Capital Penetration and the Subordination of the Peasantry Under Neoliberalism in Africa

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Abstract As a dominant trajectory animating global capitalism, neoliberalism affects, in multiple ways, land and agriculture across the African continent, including the lives of the peasantry. Though its effects are uneven and differentiated, it generally tends to marginalise the peasantry further or incorporates them into the global political economy in a subordinate manner while also generating new rural inequalities. In large part, this is because neoliberalism (as a class project) facilitates and entrenches capital penetration into the agrarian economies of African nations. In focusing on the land and agricultural sector in primarily southern and eastern Africa, this chapter examines key dimensions of the neoliberal project in the land and agricultural sector in primarily southern and eastern Africa as the means for framing the following case study (or nation-based) chapters in this volume. This includes discussions around a reconfigured land reform programme, a new wave of land dispossession called 'land grabs', and restructured agricultural and marketing arrangements such as contract farming, all of which have ongoing implications for levels of food security and poverty amongst the peasantry. However, the chapter also shows that capital penetration and the subordination of the peasantry under neoliberalism in Africa is prone to crisis and resistance.

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1 Introduction

Land and agriculture continue to be central to most African economies (Moyo et al. 2019). Agriculture's contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of African nations averages 15%, ranging from 3% in Botswana to over 50% in Chad (OECD/FAO 2016). The importance of agriculture to the continent is also underscored by the fact that it is a source of employment for over 50% of the rural labouring population and provides livelihoods to the majority of rural households, which consist of mainly peasants.

Processes of depeasantisation (and proletarianisation) occurred across the African continent during the time of colonialism and subsequently as well, leading at times to claims about the inevitable 'death of the peasantry'. However, processes of repeasantisation are also now evident (Moyo and Yeros 2005), arising in part because of the negative consequences of neoliberal restructuring. Irrespective of the extent of depeasantisation and repeasantisation as opposing trends, land and agriculture will continue to be central to any meaningful development agenda on the continent. Despite this significance and the important contribution of agriculture to national economies, Africa remains in a deep agrarian crisis characterised by poverty, malnutrition, land alienation, food insecurity and an ever-increasing food import bill (Patnaik 2011; Moyo 2014). Overall, these conditions are attributed to a broad range of factors, such as deficient state policies, unfavourable integration into the global economy, commodity price volatility, and the ongoing emphasis on exporting unprocessed primary products (Patnaik 2011).

In this context, international financial institutions (for instance, the World Bank) and neoclassical economists argue that the agrarian crisis is an outcome almost exclusively of misguided policy frameworks, market inefficiencies and distortions, and counterproductive state intervention in African economies, which undermine domestic and foreign private sector investment and productivity (World Bank 2019; FAO 2012; Kirsten and Sartorius 2002). In promoting neoliberal restructuring, they thus highlight the importance of opening up markets as well as furthering capital and technology transfers, thereby in turn presenting an opportunity for African countries to develop under the tutelage of global capital (Rodrick 2002).

In adopting an alternative argument, radical agrarian political economists attribute the crisis to the character and effects of neoliberalism as an economic and political configuration marking contemporary capitalism: this incorporates, for example, unequal exchange on global markets, large-scale land dispossessions, underfunding of the agricultural (particularly smallholder or peasant) sector, and macro-economic initiatives such as the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In large part, this volume of chapters on neoliberalism, capital penetration and the peasantry in Africa is consistent with the claims embedded in the perspective of radical political economy.

As a dominant trajectory animating global capitalism, neoliberalism affects, in multiple ways, land and agriculture across the African continent, including the lives of the peasantry. Though its effects are uneven and differentiated, it generally tends to marginalise the peasantry further or incorporates them into the global political economy in a subordinate manner while also generating new rural inequalities. In large part, this is because neoliberalism (as a class project) facilitates and entrenches capital penetration into the agrarian economies of African nations. In focusing on the land and agricultural sector in primarily southern and eastern Africa, this chapter examines key dimensions of the neoliberal project in the land and agricultural sector in primarily southern and eastern Africa as the means for framing the following case study (or nation-based) chapters in this volume. This includes discussions around a reconfigured land reform programme, a new wave of land dispossession called 'land grabs', and restructured agricultural and marketing arrangements such as contract farming, all of which have ongoing implications for levels of food security and poverty amongst the peasantry. However, the chapter also shows that capital penetration and the subordination of the peasantry under neoliberalism in Africa is prone to crisis and resistance.

The chapters in the volume include case studies of the following countries: South Africa, Uganda, Namibia, Malawi, Zambia, Kenya, Mozambique and Eswatini, and two on Zimbabwe. Before outlining the volume, we first provide brief notes about neoliberalism central to any analysis of neoliberalism, capital penetration and the peasantry in Africa, after which we focus more specifically on questions of land and agriculture.

2 Neoliberalism: Brief Notes

As a concept, neoliberalism has increasingly dominated the development discourse over the past half century. As well, without doubt, it has become a very slippery term (like 'development' itself), with scholarly discussions about it marked by considerable complexity and contestation (Ashman et al. 2011; Thorsen and Lie 2006). Based on a laissez-faire economic ideology (Wolford 2007; Harrison 2019), the central tenet of neoliberalism, however, is the significance of the so-called self-regulating market (as an economic institution) in supposedly facilitating and maximising economic growth and redistribution. The hallmark of the neoliberal agenda, for agrarian spaces, has been the entrenchment of landed property rights and the push for market-led land reforms, which are viewed as sine qua non to development (Moyo 2008).

Initially, neoliberalism appeared to be merely an economic project but it later expanded more explicitly into a political project as well, involving processes of state restructuring for purposes of neoliberalism's political agenda (Harrison 2005). In pursuing this agenda, the buzzword became 'good governance' which was then used to propagate and effect regime change if and when necessary (Moyo et al. 2012). As a result, various state-centred policies, programmes and agencies came about to ensure particular public sector reforms, such as output-oriented budgeting and the commercialisation-privatisation of parastatals. However, the early example of the

Chilean military junta (from the 1970s) highlights that these public sector reforms do not rest on, or require, 'good governance' as understood in terms of the principles of liberal democracy.

Despite the politics of neoliberalism, the intervention mechanisms promoted and implemented under neoliberal restructuring are presented typically as technical-scientific (or 'technocratic fixes'—Moorsom et al. 2020), camouflaging the politics intrinsic to the neoliberal project (Bond and Dor 2003), thereby tending to 'obfuscate the actually existing power relations playing out' (Moorsom et al. 2020, p. 214). Concomitant to this project is exceedingly limited social and political accountability in the relationship between states and citizens, in large part because of the marked influence of the Bretton Woods institutions in formulating and shaping the fundamentals of neoliberalism, which states then impose on the populace. Thus, with its emergence, the neoliberal project has provided limited space for state sovereignty globally (Prashad 2013; Moyo and Yeros 2005).

While some African countries have tended at times to resist the global dictates through various local initiatives (such as Zimbabwe's fast track land reform programme), destabilisation campaigns (including sanctions) are deployed by global hegemonic forces in forestalling these (Moyo et al. 2013; Moyo and Yeros 2007). Economic strangulation is thus a strategy used by monopoly capital to discipline those countries that challenge neoliberal tenets in significant ways. This raises complex questions about state autonomy vis-à-vis global capital as well as the importance of resolving the national question through pursuing relatively autonomous development paths (Moyo and Yeros 2011).

Since the 1970s, neoliberalism has been accompanied by key imperialist tendencies, taking place via the easy movement of capital throughout the global system, the prioritisation of property rights and the promotion of free trade across national boundaries while, simultaneously, crowding out the import-substitution, redistributive and heterodox economic policies prevalent prior to its emergence (Patnaik 2003; Harvey 2005). Financialisation has been increasingly central to these tendencies, which hinges on borrowing on markets often for speculative purposes, mergers and diversifications (Shivji 2011; Amanor 2019). This reflects the emergence and consolidation of fictitious capital unrelated to any form of production and which ultimately subsumes real capital (Ashman et al. 2011) or, to put it another way, it entails the subordination of the real economy to the virtual one (Ye et al. 2020). Further, the prominence of financialisation prioritises shareholder value over social value (Ashman et al. 2011). This ongoing rise and development of financialisation provide the platform for capital to penetrate new spatial and sectoral zones that provide exceedingly high rates of interest (Patnaik 2003). At the same time, '[f]inancial capital is not able (nor willing) to solve the real problems of the real world – it is only interested in further [extraction and] accumulation' (van der Ploeg 2020, p. 957).

In the end, it is possible to distil a number of—interrelated—points about neoliberalism analytically and conceptually. We bring to the fore seven points in the remainder of this section (see Klerck this volume, for an expansion of some of these points). First of all, neoliberalism is an ongoing process and not merely a condition (a 'becoming', rather than simply a 'being'); because of this, 'neoliberalisation' may be a more apt phrase. This means that it is necessary to be constantly sensitive to neoliberal reconfigurations over time. Secondly, neoliberalism is marked by variegation; in other words, it takes on different forms and trajectories, though within the broad remit of market-led growth and development (Peck and Theodore 2007; Brenner et al. 2010). For this reason, neoliberalism does not exist anywhere in a 'pure form', just as the existence of a self-regulating market is utopian. Because of this, new forms of agrarian and land restructuring are appearing in Africa, including in relation to 'land grabs' and contract farming, but not in any homogenous or blanket manner.

Thirdly, neoliberalism does not entail outright state deregulation; rather, re-regulation is taking place. States in Africa continue to provide the conditions necessary for the expanded reproduction and accumulation of capital, including facilitating capital flows and investments. Fourthly, in aligning with monopoly capital under neoliberalism (Moyo et al. 2013), the state takes on different forms: from liberal democratic to semi-autocratic ones and even military dictatorships (incorporating the notion of 'authoritarian neoliberalism'—Harrison 2019), all of which are compatible in their own way with the 'reign' of market forces (Rosset et al. 2006; Moyo et al. 2012). In this regard, the state may deploy violence and bypass democratic principles in creating enabling conditions for the market. However, as contradictory institutional arrangements, states in Africa are not at all times compliant to global forces, as they may emerge as sites of reform or outright opposition (Moorsom et al. 2020).

Fifthly, so as not to treat neoliberal restructuring as moved along by an invisible hand, it must be recognised as a social-cum-political project (specifically, a class project) with specific actors and agencies pushing it forward (Harvey 2016; Patnaik 2003, 2020; Shivji 2009, 2020). Sixthly, neoliberalisation is not a coherent project and is prone to crises; indeed, it emerged as an answer to crises in the first instance. Crises are immanent to its very existence, and it thus engenders social disorder and political instability. Certainly, wars and conflicts have been initiated by global powers for purposes of new variants of primitive accumulation (via minerals, land and natural resources) (Moyo et al. 2012; Moyo and Yeros 2005; Patnaik and Patnaik 2016). Seventhly, neoliberalism is subject to resistance and opposition, and the latter contribute to the reconfiguring of neoliberalism. Through an unstated capital-state alliance, the project of neoliberalism subordinates and marginalises the peasantry, including by means of repressive measures (Moyo et al. 2019; Nyong'o 2013; Moyo 2008), and it also reinforces social hierarchies based on class, gender, age, caste, ethnicity, and race (Ossome 2020; Andrews 2021; Moyo and Yeros 2005). This goes some way in explaining the agrarian unrest reverberating around Africa presently. Currently, numerous social movements exist which advocate for the dismantling of neoliberalism (Moyo and Yeros 2011; Moyo and Yeros 2005), including via the 'reclamation of the land' (Moyo and Yeros 2005).

3 Neoliberalism: Land and Agriculture

In this context, we consider the effects of neoliberalism on land and agriculture in Africa, and specifically on the peasantry. In speaking about the negative effects in particular on the peasantry, we are not implying an essentialised notion of the peasantry built upon romanticism, a notion which Soper (2020) has recently warned us about. More specifically, we do not claim that the peasantry is an undifferentiated whole and, further, is inherently and invariably progressive in terms of agricultural practices or politics.

Nevertheless, in various ways, neoliberalism's practices around land and agriculture in Africa (and indeed elsewhere) depend regularly on processes of extraction. This does not refer exclusively to pockets or enclaves of extraction but to a more generalised mode of production and exchange under neoliberal capitalism, or a move 'from single and dispersed activities towards a structural feature of the politico-economic system as a whole' (Ye et al. 2020, p. 156) This has become crystallised in many cases of land concentration and grabbing (by private, domestic and international capital), monopolistic control over natural resources, and new forms of production arrangements (for example, contract farming) involving agrarian capital—in which there is corporate control over flows of commodities, credit and value.

Adopted by governments throughout Africa, SAPs and later forms of neoliberal programmes have, amongst other effects, undercut petty-commodity production in agrarian economies (Shivji 2011; Moyo 2011) and, more significantly, rural food security. In addition, peasant social movements (notably La Via Campesina) link the agrarian crisis to the adoption of green revolution inputs (seeds and chemicals), which harm the soil and cause overall environmental degradation (McKeon 2015). The dominance of international agribusiness firms like Monsanto on input markets (through the supply of seeds, chemicals and fertilisers) is understood as not only detrimental to the environment but also exploitative because these agribusinesses generate super profits (Mazwi et al. 2021; McKeon 2015) through the extraction of value and unequal exchange (Shivji 2011; Sachikonye 1989).

There is no doubt that, for decades now, neoliberalism has been at the core of global capitalism and core to the crises intrinsic to its uneven development. The global neoliberal economic and political architecture has shaped (and reshaped) land and agricultural policies and practices in Africa on an ongoing basis, with serious consequences for the well-being of peasants. Since the 2007/2008 global crises (including food and energy), Africa has witnessed the penetration of capital into the land and agrarian sectors from at least 130 foreign investors drawn from approximately 30 countries (Moyo et al. 2019; Land Matrix Data 2012). These 'investments' have occurred through so-called 'large-scale land investments' in communal and 'unoccupied land', via foreign (privatised) takeovers of state-owned plantation estates by transnational corporations, and by means of the subordination of the peasantry to contract farming arrangements (Chambati et al. 2018; Hall et al. 2017).

There are contrasting views on the effects and consequences of this neoliberal restructuring (and 'investments' in land and agriculture) on the well-being of peasant farmers, as indicated earlier. While the consequences are uneven and differentiated, a general trend exists consistent with the overall arguments of radical agrarian political economists. A survey of pertinent literature demonstrates that the penetration of capital has led to increased poverty, malnutrition, hunger, growing landlessness and deepening inequalities for rural, 'working people' (Amanor 2019; Jha and Yeros 2019; Chambati et al. 2018). These interconnected challenges undermine peace, justice and stability due to the increasing number of 'working people' who are cast to the very margins of society, thus rendering them part of a growing reserve army of labour (unemployed proletariats, peasants, landless and self-employed) for which there is likely no land nor labour in the foreseeable future (Moyo and Yeros 2011). As a consequence of marginalisation and subordination, demands for an equitable distribution of resources, economic restructuring and state accountability (Patnaik and Patnaik 2016) are becoming louder, alongside diverse forms of rural mobilisation.

In recent decades, the penetration of capital has been largely driven by the desire to resolve growing food and energy deficiencies in metropolitan states (Moyo et al. 2019). Under neoliberal capitalism, two broad phases of capital penetration around land and agriculture in Africa exist. The first wave was facilitated by the SAPs (1980s and 1990s), while the second one followed the 2007/2008 food, energy and financial crises. Under the first wave, capital penetration required the freer movement of finance capital, privatisation of national assets, and trade liberalisation (Patnaik 2011, 2015; Havnevik et al. 2007; Hanson and Hentz 1999). Prior to this, and despite authoritarian tendencies, independent African nations were characterised by state-interventionist policies (including around land redistribution) and import-substitution strategies which generally supported agriculture, including peasant agriculture (Mkandawire and Soludo 1999; Moyo 2011; Yeros and Jha 2020). The second wave, which we discuss more fully below, is currently ongoing, and its effects continue to be experienced in the African countryside.

3.1 Agricultural Restructuring Under Neoliberalism

Capital penetration is related to ongoing primitive accumulation insofar as it facilitates the latter, leaving behind pauperised labourers and peasants. Narrow Eurocentric interpretations of primitive accumulation reduce it to corrupt activities mainly by the African ruling elite (see for example Mills et al. 2019). While such activities do exist, primitive accumulation is to be understood first and foremost in terms of the imperatives of global capitalism. Hence, according to a Marxist perspective, primitive accumulation entails:

> [T]he deployment of extra-economic force to separate peasants from the land and commodify both labour and land;. . .and how the capitalist system once created, continues to exploit

> labour by less transparent means, that is, by the appropriation of labour power beyond the labour time necessary for the social reproduction of the workforce (Moyo et al. 2012, p. 185).

This process is supported by Northern countries working in conjunction with multilateral development and financial agencies, and it perpetuates the historical marginalisation of peoples of Africa under neocolonialism (Nkrumah 1965). Thus, the latest wave of capital penetration under contemporary capitalism should be considered as a new round of primitive accumulation which further immiserates the peasantry (Moyo et al. 2012).

Admittedly, the neoliberal doctrine as espoused by the World Bank (in its World Development Report of 2008) and by the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) rightly places primacy on rural development as a strategy for poverty alleviation in Africa (World Bank 2007; FAO 2012). However, this primacy, which in the end reinforces the global international division of labour, misses the point by suggesting that a market-driven rural development strategic framework is a panacea for agrarian underdevelopment and poverty. For over four decades now, African countries have pursued in the main a market-driven approach to rural development with minimal success (Havnevik et al. 2007). These rural policies have been advanced in the name of the fallacious mantra of ‘getting prices right’, which assumes that liberalisation of the agricultural sector automatically translates into an improvement in the lives of the peasantry. On the contrary, evidence from contributors to this book shows that privatising the agricultural sector and opening it up to the market mechanism tend to complicate the lives and livelihoods of the peasantry even further, with women suffering the most (for case studies of this, see Tekwa and Tekwa this volume, Lukalo this volume, and Mwando this volume).

One key outcome of the penetration of capital under neoliberalism’s primitive accumulation has been the restructuring of agricultural production by reinforcing the international division of labour (Amin 2015; Jha and Yeros 2019; Moyo and Yeros 2005). Under this system, most African countries continue as major producers of commodities for metropolitan countries while producing a decreasing amount of food grains for domestic consumption (Patnaik 2011; Moyo and Yeros 2005). In India, for example, cotton production for export has increased at the expense of food security among the peasantry (Patnaik 2003). African countries became major losers under SAPs (Shivji 1992) as they resorted to the production of export crops, resulting in an oversupply of commodities on global markets and thereby triggering a fall in international prices. The far-reaching effect of this neoliberal arrangement was massive declines and losses in foreign exchange generated (Patnaik 2011).

Concomitant to rising exports have been declines in the production of food crops in Africa. This has led to increased food imports as cereal production is replaced by the production of export crops (Moyo 2011). For African states, after SAPs, there was a 33% fall in cereal production (Patnaik 2003). What then emerged under conditions of food insecurity was the rise of food aid and increased dependency on donor support. Food insecurity required African states to mobilise scarce foreign exchange for the importation of food grains from the United States, Canada, Europe, and Argentina (Patnaik 2011), thereby undercutting the growth of national economies. Even for countries that had adequate foreign exchange available, the central state was found in many cases to be simply unwilling to commit resources to import food grains for millions of people facing hunger and starvation, thus severely compromising the nutritional diets of the peasantry (Patnaik 2011). A general pattern emerging from the global food regime, for most of Africa, is that of increased incidences of poverty and malnutrition at the household level.

Another key characteristic of global agricultural production and trade during this phase has been volatile global markets, with supply and demand being key determinants (Martiniello 2016; Patnaik and Patnaik 2016). As a result of these tendencies, the possibility of capital formation for peasants becomes increasingly dependent on global market prices, and this has led to 'dependent-capitalisation' where small-scale farmers accumulate when prices are high and are reduced to paupers in periods when crops prices go down (Korovkin 1992; Mazwi et al. 2020). This global price volatility has affected farmers across the African continent (Moyo 2011).

The reconfiguration of global production systems has been accompanied by the intensification of contract farming and out-grower schemes, driven mainly by monopolistic international agribusiness corporations (Amanor 2019; Jha and Yeros 2019; Mazwi 2020). Contract farming is a mechanism used by large agribusiness firms to structure agricultural production in the peripheries by extracting value from crop commodities through capturing the input and output markets and the processing of primary commodities (Jha and Yeros 2019). These global-driven agricultural production and marketing processes reduce the autonomy and fortunes of the peasantry (see Sakata this volume, Mhlanga this volume, and Bruna this volume). As Amanor (2019) notes:

> Most international agricultural markets are characterised by concentration and monopoly and intense competition to control markets – through outsourcing, takeovers, and mergers – and the control and regulation of production through contracts. These features have considerable impact upon agricultural production (Amanor 2019, p. 31).

Through the restructuring of global finance, trade and production, international monopoly corporations use intermediaries at the local level (national and sub-national) to push forward contract farming (Amanor 2019). Additionally, they become engaged in other activities, which range from industrial manufacturing to banking and real estate (Jha and Yeros 2019). In covering wider geographical and sectoral spaces, their expansion represents a new mode of global capitalism different from colonialism (and even recent land grabs), where the metropolis directly controls land in the peripheries. Under contract farming, the control of land by monopoly capital and the metropolis is indirect (Amanor 2019), and it hence ensures a mediated form of imperial control by the metropolis over so-called developing nations (Patnaik and Patnaik 2016).

Nearly a decade ago, research showed that some countries in Africa have almost 100% of certain commodities produced under contract farming while other commodities remain underfunded (Oya 2012). The level of contract farming in African countries has no doubt increased, although there is a lack of studies showing its prevalence currently. At the same time, the scale and extent of contract farming vary from one country to another. The commodities grown under contract farming include sugar, coffee, tea, palm oil, cocoa tea, tobacco, cotton and horticultural commodities, with many of these being perishable export products (Little 2014). Production of contracted export crops (often, non-food crops) has altered land-use patterns in Africa significantly by diminishing the total land area where own consumption food grains are produced, a development which has seriously undermined food self-sufficiency (Moyo 2011; Patnaik 2011). It has also contributed to undercutting historical-cultural practices around food and agriculture, leading to, for instance, 'seek activism' (Peschard and Randeria 2020) in the face of genetic modification and related phenomena.

Available data reveal that the production of export crops grew by between 6 to 13%, while the volume of food grains produced decreased significantly in the 1990s (Patnaik 2011). More recent evidence shows that food dependency increased post the 2007/2008 global economic crisis. The FAO database indicates that cereal imports in sub-Saharan Africa rose from 24 million tons in 2007 and 2008 to about 30 million tons in 2012 and 2013. An increase in the importation of flour was also noted, from about 12 million tons in 2007 and 2008 to 17 million tons in 2012 and 2013 (Chambati et al. 2018). The declines in food grain production and subsequent rising food importations are partially explained by the shift to contract-based production.

A survey of literature on the impacts of neoliberal restructuring via contract farming not only reflects increases in poverty, malnutrition and grain imports but also growing social differentiation in the countryside (Oya 2012, 2010; Little 2014; Mazwi et al. 2020; Pérez Niño 2016; Mazwi et al. 2019). This is shown by the upward and downhill transitions of farmers. For example, some capitalist farmers and rich peasants have been accumulating through contract farming in Senegal, Mozambique and Tanzania and, in the process, displacing poor farmers, thus setting into motion acute social differentiation within communities (Oya 2012; Pérez Niño 2016; Martiniello 2015). Through this, social hierarchies have been accentuated (Martiniello 2017). Hence, 'despite contract farming schemes not involving *prima facie* the dispossession or displacement of smallholders, they lead to forms of expulsion and/or marginalisation of poor smallholders from ... agro-extractive poles through social differentiation' (de L T Oliveira et al. 2021, p. 325).

Through contract farming, commodities are produced by peasants in the peripheries for international global firms; however, no formal capital-wage relationship exists (Patnaik and Patnaik 2016). In order to reduce production costs and do away with political challenges associated with 'large-scale land investments' (in which capital-labour relations abound), contract farming is seen as a solution, with agribusiness indirectly controlling production and maximising value (Sachikonye 1989). Also fundamental in this regard is that peasants—almost by the very compulsion of circumstances under capitalism—become 'price takers' (Patnaik and Patnaik 2016, p. 50). This is because they do not have the power to set their own output prices or incomes such that, when they encounter increases in production costs, they have no option but to accept them. Thus, the peasantry subsidises capital in the production of export commodities (Shivji 1992, 2009). Indebtedness is also deployed by monopolistic agri-firms through their intermediaries to ensure that the peasantry remains subordinated to capital (McMichael 2013; Mazwi 2020). This is enforced by placing high-interest rates on inputs and by reducing farmer incomes, thereby inhibiting the independence and autonomy of the peasantry (Martiniello 2015).

The distress on the peasantry (and 'agrarian classes of labour' as a whole—Pattenden et al. 2021) has been more accentuated during the time of the Covid-19 pandemic. For instance, in the context of pandemic lockdowns, the state has imposed movement restrictions for the peasantry and informal traders (Mudimu 2020). Though perhaps less affected than large-scale farmers by pandemic-induced disruptions beyond their locality, certainly the movement-lockdowns have had severe effects on smallholders, with losses in farm produce and income taking place. More generally, the Covid-19 pandemic (and associated lockdowns) has brought to the fore fundamental problems intrinsic to the international food regime as well as challenges for the heavily indebted 'food empire' which dominates it, as the pandemic lockdowns have disrupted agricultural production and the entire food chain in which mutually-dependent nations around the world depend on some degree on global food imports (van der Ploeg 2020).

3.2 Neoliberalism and Land Reforms

As previously noted, neoliberalism is not only an economic programme but also a political project, as reflected in neoliberalism's reconfiguration of land reform processes in Africa, notably in relation to land distribution. The redistribution of land is particularly important in Africa because of the land inequities which arose under colonialism (Moyo 2013; Moyo et al. 2013). Land reform should address this historical dispossession and the racial and foreign domination concerning landholdings, including by the transfer of land to those without land or adequate land (Byres 2004).

Land reform gained prominence from the 1950s to the 1970s during the state-centric 'developmentalist moment' (Fraser 2008). However, the rise of neoliberalism led to a significant change in the discourse and policies around land reform. There has been a new focus on economic growth by way of market-assisted (and market-led) models of land reform, departing from broad-based and more inclusive state-led reforms. One key model promoted by the Bretton Woods institutions under the neoliberal project is the willing buyer, willing seller one.

Overall, this and related neoliberal land reform programmes focus on 'property, scale, technology and the market' as the key determinants of the character and success of land reform practices (Rosset et al. 2006, p. 6). This requires the fundamental protection of property rights in agrarian spaces as well as the ongoing (and indeed extension of) privatisation and ownership of land under freehold title (Moyo 2011). A key issue is that market-led reform entails a shift from pursuing equity and justice to efficiency and economic growth, with the efficiency discourse dominating debates on land reform over an extended period. However, for a number of reasons (including the focus on efficiency and non-cooperation on the part of rural landholders), market reform has failed to guarantee the rural poor any meaningful access to land (Moyo 1995, 2013, 2016) (see Melber this volume, Banjwa this volume).

By and large, these programmes have led to land consolidation, further privatisation of land in the name of secure land tenure, and corruption and rent seeking by political elites (Peluso and Lund 2011; Moyo 2011). But, more critically, they have failed even to address colonial land injustices (Moyo 2001). Examples of countries which have implemented market-assisted land reforms with little success include the former settler-colonial states of Kenya, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe (Moyo 2008). Market land reform has often been resisted, at times via courts (for example in the Philippines) (Borras 2008). Additionally, its failures have led to variegated responses from below, including the formation and internationalisation of peasant-led movements and land expropriation by way of land occupations as in Brazil and Zimbabwe (Borras 2008; Moyo and Yeros 2005; Moyo and Yeros 2011). The state responses to these on-the-ground actions have hovered between violence and concession (Borras 2005).

Implementing land reform (specifically, land redistribution) under the guidance of international finance in the neoliberal era as a basis for addressing land injustices and rural poverty, at least under market-led reform, seems like a fraught task from the very beginning (Moyo 1995; Borras 2005), as it has no solid foundation for success as measured in terms of land justice and poverty reduction (see Mangulama and Jin this volume). Further, at least in southern Africa, for some time (in particular during the 1980s and 1990s), land reform became marginal to debates about agrarian economies because of the sustained focus on the liberalisation of agricultural markets as the basis for peasant productivity (Lahif 2003). Nevertheless, as noted, nations that sought to go beyond market-led reform and engage in state-initiated expropriation (with or without compensation) became the subject of punitive measures. This tended to discourage similar endeavours elsewhere (Moyo et al. 2013) or became a way of seeking to reverse expropriation—in the latter situation, ‘reliberalisation’ is seen as the only possible path, from a neoliberal perspective, to rescue the national economy and the agricultural sector specifically (Moyo and Yeros 2011).

For both settler and non-settler countries in Africa, neoliberal market land reforms were characterised by the minimal transfer of land and, importantly, processes of land commodification (Moyo 2008). The outcome of this land commodification has been land alienation of peasant households and land concentration by domestic and foreign capital (Moyo 2016). The displacement of peasants via the widespread activation of rural land markets led to their transition into a landless rural proletariat in many cases, sometimes as wage workers on the very land purchased by the nascent capitalist farmers. It has also triggered massive rural to urban migration, though such migration is taking place in the context of national economies characterised by jobless growth (Delgado Wise and Veltmeyer 2016). Former non-settler countries such Malawi and Zambia witnessed a surge of budding middle-capitalist farmers who operated alongside peasants (Kanyongolo 2008). Thus, African countries have experienced the further development and consolidation of social class differentiation within their agrarian economies, rather than a levelling process as promised by neoliberal's land redistribution agenda (Moyo 2016).

The effects of neoliberal practices around the land are most visible and dramatic in the form of what are called 'land grabs', sometimes spoken of as entailing accumulation by dispossession. The current land grabs, of which grabbing access to water is also central (de L T Oliveira et al. 2021), gained media attention in 2008 amidst the rise in global food prices and, in terms of a land grab genealogy, they mark the third phase of land alienation in Africa (Moyo et al. 2012). After the initial phrase of land dispossession during colonialism, the second wave involved the conversion of customary or communal land into private property in conjunction with market land reform, with titling supported by donors. For example, there was a clear rise in land registration and land titling in West Africa, and the growth of rural land markets increased land alienation (Moyo 2011). These localised land grabs stimulated the further formation of an aspiring African agrarian bourgeoisie through land concentration. The newest round of land dispossession (associated with private corporate investors and sovereign funds) is part of the wider project of 'globalised control of land, natural and mineral resources' (Moyo 2011, p. 62) under the impact of 'neoliberal globalisation' (Adnan 2013).

In the case of natural resources, neoliberalism has also been restructuring and ultimately politicising landscapes and local resources in significant ways (Büscher 2010). For instance, there is the rise of ecotourism as states seek to attract capital investments (Ojeda 2012). This falls broadly into 'control grabbing' (Borras et al. 2012), involving singular control over the usage of a range of resources, including wildlife. In South Africa, in relation to the Kruger National Park, conservative lobby groups and even the state regard the local communities as a problem in terms of ensuring conservation (Ramutsindela and Shabangu 2013), leading to the rise of environmental neoliberalism. Similarly, in Zanzibar, the development of ecotourism supported by 'individual titles' has led to the right of occupancy deeds being issued to foreigners and the grabbing of prime beachfront (Myers 2008). This entails a shift from protecting nature from capitalism to capitalism as the way to supposedly protect nature (Ramutsindela and Shabangu 2013). Such a shift is accompanied by the growth of privatised wildlife estates and conservancies (Moyo 2011).

4 Volume Outline

This book is divided into four broad sections. The first section (including this first introductory chapter) examines neoliberalism analytically and provides a broad overview of the forms of capital penetration under neoliberalism in the land and agricultural sector in Africa and their effects on the peasantry. In doing so, it sets the analytical stage for the following nine case study chapters.

As part of this opening section, the second chapter by Gilton Klerck analyses commercial agriculture in post-Apartheid South Africa, but it does so through an extended and illuminating examination of the constitution, character and consequences of neoliberal restructuring more broadly. In this respect, the notion of ‘neoliberalism’ has been widely deployed to describe the resurgence of market-orientated institutional shifts and policy realignments across the world economy since the 1980s. Following the initial analysis of these trends, much attention has been devoted to their conceptualisation. While the meaning and tractability of ‘neoliberalism’ continue to be topics of intense debate, recent theoretical work in the field, as shown by Klerck, has produced several important insights that have significant implications for empirical research on regulatory restructuring at all spatial scales. Against the monolithic conceptualisations that prevail in popular and academic accounts, Klerck highlights that the notion of ‘variegated neoliberalisation’ emphasises the uneven, hybrid, and unstable character of neoliberalising forms of regulatory transformation. By substituting an end-state view of neoliberal*ism* with emergent and tendential processes of neoliberal*isation*, the dramatic changes in South Africa’s agricultural policy and practice that have unfolded since the 1980s may be cast in a new light. In particular, Klerck explores the apparent paradox between extensively liberalised product markets and highly regulated labour markets in post-apartheid commercial agriculture.

The following nine chapters focus more exclusively on national studies, with each of the three sections consisting of three chapters. The second section focuses on land, peasants and neoliberalism, including land reform, land grabs and land struggles. In the third section, attention turns to neoliberalism and agriculture, and specifically to neoliberal-configured agricultural policies and their effects on peasant production and lives. The fourth (and final) section examines the social and economic impacts of integrating the peasantry into global commodity chains, including through contract farming.

In chapter “Land for Development? Neoliberal Restructuring and the Dynamics of Land Reforms in Uganda”, Adventino Banjwa examines neoliberal restructuring and the dynamics of land reform in Uganda. He notes that the idea and relevance of compulsory land acquisition is central to the claims of many modern states world over. But how should we think of this practice in a post-colonial neoliberal context? This is the question at the heart of the theoretical criticisms and debates regarding Uganda’s Compulsory Land Acquisition Programme. In this debate, the government claims and affirms that a law on compulsory land acquisition is needed because the government requires ‘land for development’. Banjwa intervenes in the debate by raising the question of the form of state prevailing in Uganda today and the nature of ‘development’ it pursues. The chapter critically reviews some past cases of compulsory land acquisition in Uganda in the post-1980 period. These cases demonstrate how in practice, the consolidation of neoliberalism requires an interventionist state, one that can, for instance, use its coercive instruments to avail land for capitalist development in agriculture. If Uganda’s ‘land for development’ drive has resulted in a coupling of a regime of state-led forced land acquisition (more broadly, ‘state-driven development’) with neoliberalism, Banjwa argues that we need therefore to decouple them analytically to allow for a historically and contextually informed query on the implications of land reforms in a post-colonial neoliberal context.

In the following chapter (chapter "The Struggle Continues: Namibia's Enduring Land Question"), Henning Melber focuses on the land question in Namibia. With Independence in 1990, Namibia inherited a socio-economic structure that, in terms of land distribution, had anchored the colonial divide and rule under Apartheid: a white-owned commercial agricultural sector contrasted with communal areas based on regional-ethnic criteria. Constitutional principles accepted as the final step towards Independence and sovereignty excluded any expropriation without fair compensation and therefore contributed to limiting land restitution and redistribution. Since 1990, diversification has taken place in private land ownership in commercial agriculture. A growing number of black farm owners have benefitted from a redistributive land policy guided by state support for elite interests. In the communal areas, local traditional authorities and representatives of the central state administration abused control over land rights to further the privatisation of communal property in terms of its use. In this context, Melber argues that these land reform dimensions underlined the new pact among elites in independent Namibia in different ways and disclosed the class character of property relations and ownership related to land. But, in the absence of a coherent policy, even a neoliberal perspective and strategy is hardly visible. He concludes that government policy so far rather testifies more to the negligence of any meaningful land reform.

The last chapter on land (chapter "Land Reform or Continued Social Exclusion? Land Occupations, State Responses and Neoliberal Policies in Southern Malawi"), by Justin Alinafe Mangulama and Wu Jin, considers land reform and land occupations in Malawi. In this respect, the last five decades have witnessed an increasing number of peasants encroaching onto idle tea estate land in Thyolo district, in southern Malawi. In drawing upon a study of this district, Mangulama and Jin argue that state responses to land occupations remain contradictory. Malawi's 2002 land policy advocates for redistributive land reform. At the same time, however, the state has actively promoted the Malawi Investment Policy, which encourages land expropriation for foreign capital. Repressive measures that include policing, punitive fines and arrests of peasants stirred the land occupations further, rather than inhibiting them. The state remains in a dilemma, whether to optimise local votes from the peasants or side with white agrarian bourgeois interests for capital accumulation via a rent scheme. Thus, Mangulama and Jin point to the tension-riddled character of neoliberalism, as shown through accumulation at one pole and impoverishment of the majority at the other pole.

In turning to section three on neoliberalism, agricultural policies and the peasantry, the initial chapter (chapter "Gender, Household Food Security and Neoliberal Decimation of the Grain-Producing Peasantry in Zimbabwe") by Newman Tekwa and Happymore Tekwa focus on household food security amongst the peasantry in Zimbabwe. With over half of the Zimbabwean population now facing food hunger, this could be juxtaposed to the 1980s' dirigiste period when the state boosted peasant maize production (as a proportion of national maize output) from 3.6% in 1979/80 to 35.6% in 1984/85. Since then, though interspersed with brief periods of heavy state involvement in the 2000s, Zimbabwe has undergone three decades of economic liberalisation from a Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in the early 1990s to the current Transition Stabilisation Programme (TSP). The gendered effects of decades of agricultural market liberalisation on peasant households in the country remain inadequately documented and analysed. In this light, Tekwa and Tekwa first consider the extent to which the shift from dirigisme to liberalisation affected integration, efficiency and competitiveness in the agricultural sector. They then examine the distribution of benefits of market liberalisation across different scales of agricultural production in addition to interrogating how female peasants have fared in these economic restructuring processes relative to men, primarily in relation to food security. In the end, Tekwa and Tekwa argue that liberalisation negatively impacted peasant maize production and curtailed the dual role of peasant households, leading to gender-differentiated knock-on effects for household food security. This highlights the crucial role of the state in ensuring national and household food sufficiency.

In chapter "Smallholder Farmer Empowerment and Neoliberalism: Examining the Current Institutional and Policy Arrangements in Zambia" by Sam Mwando, the emphasis is on policy and institutional support for agriculture amongst the peasantry (or smallholders) in Zambia. Agriculture supports the livelihoods of up to 70% of the Zambian population. The rural population is characterised by poorly developed monetary economies and markets with inadequate infrastructure and weak institutions for supply chain development, as needed for agricultural intensification and productivity. This is despite the structural adjustment and liberalisation programmes of the early 1990s, which were hyped as the precursor to incentivising foreign direct investments and reigniting the wheels of economic growth in Zambia. Thirty years on, economic liberalisation policies, including for the agricultural sector, continue to exist, albeit in altered and haphazard form. The failure to liberalise the agricultural sector fully, with piecemeal, start-stop and frequency policy reversals, has tended to depress any possible returns and raised risks for smallholders associated with private sector investment. As well, as Mwando argues, the weak institutional support for smallholder farmers, despite some state support, has inhibited the capacity of smallholders to enhance their agricultural production and rural livelihoods. Because of this, neoliberal agricultural policies have failed to empower smallholders in Zambia. Mwando examines and highlights this agricultural trend, including through a case study in Chibombo district.

Chapter "Putting Agriculture Ahead? Some Reflections about the Early Years of Neoliberalism in Kenya" by Fibian Lukalo also examines agricultural policies and the peasantry under neoliberalism but in relation to Kenya. More specifically, it discusses the effects of the neoliberal agenda with reference to agricultural development, agricultural policies and land reform in Kenya. The centrality of the agricultural sector to rural livelihoods and to the economic development of Kenya and its linkages to land are intricately connected to the history of economic policy, politics and land reform. Lukalo examines the background and policy context surrounding the agricultural debates in Kenya across two decades (the 1980s and 1990s), including how neoliberalisation had diverse and differentiated effects on the land reform agenda, the agricultural sector and the lives of the peasantry. In bringing to the fore three policy positions (Sessional Papers) as points of reference, Lukalo presents an understanding of the historical, policy and discursive framework within which agriculture and land issues were debated and struggled over concerning the lives of rural Kenyans. Overall, it appears that neoliberalism, though not necessarily intentionally, further impoverished many Kenyans who relied on agriculture.

The last section on neoliberalism and the incorporation of the peasantry into global commodity chains start off with a chapter (chapter "Neoliberal Agrarian Policies and Terms of Incorporation in Rural Mozambique") by Natacha Bruna on Mozambique**.** The current scramble for resources in Africa has become a major driver of social exclusion and ensuing negative implications for rural livelihoods, albeit in differentiated ways. Pre-existing structures and inequalities that resulted from historical colonial paths and specific economic, traditional and legal contexts conditioned the heterogeneity of rural populations; and, consequently, how differently they experience and react to current processes of land grabbing. Bruna aims to understand the differentiated outcomes, implications and reactions of each segment of the rural population in the context of Mozambique specifically, building on Shivji's concept of the working people. Presently, most large-scale investments in rural areas in Mozambique involve ways of integrating the affected smallholders into the dynamics of rural development. A critical examination of such policies and approaches is presented by Bruna, by looking particularly at processes of smallholder integration, as materialised through corporate social development plans. This entails analysing the terms of incorporation of the different segments of the rural population, including wage workers, poorer peasants, women and local elites. Empirical findings show that most of the smallholders end up adversely incorporated into investment-led rural development projects, ultimately resulting in the inclusion of the few and the exclusion of the majority.

In chapter "Socio-Economic Effects of Neoliberal Transformation on Irrigated Agriculture in Eswatini: A Case of Sugarcane Farmers' Groups in the Komati Downstream Development Project", Nicollete Mhlanga-Ndlovu focuses on the incorporation of peasants (as sugarcane producers) in Eswatini into the sugar commodity chain. Since the early 2000s, the Government of the Kingdom of Eswatini has been implementing neoliberal transformations in the agricultural sector, with the aim of primarily promoting the production of cash crops (mainly sugarcane) through the conversion of subsistence farming into commercial agriculture. The main drivers behind this paradigm shift have been poverty eradication and promotion of food security as well as income generation for livelihoods improvement. Despite the intensification of irrigated agriculture since the 1990s, Mhlanga-Ndlovu shows that food security has deteriorated, with many rural communities within Eswatini remaining dependent on food aid as the local cereal production has suffered a massive decline. This has largely been caused by an increased focus on export-oriented strategies compared to food grain production. Based on interviews conducted at the Komati Downstream Development Project, the study by Mhlanga-Ndlovu shows that neoliberal reforms in Eswatini did not improve food security for the great majority of smallholder producers and that the reforms have exacerbated challenges faced in the sugar industry. The chapter concludes by recommending the strengthening of capacities of farmers' associations for an improvement in sugarcane yields.

Last but not least, chapter "Meeting Global Capital in a Village: The Expansion of Tobacco Contract Farming in Zimbabwe" by Yumi Sakata examines the expansion of the tobacco industry in Zimbabwe amongst the peasantry as contract farmers. Foreign interests in Africa's resources and markets have been rising in recent years. Various studies have described the flow as a 'new scramble' that intensified in the twenty-first century. While the continent has been depicted as being in crisis, suffering from a limited inflow of foreign investment, it is now receiving more global investment than at any time in the previous five decades. Sakata argues, however, that capital penetration often leaves farmers in precarious conditions and fosters the 'scramble' for Africa even more, without safeguarding smallholder farmers. This is demonstrated through a case study of tobacco contract farming in contemporary Zimbabwe. As shown in a series of works by the Sam Moyo African Institute of Agrarian Studies based in Harare, Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) reconfigured the agrarian structure of Zimbabwe, including through repeasantisation as reflected in the tobacco sub-sector. Sakata presents case study based results of the socio-economic impacts of tobacco contract farming on smallholder farmers and argues that, while contract farming resuscitated the tobacco industry post-FTLRP, it also exposed smallholder farmers to the viscidities of global markets.

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