, caste, class, generation, age, and larger social relations are informative of and for social relations with land.

Issa Shivji circulated a “quick note” (available [here](#)) on his initial reflections after the Gender Plenary. In these notes, he emphasized the need to engage our conversation as a “theoretical task [to] guide our practice from the standpoint of the working people.” Shivji summarized central themes from Tsikata and Marjorie Mbilinyi’s plenary as (1) the need, as posited by Tsikata, to embed “the gender question” within the radical political economy and (2) the need, following Mbilinyi, to emphasize the “bigger picture” of global capitalist hegemony and patriarchal relations. The latter, I think, is an emphasis on the interrelationship between capitalist hegemony with patriarchal relations. As Tsikata reminded us, Fredrick Engles’ work on the origins of family relations under capitalism centered upon property inheritance as passing from father to son—relations that pre-exist modern capitalism. Patriarchy and capitalism are inextricably linked. In response to a question from the audience about women’s potential preference for one “system” of exploitation over another, Tsikata asserted, “We do not have patriarchy [as if] by itself. We have patriarchal relations that underpin the system.”

Shivji’s assertion that women “subsidize capital” through her super-exploitation by capital (as a laborer/producer) and her exploitation within the household (as unpaid laborer/reproducer) is helpful in conceptualizing women’s integration within neoliberal capitalism, particularly rural women (whose household/reproductive labor is often greater than women in urban areas). This was demonstrated during several Q&A sessions, in which audience members called upon women’s subsidization of capital to interpret, for example, the gendered inequalities of labor in out-growing operations in Ghana and in Lynn Ossome’s examination of social reproduction of households in India.

Karolyna Herrera’s work with rural women in southern Brazil reflects the extent of women’s unacknowledged subsidization: Here, women interpret themselves as “only helping” their husbands. This “helping” is reflected through four to five hours of daily work. As women “subsidize capital,” so too does the frontier. Capitalism, Yeros powerfully reminded us, “empties out the countryside.”

The School’s sessions on gender presented comprehensive analyses of the themes introduced by Tsikata and Mbilinyi. A number of central themes emerged from further discussions at the Summer School, including:

(1) The socio-economic reality of male out-migration and its implications, including (i) challenges of female-headed households (for example, according to Mbilinyi, 30 percent of households in Tanzania are female-headed), (ii) economic transformation, as activities that were once male-

dominated become open to women (Cape Verde), and (iii) social and family transformations in shifting land regimes (Zimbabwe).

Vongai Nyawo argued that Zimbabwe's fast-track land reform created conditions for the disintegration of the family, resulting in increased insecurity for families. An interesting theme that emerged from her presentation was the notion that although "men look absent, they might not be." Through remittances men might be present. During the Q&A, one audience member distinguished between "social fathers" and "financial fathers." The argument was that although a man might be physically absent, his financial remittances mark a form of presence. Although our brief discussion did not allow an expansive exploration of this distinction, its mention illustrated some of the complexity of fathers' changing involvements and roles in agrarian family structures. Interestingly, I found echoes in Vongai's rural-focused discussion with Otrude Moyo's (2008) [work on challenges within families in urban Zimbabwe](#) during the same period. Taken together, these arguments reveal the ways in which large-scale socio-economic changes, such as land appropriations and redistributions and economic violence, perpetuate conflict and relationships of violence within communities and families in both urban and rural areas.

Meanwhile, Carla Carvalho's scholarship highlighted a redefinition of gender roles through a case study of rum production in rural Cape Verde, where a dearth of male labor (as men leave the community and/or go abroad) has led to an expansion of women's roles in *forndjeras* (rum production). Her discussion echoed Mbilinyi's emphasis on the "creative conflict" that can emerge out of gender tensions. Mbilinyi, for example, emphasized rural women's access to ready cash (as opposed to men's access to greater amounts of cash). "We have this idea that it is 'small-small' but it has enormous impacts on the everyday relations. When a child comes home in need of paper for school, for example, the child goes to mama."

(2) A gendered segmentation of labor—particularly the feminization of cheap, casual, and precarious labor—and its relationship to the reproduction of the household (including relationships between co-wives and mothers and children and its differentiation by economic structure, social systems, and agrarian production systems) as well as the role of the state and the status of labor organizations.

In the [Blue Skies](#) out-grower production structure in Ghana, women make up 60 percent of the employees, yet, Joseph Yaro explained, women's positions are the least secure and the poorest remunerated. In such rural out-growing production schemes, women have become "permanent casuals" in a context of labor overabundance. While hegemonic developmental paradigms espouse "employment creation" as a goal in poverty reduction needs, we must advance a nuanced reconceptualization of what this "employment creation" looks like, as social differentiation, casualization, and insecure conditions generate "winners" and "losers" in out-grower value chains.

During the Q&A for this panel, audience members critiqued any oversimplification of women's incorporation into fruit out-growing schemes. Sophie Ogutu problematized the characterization of women laborers as somehow "more malleable" because of her motherhood and family responsibilities. She asserted that women find themselves in a "struggle within a struggle." Society first places the woman as the responsible reproducer for the family (she must care for her children and for sick family members) and secondly, society damns her for (sometimes desperately) seeking money and allowances to bear these family-related responsibilities.

(3) Women's strategies to access to land. In a context of an aggressive promotion of agro-business and policies of gender mainstreaming (which are often in diametrical opposition to women's wellbeing), Gaynor Parodza warned, "Policy-makers treat women as homogenous and this risks harming and excluding the most vulnerable or those with the most fragile rights."

Rama Dieng's discussion of differences in gendered access to land in Senegal firmly asserted this heterogeneity. She comparatively examined systems of land tenure among the Wolof, the Sereer, and the Pulaar. Hierarchical rules, structured positionality, and polygamy in Wolof and Pulaar



societies, Dieng explained, culminate in land tenure practices reluctant to women's ownership of land. The "more egalitarian" Sereer tend to have more flexible land tenure.

Govind Kelkar discussed the social and cultural norms that sanction and reinforce unequal access to ownership of land and property in Uttar Pradesh, India, where 63 percent of all women workers are in agriculture. Multifold changes in rural India, including the slow breakdown of caste hierarchies, a declining importance of agriculture and its links with power, and collective social movements have led to marginal increases in women's access to land. At the same time, Kelkar explained, 80 percent of women say that they want their land to go to their sons rather than to their daughters. Kelkar demanded, "How do we interpret this fragmented voice in the field?"

Our Q&A discussion emphasized the lived realities of gendered land tenure, including a need to recognize that women live in legal pluralities, often navigating both statutory and customary laws. Statutory and customary are not somehow discrete, separate systems: In Ghana, for example, a person is given the land from the chief but still must get the title from the state.

## PRESERVING SOUTH-SOUTH SPACES FOR RURAL SOCIAL JUSTICE

Following the Summer School, Chambi Chachage and Deborah Bryceson offered rejoinders to Shivji's notes (see Chachage's [response](#) and Bryceson's [response](#)) although neither attended the School. While I support projects to spread the knowledge shared and co-created during the School as widely as possible and I am passionate about critical exchanges of ideas to advance our projects, I am troubled by a wider tendency in academia to over-problematize minutiae in ways that are counter-productive for movement making.

Briefly, for example, Bryceson's argument that we need an elaboration of rural households as "far less coherent socially and materially" was indeed evident throughout our conversations (as my discussion above illustrates). In his response to Shivji, Chachage wonders, "some of us are compelled to ask Shivji...about this capital that is exploiting (the labour) of both the African peasant woman and man. What is capital? Who is owning [sic] it? Aren't these owners the ones who are exploiting these men and women, albeit differentially, in terms of what some black feminists conceptualise as [intersecting oppressions](#) in regard to class, gender and race among other 'social categories'?" We can respond by turning back to one of Moyo and Yeros' central inquiries in *Reclaiming the Land*, in which they articulate the need for a more appropriate and renewed global theory of agrarian change, one that includes a "holistic analysis of global capitalism (imperialism)" through a focus on the material struggles produced at the interface of global and national capitalistic interests.

Taken holistically in the context of the Agrarian South Summer School—a place that we are struggling to protect and sustain, where we come together to address devastating poverties that trigger thousands of annual farmer suicides in India and that disproportionately disadvantage the elderly, women, and children—we must work to ensure that our provocations advance political momentums and struggles against neoliberal capitalism (imperialism)'s violence against entire ecosystems.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the African Institute for Agrarian Studies and Jimma University's College of Law & Governance for supporting my travel to Zimbabwe to attend the Summer School. A special thanks to all of the people based at the AIAS in Harare, who did such tremendous work putting the School together, including Walter Chambati, Rangarirai Muchetu, Tendai Machemedze, Steve Mberi, and Freedom Mazwi. Finally, thank you, Dr. Maimuna Islam, for your very helpful comments on earlier drafts of this reflection.

\* Amber Murrey researches and writes on transformations of life, place, and politics amid structural, developmental, and colonial violence(s) in Central and West Africa. Amber is currently an Assistant Professor of Development Studies at Jimma University in Jimma, Ethiopia. She has a PhD in Geography and the Environment from the University of Oxford and a MA in Pan-African Studies from Syracuse University. You can email her at [amber.murrey-ndewa@jesus.ox.ac.uk](mailto:amber.murrey-ndewa@jesus.ox.ac.uk)

\*\*\*



## African Institute for Agrarian Studies

19 Bodle Avenue, Eastlea, P.O. Box CY1909, Causeway, Harare, Zimbabwe. Tel: 263 4 708654/ 795751, 795 877, 2931438-9  
Fax : 263 4 795 754, email: [research@aiastrust.org](mailto:research@aiastrust.org), website: [www.aiastrust.org](http://www.aiastrust.org)

25 January 2016

Dear Partners and Stakeholders

### Ref: Transition at AIAS

The African Institute for Agrarian Studies (AIAS) entered into an unexpected transition following the sudden and tragic passing of its Executive Director, Professor Sam Moyo in November 2015. This letter serves to inform you of the decisions adopted by the Board of Trustees during their meetings convened in January 2016 to manage the transition.

The membership of the Board of Trustees was expanded through the appointment of four additional Trustees in order to boost the capacities to deal with the institutional transition, namely:

- **Praveen Jha** (Chairperson and Professor, Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India);
- **Dzodzi Tsikata** (Associate Professor, Institute of Statistical and Economic Research, University of Ghana and President of CODESRIA);
- **Issa Shivji** (Professor and Director, Nyerere Resource Centre, Dar es Salam, Tanzania) and;
- **Paris Yeros** (Adjunct Professor, Department of Economic Sciences, Federal University of ABC, Sao Paulo, Brazil).

These four new trustees bring in a wealth of experience in research and policy analysis and are committed to AIAS' agenda of enhancing Africa's agrarian transformation. Moreover, the new trustees will also provide impetus to the institute's quest to extend informed participation in the development and articulation of effective land and agrarian policies within a context of partnerships in the Global South. The expanded Board of Trustees now reflects the South-South thrust of AIAS' work and now brings together nine Trustees including the existing membership comprised of:

- **Joshua Nyoni** (Agricultural and Natural Resources Consultant, Zimbabwe)
- **Themba Maluleke** (Rural and Urban Planning, South Africa)
- **Doris Sikhosana** (Former Director, CORN, University of Kwa Zulu Natal, South Africa)
- **Kojo Amanor** (Professor, Institute of Statistical and Economic Research, University of Ghana)
- **Michael Odhiambo** (Land Law Expert, Ministry of Lands, South Sudan)

The trustees resolved to devote more time to recruit a substantive Executive Director to replace Professor Sam Moyo. In the interim, the trustees appointed **Professor Issa Shivji as the Honorary Executive Director** to oversee the affairs of the Trust until such a time that they can recruit a substantive Executive Director. Professor Shivji will lead the recruitment of a substantive Executive Director under the direction of the Board of Trustees; and the development of a Strategic Plan for the AIAS (2016 – 2020) to guide the programmatic direction, as well as providing oversight and strategic roles of furthering the vision and mission of AIAS.

Trustees

Joshua Nyoni  
ZIMBABWE

Kojo Amanor  
GHANA

Themba Maluleke  
SOUTH AFRICA

Michael O. Odhiambo  
KENYA

Doris Sikhosana  
SOUTH AFRICA

Sam Moyo  
ZIMBABWE