

AFRICAN AGRICULTURE: THE NEXT 25 YEARS-OLD PROBLEMS, OLD SOLUTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC FOIBLES

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The Crisis in its Intellectual Setting

Although rarely acknowledged, scientific training, aside from imparting skills, is a process of social and intellectual indoctrination. The exact form(s) this takes depends on prevailing circumstances. In the present epoch, as a consequence of foreign aid and transfer of technology, there have emerged a particular breed of scientists, the "experts". Their special trade mark is that they always know. If they were to confess otherwise, they would do themselves out of their jobs. This is in contrast to ordinary scientists who are socialised into admitting their ignorance and might even use that as an excuse to seek opportunities for research, but whose results they cannot guarantee in advance. In an age where "development" has become a problem of bureaucratic management, it is hardly surprising that donors and international agencies exhibit a bias towards spawning "experts".

To varying degrees, underdeveloped countries have been objects of experts since the 1960s. Whether this has been beneficial or not is an open question. Perhaps, if it had been so felicitous, Africa, which of all continents had been inundated with so many foreign experts and advisors, would not be in the perilous situation in which it finds itself today. Ironically enough, it is the same parlous state of affairs which seems to be an open invitation to ever more experts and advisors. Starting with the World Bank Report, Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: an Agenda for Action in 1981, various international agencies have taken it upon themselves to produce what purports to be analytical studies and policy guidelines for Africa. In the circumstances, it is not always possible to disentangle the ideological presuppositions of particular agencies from the intellectual pretensions of their "experts". From the point of view of

the African consumers, this might be immaterial. But what if all Africans were not merely consumers and that some were, instead, the antithesis of "experts"?

One of the tragedies of the foreign aid system is that international agencies and experts assume the absence of their professional counterparts in recipient countries. This is consistent with the ideology of "experts". Knowledge has become a commodity, purveyed by international agencies and negotiated with governments. In this context scientific prescriptions are often nothing more than intellectual rationalisations of what is ideologically preconceived. But when things go wrong, international agencies, experts and governments alike are quick to blame the people, and not themselves. This volte face exposes the cynicism of the epistemology of subject-object in bureaucratically conceived strategies for development. If there are subjects who are capable of perverting what is believed to be sound development plans, is not this sufficient justification for involving such subjects in the formulation of the plans themselves? Or could it be assumed that people who are threatened with hunger or even famine can afford to act out of sheer perversity? A logical and honest answer from an expert would be that the people do not know any better. If so, then why the new creed about "people's participation"? On what scientific and professional grounds is this founded?

Scientific grounds for promoting cooperation between specialists and popular masses could be found. But under modern conditions this might prove subversive for two reasons. First, it is generally assumed by experts and international agencies that bourgeois science and philosophical presuppositions are intrinsically superior. This is based on the fact that, historically, they are associated with the most advanced system so far, industrial capitalism. This general association is shared by most governments in the underdeveloped countries. The role of the "expert" is but a natural outcome of this concurrence and degradation of local knowledge its logical concomitant.

Then, coming to what constitutes the second barrier, those who endeavour to give scientific credence to folkways fall foul of policy-makers in their countries and incur the disfavour of international agencies. Experts might show some intellectual curiosity towards them, but they normally do their best not to be identified with them. In worst cases every effort is made to discredit them in official circles. This often leaves the people without scientists who are committed to them. This is a great handicap because people's knowledge, while often sound, is always implicit. It requires some

formally trained researchers to make it explicit. It is quite conceivable that such practice could in the long-run give birth to new paradigms that are unknown even to industrial capitalism. In scientific activity the norm is that no possibility should be denied until it has been found inefficacious. Likewise, no facile assumptions should be made about even those systems which have worked before.

Nowadays, it is all too common for development theorists to be overly concerned about defending particular modes of production and try to prove their case either by extrapolation or by making ahistorical assumptions. Not only does this divert attention away from the people who are supposed to be objects of solicitude in development programmes but also denies the possible existence of valid forms of knowledge outside the known and approved orthodoxies. In agriculture when topics such as land tenure, cooperation and income distribution come up, the instinctive reaction of experts and their sponsors is to check into which Euro-centric mold, capitalist or socialist, recommendations made by independent-minded or other-oriented researchers might fall. Yet, it is in agriculture that different cultural traditions and modes of organisation are most likely to manifest themselves. If it seems that industry is technique-neutral, it is yet to be proved that the same is true of agriculture. This is even more so now that there is growing concern globally about lack of adaptation to different eco-systems and about the need to introduce sustainable systems of production. In some cases, especially in agriculture, this has meant or might mean reversion to the so-called traditional techniques or methods. This cannot be done, without raising fundamental questions about the production function of modern agricultural economies or economies at all. Yet, this is definitely taboo to international agencies and "experts" often avoid it like plague.

The Agricultural Crisis in Africa and its Causes

As far as the agricultural crisis in Africa is concerned, some of our reservations can best be illustrated by a systematic review of the FAO main report, African agriculture: the next 25 years (Rome, 1986). Not only is FAO a specialised international agency but also it took the trouble to produce a special expert report on the state of agriculture in Africa. Presumably, the study had been approved by African governments. If so, then one wonders what they were expecting to be revealed which had not already been identified in the Lagos Plan of Action (1980). Secondly, having virtually failed to implement the recommendations of the Lagos Plan of Action, how were they hoping

to implement the FAO recommendations which are even more wide-ranging in agriculture than the latter? For those who were involved in the deliberations over the Lagos Plan of Action and saw in it prospects for a sustained effort by African governments towards self-reliance, such questions are not unjustified. Not only is the sincerity of African governments at issue but also there is justified anxiety about external manipulation of African countries or about the impact of international politics and propaganda on development policies in Africa. Therefore, without denying the need for international cooperation and aid, the need for vigilance is its obverse. This applies *ipso facto* to foreign-sponsored studies.

It is an acknowledged fact that African agriculture is undergoing a deep crisis, especially food production. Experts are not agreed on what the underlying causes are. According to FAO, "Six well-established trends are currently affecting African food production". These are:

- (i) A bias against agriculture in government policy;
- (ii) High population growth rates;
- (iii) A decline in the rate at which arable land and harvested area are being developed;
- (iv) A lack of technological change, which is leading to a wide-spread stagnation or even decline in crop yields;
- (v) Accelerated degradation of the environment; and
- (vi) An external economic environment that is making it more difficult for most African countries to balance their budgets.

These statements by the FAO experts can be described as, at best, platitudinous and, at worst, as erroneous. First of all, it is not clear whether the expression, "well-established" is used in the historical or statistical sense. The distinction is an important one because in some reports the agricultural and food crisis in Africa is treated as a sudden occurrence, attributable largely to physical factors. This has a certain appeal to African technocrats and politicians because it shifts the burden of responsibility elsewhere and also creates the illusion that economic recovery in Africa could be achieved without some radical changes in the existing production relations and the social institutions which govern them. Viewed from this angle, it is apparent that the present crisis in African agriculture is an outcome of a number of social and economic factors which pre-date the natural calamities which have befallen Africa in recent years. This would emphasize historical at

the expense of physical factors. After all, physical factors have in history been an object of manipulation by human beings. This is what technological progress and the destruction of the ecological balance is about. Predictably, it is put back-to-front in the FAO report.

Here, we are not referring to archaeological evidence from so many thousands of years ago as the FAO experts do, but more to what has happened over the last one hundred years. For instance, there is evidence that the replacement of the African inter-cropping practices with mono-culturalism by the colonial authorities had a direct impact on the preservation of the soil. This was not motivated by a desire to improve the lot of poor and backward peoples but rather the wish to enrich the industrialised nations was over-riding. Likewise, ill-motivated attempts by colonial governments to sedentarise or to confine nomadic pastoralists to limited grazing land so as to make more room for arable agriculture accelerated the phenomenon of over-grazing. This was bound to be the case because no positive steps were taken to help the nomads adjust to changing economic conditions. Worst still, in some areas such as East and Southern Africa, it was not a question of pressure on the land. Rather, it was a deliberate attempt to monopolise land by white settlers so as to force the displaced or impoverished African subsistence producers into the capitalist labour market. After independence the same pattern of land distribution was maintained in countries such as Kenya, Malawi, Swaziland, and lately Zimbabwe. However, the aim was not to cheapen black labour (except perhaps in the Ivory Coast and Malawi) but rather to "modernise" agriculture i.e. to encourage estate farming. Therefore, the cultivation of escarpment land in Malawi with the consequent erosion of the soil reported and regretted by the FAO experts need not be associated with land scarcity. The same is true of Swaziland, Kenya and Zimbabwe.

In so far as all African countries encouraged capitalist, commercial or estate agriculture for export crop production, the general claim in the FAO report about lack of technological change in Africa, "leading to a widespread stagnation or even decline in crop yields" (p.1) is somewhat misleading. There has been adoption of new technologies in African agriculture but the trouble is that the process has been highly selective. As is acknowledged in the FAO reports, there has been a bias towards cash crops: "Fertilizer allocation... has been biased towards export crops, partly because these crops are more profitable. In the Sudano-Sahelian region about 60 kg of fertilizer nutrients were used per hectare during 1979-81 to grow export and non-food crops but only 2kg were used on food crops". Furthermore, in those areas in

which small-scale producers had responded vigorously to new technologies e.g. in areas of white settlement in Southern Africa and East Africa, they were discouraged as a matter of official policy. Later, general poverty and deprivation, as elsewhere in Africa, rendered these new technologies inaccessible to them. As the FAO experts are well aware, credit, extension services and scientific research got concentrated on export or cash crop production. But even this failed, something which the FAO experts do not mention. Yet, it might be crucial in any discussion on technological change in agriculture in Africa.

The question of what type of technology to be adopted in African agriculture has not been resolved yet. Since colonial times modernisation of African agriculture had been equated with direct transfer of European and North American technologies to Africa and with large-scale capitalist farming. At the physical level it was doubtful if what applied to agriculture in the temperate zones would also apply in the tropics. At the social and cultural level there was the question of whether European modes of social organisation could be replicated in Africa. This was particularly true of land tenure and family systems. When progressive farmers seemed to falter in the 1970s under the aegis of "inter-mediate" technology, there was a re-newed debate (which was not confined to Africa) about the appropriateness of imported technologies. The outcome of these debates was an emphasis on "indigenous technologies". By and large, all this remained vague and abstract, if not nationalistic. Its significance is that it pointed to the failure of what had more or less been taken for granted.

The "progressive farmers" had made no progress, technologically and socially, since the 1960s. If they seemed to have achieved greater productivity per man/woman, there is no evidence that they attained any greater output per hectare than the small producers throughout this period. This is despite the fact that they were favoured in terms of credit and technical inputs. Here, we are not referring to extension services because so far their value in most of Africa is dubious. Experience shows that extension services did not produce progressive farmers in Africa but rather followed them, as if to justify their existence bureaucratically. If the extension services had been effective at all in black Africa, the rate of social reproduction of progressive farmers over the last 25 years would have been much higher than it has been so far. Indeed, part of the explanation for the crisis in African agriculture resides in the fact that African "progressive" farmers have not been able to reproduce themselves steadily over the last 20 years. If in fostering them the African governments as well as their colonial predecessors were hoping to promote capitalist agriculture on the

continent, can their atrophy be seen as a measure of the failure of the capitalist revolution in African agriculture?

On this question the FAO pronouncements are necessarily ambiguous. Unlike the World Bank which in its "Agenda for Africa" re-affirmed the export-oriented colonial structure and concentration on large-scale farmers (an unmistakable reversal of McNamara's policy), FAO is critical of such an approach and complains that:

"Governments have allocated in the past, especially in the fifties and the sixties, a larger share of their agricultural support to export crops in their desire to generate export taxes and to earn foreign exchange. They often biased the allocation of other production factors and support services in favour of export crops, notably capital investment in irrigation, market development and rural roads, and the provision of fertilizers and extension services" (p. 40).

The strictures against African governments by FAO are thoroughly justified. What is not clear is whether in advising against concentration on export-oriented producers FAO is cognisant of the fact that this might spell doom for capitalist farmers in black Africa. The would-be capitalist farmers in Africa did best in the 'fifties and the 'sixties when, as FAO acknowledges, they were getting maximum support from their governments. When this was no longer the case in the 'seventies and 'eighties and when the need for structural adjustment was greatest, they seemed to have collapsed completely or reverted to subsistence production. Once again, this is alluded to in the FAO report: "The farmers responsible for the success stories in export crop production are, in many instances, the same farmers who have not expanded staple crop production beyond their own subsistence needs" (p. 40). Why? The FAO experts seem to think that these farmers were unable to find alternatives because of unfavourable government policies, including terms of trade, credit, supply of consumer goods and limited market opportunities. It would be very ironical if African governments which, with a few exceptions, are committed to capitalism would be the ones to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs. Evidence from countries such as Malawi, Kenya, the Ivory Coast and the Cameroon shows that commercial and estate farmers in fact received differential treatment from the incumbent governments. The contradiction is that all this did not avert the impending agricultural crisis, except in the Cameroon where commercial farmers played a big

role in food production.

In this context the urban bias thesis, which the FAO experts share with so many other commentators, is analytically superficial. In aggregate terms all the countries in the world are urban-biased and yet all the countries in the world have not experienced a deepening agricultural crisis. It is true that there have been net transfers of value from agriculture to urban areas in Africa. But, historically, this is true virtually of all countries during the transitional period from agrarian to modern economies. Therefore, we still have to be told what is so peculiar about Africa.

First, it is very important to point out that not all African farmers suffered a disproportional transfer of value to the urban areas. The big farmers benefitted from government services, credit, capital investment in such things as roads and irrigation schemes, and quite often were allowed to market their own produce. They were not favoured only because they earned desperately needed foreign exchange. In most cases they had a powerful lobby in the national government. What came to be known as the "plantocracy" in the Ivory Coast, the farmers in the Gezira Scheme in the Sudan, the tea estate farmers in Malawi, the black Kenyan farmers who inherited the former white highlands largely by virtue of their association with government, and the big ranchers in Botswana are obvious examples. The big coffee farmers in Tanzania and Uganda, who found themselves confronted with reformist governments in the late 'sixties, represented the same phenomenon. It is not that these farmers were necessarily the most productive or gone-ahead. They simply had political clout.

It is arguable that the medium-sized or self-made commercial farmers were the most dynamic in the 'fifties and the 'sixties. Among these may be mentioned the migrant cocoa-growers in Ghana, the cotton growers in East Africa and the maize-growers in Southern Africa, especially in Malawi. Generally, they did not have so much power. They compensated for this by joining the cooperative movement which played largely a political rather than an economic role before independence. After independence the cooperative movement seems to have lost its political significance, leaving the farmers more or less defenceless against the marketing boards and other government agencies. It is possible that this led to demoralisation among the only category of African farmers who represented the true capitalist spirit in that they were go-getters. This is in contrast to the estate farmers who were fairly conservative, not particularly concerned to use their resources to the maximum, but more concerned to extract guarantees,

from the government, of which they constituted part. This trend might be re-inforced by the fact that the first generation of African politicians and higher civil servants who bought estates in anticipation of old age are about to retire with all their political capital.

If it was not easy sailing for medium-sized commercial farmers for lack of effective political power, then how much more for the small-scale producers who had no bargaining power whatsoever because they were largely unorganized and what they produced was grossly undervalued. In doing the latter the African governments inadvertently committed the worst strategic mistake since they came to power. Not only did the small producers take to cash crop production and became by virtue of their sheer numbers and over-taxation the greatest source of national revenue but also remained the major producers of food under very unfavourable conditions. They represented an under-privileged sub-sector within agriculture. They received neither technical nor financial support from the government. This was a serious omission, socially and economically, as is shown by the present food crisis in Africa.

In the wake of the crisis African policy-makers as well as international agencies have all of a sudden become preoccupied with what is seen as increasing rural poverty in Africa. Recurrent or threatened famines are cited as incontrovertible evidence. While it is technically difficult to measure "poverty", it is arguable that a crisis in food production by itself and in itself is no index of poverty. It is a sign of underdevelopment. In contrast, famines are an end result of absolute poverty since they are directly correlated with the problem of access which is determined largely by the amount of income at the disposal of each family or household. Dynamically, this is also reflected in the ability of each such unit to invest in production. As far as the latter two points are concerned, it is apparent that the majority of the African rural dwellers has known nothing else but poverty since colonial times. Therefore, the basic question to answer is not why do they starve but rather why do they continue to be poor?

In agriculture FAO attributed this to "technological stagnation". Reading off from the surface, this is not unjustified. But it begs too many questions to be useful. Why has the majority of African agricultural producers not made any technological progress over the years, compared to other Third World regions? One facile but commonly held view (often privately) among experts is that they are too primitive or simple to appreciate the advantages of advanced

technology and capitalist production. In spite of any racist beliefs that the world of experts might harbour, the problem of backwardness in the historical sense can be raised, without imputing any inherent characteristics in any group of people. Objectively speaking, Africa is technologically behind the other regions of the world. But this observation has to be qualified by taking cognizance of the fact that technologies are not only culture-bound but are also eminently production-function specific. African producers could, comparatively speaking, be backward technologically and yet be able to meet their needs. If this were not the case, they would have all disappeared from the face of the earth by now. If they seem to be confronted with that precise prospect at this historical juncture, then we must ask ourselves what went wrong?

As was mentioned earlier, the FAO experts emphasized physical factors such as demography, ecology, weather, infrastructure and some economic constraints such as lack of investment, adequate marketing facilities and supply of consumer goods. These are legitimate concerns but are, theoretically, soft options whose prescriptive value is questionable. A country such as Malawi scores very high on all the points mentioned and yet it is as much a part of the current agrarian and agricultural crisis in Africa as any of the other countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Malawi, once a success story, is faced with declining agricultural performance, including the tea estates, increasing rural poverty and outward migration, and serious structural adjustment problems. It is apparent that the problem is much deeper than the FAO experts would have us believe. Our hunch is that it is rooted in the production function of the African agricultural economies and the historically determined inability of the production units therein to reproduce themselves consistently and progressively.

In their report the FAO experts had taken for granted capitalist production in agriculture in Africa and made technical recommendations which were consistent with that supposition. The only inconsistency is that they seem to have been unaware of any logical connection between development of capitalist agriculture and growing landlessness among the rural poor and between falling rural incomes or depressed agricultural wages and unavailability of labour in agriculture. Even so, can it be assumed that African agriculture is developing along capitalist lines? Whether yes or no, need it do so in order to develop? Capitalist development succeeded eminently in the developed countries because it was consistent with itself. In Africa not only are there inconsistencies between property, production, and exchange relations but also there is, more than in any other region, a

major disarticulation in the production function of the agricultural economies. If before colonialism there was a natural link between production and popular or local needs, since the introduction of colonial capitalism there has been a continued discrepancy between resource use and local or popular needs. Included in this is production of food for local consumption and raw materials for nascent industries. Instead, there was a contrived response to external demand even among the small producers. Consequently, when the African agricultural economies seemed to be flourishing in the 1960s, it was not due to growth of domestic markets but rather to external markets. Likewise, where attempts at import-substitution seemed to be making headway, it was not due to internal accumulation and expanding markets but rather to vertical integration with developed economies. When these external economies all of a sudden collapsed or fluctuated violently, they could not but precipitate the worst crisis in the extroverted African agricultural economies.

Therefore, it is surprising that the FAO experts, after enumerating all the pitfalls of extroverted African agricultural economies, suggest that African countries could improve "their international competitiveness through better marketing and further devaluations (p. 64)". How is this to be reconciled with the fact that even the most advanced agricultural economies, far from being competitive in international markets, are suffering from chronic structural surpluses and thus have to subsidize their farmers. Secondly, how does this proposed monetarism overcome the implicit distortion in the production function of the African agricultural economies? Would not competitiveness in international markets by African countries exacerbate the discrepancy between resource use and local needs referred to earlier? If the EEC countries are suffering from structural surpluses, it is not too difficult to see that deep-down African countries are suffering from structural deficits. Nor could this be treated as largely a problem of pricing policy, as the FAO experts seem to realize but refuse to abandon their neo-classical suppositions (see inset, p. 42).

There are two structural points at issue here. Agriculture needs the urban areas as its most effective market. Urban areas need to be fed by agriculture. But in a situation where the farmers are uncompetitive and their cost of production is relatively high and where the urban wages are relatively low, neither side is able to realize its conditions of livelihood. Something has to give. This could be one of three things: (i) government subsidies for particular food crops; (ii) cheap food imports; or (iii) commensurate wage increases. Government subsidies are always accompanied by price controls which often prove to be a

disincentive to the majority of producers. From the point of view of laissez-faire capitalists or international agencies like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, such interventions are most undesirable as they interfere with market forces and inevitably lead to inefficiencies.

The point, however, is that, given declining food prices globally, the majority of African producers are not likely to fetch much higher prices for their commodities under present market conditions. Their most likely fate is to be expropriated by more efficient commercial farmers and by multinational corporations. A further contradiction is that, being hard-nosed capitalists, the laissez-faire theorists cannot with equanimity recommend higher wages for urban workers so as to enable them to be effective consumers of expensive, local foodstuffs. Thus, their strategy would benefit neither the small producers nor the majority of urban workers. Nor could it lead to any long-term development of the national economy for, while it allows for rapid accumulation by those who can, it restricts the domestic market and thus creates a predisposition towards external dependence. This is, in fact, a perpetuation of the colonial production structure whose function is largely responsible for the unmitigated crisis in African economies.

This takes us back to the question: what is the nature and the future of African agricultural economies? In sub-Saharan Africa the capitalist mode of production has not so far succeeded in realising itself. Structurally, there are too many issues that have not yet been resolved. For instance, there has not been general supplanting of customary use-rights by individual property rights in land. In a country such as Kenya which is believed to have carried farthest the process of privatisation of land in sub-Saharan Africa, it has been reported by R.S. Odingo that:

"In the case of the areas formerly occupied by European settlers and since then re-settled by thousands of small-scale African farm families, only limited portions (estimated to be 20 percent) have been turned over to private ownership with legal titles, the rest of the land still being under the authority and stewardship of the "Settlement Fund Trustees". But even here, unsupervised and illegal subdivision is taking place to accommodate the natural population growth" (FAO Report, mimeo, 1985, p. 6).

Furthermore, he remarks that:

"The transition from European concepts of land tenure to a more practical 'peasant type' of arrangement, has been accompanied by a massive drop in rural incomes..."

He concludes:

"The sample study reveals that, contrary to expectations, the population in the recently re-settled land areas are no longer enjoying increased prosperity, and that in actual fact there is every danger of the complete reversion to subsistence agriculture necessitated by recent population increase, and the fact that the authorities have not put a stop to illegal subdivision of plots within the settlement schemes" (op. cit., p. 7).

More examples could be given. In Togo it was reported (FAO, mimeo, 1985) that up to 90 percent of the commercial farmers sampled got their land through "traditional channels". In Malawi Mkandawire estimated that estate farms constituted no more than 17 percent of arable land (Carlsson, 1983; pp. 28-47).

Secondly, as a consequence of the land question, potential or actual labour has not been totally divested of its land rights. Hence, in most cases they combine subsistence production with labour migrancy in search of wages. Here, land rights should not be confused with access to adequate amounts of land in all cases but rather with sustainable kinship claims which militate against the development of individual property in land in the true capitalist sense. Likewise, collectively controlled use- rights over land should not be thought of as incompatible with commercialisation of agriculture and individual appropriation of value. Theoretically, this is an important point because in classical literature development of a market in agriculture or commodity relations had been believed to signal unambiguously the emergence of the capitalist mode of production. Participation in the capitalist market by the majority of African agricultural producers does not seem to have made capitalists of them in any meaningful sense of the word.

Thirdly, while there is general exploitation of especially the small producers via the bureaucracy, systematic exploitation of hired labour is not characteristic of sub-Saharan Africa. It is only commercial and estate farmers, who constitute a very small percentage of the agricultural producers in this part of Africa, who rely on hired labour. Even in their case such labour is not retained on a permanent basis. It is either migratory or seasonal. Furthermore, their relationship with their employers might take non-capitalist forms e.g. patron-client relationships which are not uncommon. Then, if in classical literature it had been presumed that production relations are diagnostic of particular modes of production, this need not apply to societies in transition. Indeed, this has prompted some analysts to talk of articulation of modes of production in Africa and to accuse colonialism of having promoted a process of "dissolution and preservation" in the agrarian sector. Whatever else might be said about this type of conceptualisation, one thing is clear, that is, sub-Saharan Africa has not enjoyed a progressive division of labour in agriculture. Far from attaining a capitalist transformation in agriculture, she has been characterised by retention of what might be called the "household economy". This term has not yet been used as a critical term in African studies. Instead, it has been used interchangeable with terms such as "family farm", "peasant producers", "subsistence producers", and even "lineage mode of production".

The three critical variables which these various terms have in common are: (i) small-scale production, oriented largely towards domestic needs; (ii) dominance of joint family rights in land over individual rights; and (iii) division of labour that is largely based on kinship ties. These are the parameters within which production and social reproduction of labour occur in African agricultural communities. In this context the "household" refers to that unit which has effective control over its allotted means of production (land and/cattle), allocation of labour and redistribution of the product. In other words, unlike a family whose members in Africa might live variously, the household is characterised by a common budget, irrespective of its actual kinship composition. Most households in modern Africa are not self-sufficient. They have been seriously disrupted by two pervasive, external factors, namely, migrant labour and the capitalist market. They share labour with commercial farmers and urban employers but bear the cost of the social reproduction of all such shared labour. The persistence of labour migration is a clear indication that even under these very unfavourable conditions most households cannot do without wages from outside.

From the point of view of the national economy, a schizophrenic situation prevails. Neither does agriculture get specialised to support itself nor does industry expand such that it absorbs permanently the migrant workers and their families. This missing structural transformation is one of the requirements of a growing modern economy and hardly any of the African economies have achieved it. Secondly, for unspecialised agriculture the development of a capitalist market is not necessarily a blessing. As had been remarked earlier, it gives rise to another schizophrenia between the needs of the rural households and external demand. The fact that households need cash income to buy consumer goods and services need not detract from our basic argument about the distorted function of the national economies in Africa. Whatever the capitalist-oriented experts might argue, there is no running away from the fact that in economies such as the African ones the relationship between use and exchange value is not self-regulatory. This is a major policy issue which over-rides any possible technical solutions. It also has nothing to do with the often alluded to dichotomy between subsistence and surplus production. Maximisation of utility value is not incompatible with surplus generation in a growing economy. However, this cannot be achieved through a one-sided development strategy, as has been the case in Africa under the influence of Western advisers and experts.

Biases in favour of maximisation of value notwithstanding, what is most needed in Africa is rationalisation of production, labour and commodity markets. Contrary to what international agencies such as the World Bank and IMF believe, production in Africa must be geared primarily towards satisfying local needs. In order to intensify technological development and possibilities for surplus generation, producers must be given every opportunity to reproduce themselves progressively and consistently. In agriculture this means that more households should be able to retain as much labour as would guarantee their self-sufficiency and more. Obviously, this is contingent on adequate access to land and cattle. In the foreseeable future medium-sized plots, relying on family labour, using increasingly appropriate mechanical devices seem to be the best option for Africa.

This is current practice among African households, but they have not received the necessary recognition and support from their governments which up to now had been obsessed with "large-scale" farming. For industry the implication is that the work force should be established such that it gets specialized and earns enough to reproduce itself consistently as industrial labour. In either case dispensing with

labour migrancy seems to be a necessary condition. Better prices for agricultural commodities would evidently reduce the need for households to export labour in exchange for wages. FAO, like all the other international agencies, is very strong on the question of higher prices for agricultural producers but, typical of the international agencies, is silent on the question of wages, including agricultural wages which might be the clue to the so-called shortage of agricultural labour in Africa. FAO's theory of "urban bias" obscures the fact that the majority of urban workers are poorly paid and have to supplement their income by reverting to the countryside at regular intervals, instead of providing a steady market for the rural producers.

Refutations and Prospects for a New Agenda

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the review of the FAO report and can be summarized as follows:

1. Price Policy and Subsidies: As had been remarked, the FAO report is strongest on this point and is definitely an improvement on the callous capitalist dogma of the World Bank and the IMF. On their own, market forces are likely to benefit neither the majority of the African agricultural producers nor correct any historical imbalances African economies might have suffered. In the transitional stage African agricultural economies cannot do without subsidies for the benefit of the disadvantaged producers and the poorly paid urban majority, something which is lost sight of in the "urban bias" trajectory of the FAO experts. A few things are implicit in this proposal: (i) it gives some protection to African farmers, whose vast majority is uncompetitive and is not going to be in the foreseeable future but which can certainly produce more under favourable conditions; (ii) it improves prospects for the development of a domestic market by making it possible for the urban majority to be effective consumers of locally produced foodstuffs; and (iii) it narrows down the gap between resource use in agriculture and local needs. As the FAO experts so correctly observe, this deserves a certain amount of flexibility and level-mindedness among the policy-makers. The guiding principle here is optimisation rather than maximisation.

2. Trade and Competitiveness: Here comes a contradiction. Competitiveness implies concentration of capital and a high foreign exchange component. Under present conditions in Africa and as experience has shown, this entails discrimination against the multitude of small producers. This throws us right back to the problem of

uneven development and inequity. This is apart from the fact that the state of international markets for agricultural commodities is such that it fore-closes any dramatic gains by African farmers who have more or less collapsed under the present recession. This has happened in spite of any "comparative advantage" the FAO experts might wish to bestow upon them.

No sensible person would like to argue against trade, whenever possible. But export-led agriculture is in the final analysis a liability for underdeveloped countries. After all, there are examples of agricultural economies which developed, without relying on exports e.g. Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. But all these were marked by rapid industrialization in conjunction with the agricultural revolution. The implicit assumption in the FAO report that agriculture in Africa will be both a source of primitive accumulation and foreign exchange is probably unwarranted and could lead to a repetition of the same strategic mistakes as have occurred before. Sector analysis predispositions notwithstanding, the dynamic link between agriculture and industry might prove crucial for African development. The main objective should be increased self-sufficiency, nationally or regionally, rather than any great ambition to capture international markets which seems to be a far away cry. If finance is put up as the immediate barrier to "walking with two legs" in Africa, then the African governments might like to account for the public debt of more than 100 billion dollars they have incurred in the meantime, without being able to point to any real progress in agriculture or in industry.

3. Technology and Multinationals: Perhaps, an important distinction exists between an engineer's and a social scientist's conception of technology. It is apparent that either out of positivist predilections or out of deference to official policy, the FAO experts are inclined towards the former. Technology is not a package of useful means to an end. It is rather a complex system of communication about things or means of livelihood in different structural, social and cultural settings. As the FAO experts are quick to point out, all the technological innovations they recommend for Africa have been there for some time. But the question they are not able to answer socially is why have the Africans by and large failed to embrace them? If the purpose of production is at issue from the structural point of view (may it be state or class exploitation), then any communication about instrumentalities of production is blocked. An extreme example is Southern Africa, the Africa of "labour reserves", where initially the local producers responded enthusiastically to capitalist innovations and are now depressed, unresponsive and their

development. Romantic ideas about traditional crops by people who do not eat them might be an unwarranted excuse for double standards. Likewise, unillustrated assertions about "demonstration effect" might be part of a self-fulfilling prophecy by westerners. The peoples of the East have proudly maintained their dietary habits, despite contact with the West. In little Lesotho one of the most popular specialities in Western-style hotels is what is called "the traditional". In Ethiopia there is nothing to beat "enjera and wot" among all classes. In West Africa fufu and traditional stews still hold sway. So, it is not as if coca-cola and hamburger or hot-dog is the climax of all culinary tastes in the Third World. We still have to know what people eat and appreciate in their own context.

4. *Land and Land Tenure*: Related to the foregoing discussion is the question of land use and local needs. By any standards, Africa has an adequate supply of land i.e. enough to feed itself within the foreseeable future. Second, African households have very strong use-rights over land. Insofar as this is true, African customary land tenure systems guarantee greater access to land by potential producers than most systems in the modern world. Unhappily, all this is befogged with all kinds of capitalist prejudices. The FAO experts manage to overcome some of these, but their knowledge of African land tenure systems and grasp of their dynamics under modern conditions is open to doubt. In the appropriate section (pp. 57-58) there is tremendous confusion between the dynamics of land tenure and the dynamics of land use. For instance, demographic pressure could lead to land fragmentation even under individual land tenure, if the system of inheritance is such that each child is entitled to an equal share of their father's land. In contrast, under African customary tenure new claims are not on land that is already under use but on land that is presumed to be vacant.

However while incorporation of marginal soils might precede fragmentation of existing plots, restriction on size of future plots or redistribution from existing plots is not peculiar to African customary tenure. Kenya and Zimbabwe, which are erroneously quoted as "successful" in the FAO report, are a case in point. It is true that at first the redistribution of the Kenya highlands estates seemed successful. But as was reported earlier, there are now big question marks (see Odingo, *op. cit.*). In Zimbabwe there is as yet nothing to be described as a "success" in the redistribution of land (see Moyo in Mandaza, 1986; pp. 165-202). In several African countries consolidated plots and estate farms held under individual titles are getting refragmented because of both demographic pressure and revived

household economy is threatened with complete disintegration. If less acute, the same trend is observable elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa and it will take more than the best technology to reverse it.

If the requisite social and structural conditions are met, then the FAO experts are right in emphasizing intermediate level technologies such as fertilizers, pesticides, animal traction or moderate tractorisation, all of which still have a great potential in Africa. But then the FAO experts give themselves away when they recommend participation of TNCs in these operations (*op. cit.*, p. 66). Is this not the same story of the shark and the sardine? Given the experience in Latin-America and Asia, and the refusal by the developed countries under the leadership of the United States during the UN Conference on Technology and Science in Vienna in 1979 to adopt an international code of conduct for the TNCs recommended by the Group of 77, what would be the justification for the even weaker African states for putting themselves in the hands of such rapacious agents? If indeed, as is acknowledged by FAO, some of these views were shared "by the African scientists, economists and planners who attended the Director-General's Expert Consultation held in Rome in December 1985", then the African constituency at large is entitled to know who those were because in the drafting team only one African name appears. In the meantime, it is worth noting that most of the research that has been done on multinationals in Africa has come up with negative or pessimistic findings. This includes policy documents by the ECA (see *Multi-National Corporations in Africa*, ECA, 1972).

All this does not eliminate altogether prospects for high technology in agriculture in Africa. However, this has to be evaluated realistically. As the FAO experts affirm, the potential for irrigation at 10 percent, compared to 30 percent in Asia, is low. Consequently, the prospects for a green revolution Asian-style in Africa are very deem, indeed. This is even more so when we consider the cost of any major effort in that direction. Research into drought - and heat-resistant strains seems to hold the best prospects for the continent. As this is not part of the technological software of the West, Africa will of necessity start from a low base. More resources and scientific capacity will have to be devoted to the task. In doing so a few observations will have to be borne in mind.

First, so far drought-resistant strains are not associated with opulence. Second, there is the question of taste over and above survival. While crops such as cassava might offer the best prospects for survival, their unpalability disqualifies them as an item for

customary claims as a response to a deepening agrarian crisis.

All this as it may. The most critical question that needs to be answered unambiguously is whether or not the retrogressive nature of African agriculture is attributable to customary systems of tenure. While the FAO experts acknowledge that:

"In the past, this system responded well to changes in population and to commercialisation of production. Moreover, and contrary to the view often expressed, customary tenure does allow for inheritance and does provide sufficient security to encourage investment by recognizing individual rights to improvements and to continued occupancy during usage" (op. cit. p. 57),

they nonetheless jump to the conclusion that "Unfortunately, the traditional form of customary tenure is no longer sufficient in many countries" (*ibid.*). Demographic pressure is seen as the root cause of this and excessive fragmentation as the end result. But, what would have been the alternative under individual tenure? One of the virtues of African systems of land tenure is to guarantee access to land by every household. The alternative to fragmentation is consolidation and enclosures. The inevitable result, as is known, would be landlessness. Therefore, the natural choice is between fragmentation and landlessness.

Socially and economically, both are unsustainable but inevitable under the present conditions in Africa, where neither capitalist agriculture nor industry has become dynamic enough to bring about the necessary structural transformation in the whole economy and absorb the surplus population. This is the essence of the so-called economic crisis in Africa. In the circumstances it would be anti-social and politically unwise to insist on capitalist enclosures in agriculture. The FAO experts are perfectly aware of this and concede that traditional institutions and practices "... could remain the central element in a modified and more up-to-date system of land tenure that could meet the challenges of commercialization and shortage through mechanisms other than privatization or other legislated intervention" (*op. cit.*; p. 58). In other words, reform in African agriculture need not follow a capitalist path. But then, what path?

Here, the FAO experts limit themselves to some perfunctory remarks such as: "The modifications might include greater community

responsibility and management of land use as the traditional, merely allocative role is reduced" (*ibid.*). Consequently, we are at a loss as to whether the experts are merely equivocating or do not know what they are talking about. As was mentioned previously, management of production in Africa is not community-based. Rather, it is in the hands of individual households, whose first allegiance is to their lineages with whom they share certain corporate rights and on whom they depend for political and ritual protection. The village head is able to hold together the village as a social and political community only insofar as he enjoys the support and the confidence of these lineages. Therefore, any attempt to integrate production at the territorial or village level poses a threat to these groups. Although it has never been fully studied, this seems to have been one of the problems of Ujamma villages in Tanzania. Bajamaa agreed to pool resources in the form of land, labour and technical inputs from the government but insisted on the right to individual appropriation for the benefit of their lineages or extended families. This interfered in no mean way with the processes of accumulation and reproduction within the Ujamaa villages.

Therefore, if what the FAO experts had in mind was village producing cooperatives, using the common pool of land in which everybody has theoretically use-rights, then this cannot be taken for granted. Zimbabwe has taken the chance of organizing settlement schemes and producing cooperatives on the basis of individual need i.e. those who have access neither to land nor to wage employment. One knows in advance that even in the case of Zimbabwe the recruits will treat themselves as inter-changeable with their brothers and cousins, which implies an incipient reversion to the kinship principle. This has to be expected because to most sub-Saharan Africans kinship is the ultimate source of security and major principle of social organization. The present ambiguities and uncertainties in the still neo-colonial African economies make it almost impossible to abandon this principle. If in the meantime it is agreed that as a matter of expediency the African redistributory mode of organization and production in the rural economy has to be sustained, then it has to be indicated in what precise form this has to be done.

5. Local Institutions and Popular Participation: The FAO experts rightly fear that the term, "people's participation", might degenerate into a cliché among international agencies as well as donors. But they themselves do not go very far in forestalling that possibility. One of the reasons for this is that their liberal community development approach glosses over a number of potential or actual contradictions in

what they propose. First, there is an underlying contradiction between bureaucratic institutions and popular institutions which revolves around control over resources and their ultimate use. Under the aegis of "institution-building", African governments are intolerant of independent initiatives by local communities. This dates back to colonial times when local communities and popular institutions were a source of resistance and, consequently, the colonial authorities found it necessary to undermine or to pervert them. Secondly, under the impact of "modernisation theories" in the 'fifties and 'sixties, governments tended to regard traditional, local institutions as an antithesis of progress or development. As such, they had to be replaced with supposedly superior bureaucratic institutions. Therefore, the marriage that the FAO experts propose between bureaucratic and local institutions implies a radical change in outlook which goes far beyond liberal suppositions about community development.

The second contradiction is that, contrary to the image the FAO experts project (*op. cit.*; p. 59), African villages were not characterized by "informal traditional structures" nor did they "often have no official status". During the colonial period African chiefs, headmen and councils of elders were recognized under both indirect and direct rule and were used to contain the population and to reduce administrative costs. After independence African governments accepted this as a more or less de facto situation, though they, as nationalists, had very little time for chiefs and local institutions. They were, instead, keen to reproduce the state bureaucracy as quickly as they could. This meant that, while recognized and continued to operate in a rather attenuated fashion, traditional structures and institutions largely suffered neglect. In other words, while being undermined, they were not being transformed progressively.

Now, in the wake of the present crisis and as rear-guard action, there is a desire to revive them. The FAO experts believe that "the most appropriate basic unit of action is the village". But where? Experience from black Africa would cast doubt on this claim. While it is true that under the system of headmen each village is an administrative unit, what distinguishes black Africa is the fact that production is not managed by the village authority. It is the responsibility of individual households, which are affiliated for purposes of circulation and social reproduction to particular lineages of which the headman himself is a member. It is conceivable that for purposes of "projects", like public works, villagers can be mobilized on an ad hoc basis. But for normal year to year production, things might prove different and difficult. Reference has already been made to

the underlying organisational incompatibilities in the Tanzanian ujamma villages. The search for appropriate units of production in Africa must continue because it is apparent that no economic development can be achieved on the basis of projects, no matter how well conceived they are. While international agencies such as FAO may insist on it, there is no evidence of such happening nor any indication that it might happen in the future. However, if projects are only ameliorative, then they cannot be pushed as a matter of national policy or priority.

Finally, the third contradiction in the idea of using villages as units of production, overlooks conflicting class interests in the villages themselves. In our survey we distinguished between estate farmers, commercial farmers and household farmers or small-scale producers. We also indicated their differential access to political power and public resources. Therefore, a mere reference to "village community" does not tell us which class or category is being sponsored as part of an overall strategy for national development. One is cognizant of the fact that there is a growing emphasis among international agencies and donors on small-producers as the foundation for agricultural development in Africa. This is more than a simple bureaucratic injunction. It is a repudiation of the capitalist approach and is bound to meet with resistance from the privileged classes which are better represented in the power-structure of most countries. The few African countries which have dared to take the bull by the horns got very hard knocks, nationally and internationally. As of now, they are sipping tribulation with a spoon of sorrow. Then, the question is: which African government would willingly promote a peasant rebellion against the status quo?

If on the other hand, what the international community is interested in is not an agrarian revolution in Africa but some petty reformism to stave off starvation and famines, then village projects and some pottering around by the people in the name of "participatory democracy" are in order. One would even surmise that in the African case governments could afford a certain amount of spontaneity in re-settlement schemes and in selection of working partners. Those who choose to live and to work together, be it on a kinship basis, could be granted the right to do so, without affecting the system. The nagging question, however, is whether all this would solve the basic problems facing African agriculture, which is neither traditional nor capitalist in the historical sense. If cooperation is seen as the ultimate solution to the problem of increasing land scarcity and technological stagnation, what will be the future of African lineages and

households? What would replace their social welfare function among affiliated members? These are the questions which very few Africans are unaware of but which they hardly address because they do not feature in the agenda of those who advise them.

6. *Women and Agricultural Development*: Of late, this is a much debated topic in African development studies and tends to be highly emotive. Even so, more could have been said in the FAO report, especially under "manpower" and "people's participation". The point is that the popular demand to treat women as a special category could be prejudicial. For instance, the often-quoted predominance of women in agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa is persistently used as a justification for paying more attention to female producers, without raising at all the question of whether or not this should be an accepted division of labour in contemporary African societies or what its historical significance is. Paying more attention to female producers would not eliminate possible injustices within the division of labour itself. Indeed, there have been complaints (Women and Development Division, FAO) that women continue to be over-worked precisely because they have no access to labour in the same way as men. Here, there is a conflation of two issues, class and sex. If women object, as they must, to the exploitation of their labour by men, they cannot at the same time uphold the right to exploit other people's labour. If what is at issue is the monopoly by some men in the modern sector to hire labour, then the problem is access to resources which affects almost as many men as women outside the modern sector. Naturally, this excludes those women who happen to be labour employers. Otherwise, the argument could inadvertently become sexist in the opposite direction or be capitalist unconsciously, which would be prejudicial.

The other complaint from the same quarter is that women do not have access to "good land". This is puzzling because, if women are denied good land, then the men to whom they are attached suffer the same disability since it is their tenure which determines women's access. Even if men do not cultivate the land themselves, it is difficult to imagine that they would be indifferent to the quality of land they receive on behalf of their households. But if the issue is women's land rights at all under customary tenure, then the case is clear. The fact that women do not have direct and independent tenure is one of the most serious drawbacks of African customary tenure. Feminists tend to treat this as a problem of both patriarchy and gender within the lineage system in Africa. Analytically, this might not be the case since the lineage structure in Africa is independent of sex i.e. there are both matrilineal and patrilineal societies. In the circumstances we cannot

logically speak of "patriarchy", without reference to "matriarchy".

Although some pioneers such as Claude Meillassoux (1960, 1964, and 1972) have made it appear that in the process of social reproduction of lineages in Africa it is always women who are exchanged for prestige goods such as cattle, in matrilineal societies, which coincidentally are not cattle herders, not only are men exchanged but they have to give prestations and services to their brides' matrilineages. However, from the point of view of gender, the subordinate position of husbands in such societies is not accounted for so much by the position of women but rather by the power exercised over them by their maternal uncles and nephews. It would appear, therefore, while patriarchy is strictly a problem of patrilineal societies in Africa which predominate, gender seems to be a universal feature of family organisation. In the past the term "family" has been used as synonymous with "domestic groups" and at times with "households". It is apparent now that common residence need not coincide with a common budget or marriage relations. There is, therefore, value in restricting the term "family" to those groups which are characterized by conjugality and filiation, irrespective of whether they encompass one or two generations.

The critical relationships in such units are: husband/wife, parent/child, and brother/sister. In traditional African society these represent a hierarchy in favour of men which culminates in control over means of livelihood e.g. land and cattle. Guardianship over wives, widows and unmarried sisters follows the same pattern. All these create a predisposition towards appropriation of the fruits of the labour of women by men. The same principle does not necessarily apply to households which might be headed by either men or women and whose composition is extremely variable. There is a general, unqualified belief among feminist researchers, which is echoed by the FAO experts (*op. cit.*; p. 57), that female-headed households are usually poorer than households headed by men. In all probability, this is statistically true. But it does not say what percentage of male-headed households are equally poor because of lack of access to similar means of livelihood.

In those matrilineal societies in which marriage is uxorilocal i.e. the husband joins his wife's matrilineage, the rights of husbands in land are extremely tenuous, compared to those of their wives who belong to the land allocating group. Similarly, in patrilineal Botswana it is those women who are not attached to men who have an opportunity to own cattle, the most valued possession, in their own

right. Finally, in West Africa, market women who tend to head their own households separate from their husbands, have avoided deprivation precisely by opting for such an arrangement. These examples are a sufficient indication that, if the problem of gender is endemic in African family structures, it is not per se a problem of households. This is an important observation because, conventionally, "family" and "household" are presumed to be coterminous. A separation between the two holds out possibilities for creating production units, independently of conjugal ties or principles of consanguinity. If such groups reproduce themselves progressively, then some of the problems of gender and patriarchy in African family and lineage systems could be by-passed. Equal access to means of livelihood and the full right of disposal over the value of one's labour are the only condition which seems to be both necessary and sufficient.

Labour and Wages

As is recognized, there is tension between the process of alienation of labour and of accumulation of value. In a situation in which most of the producers are not deprived of access to means of production and where wages are low as a result of the requirements of the process of primitive accumulation, the problem of unavailability of labour or of labour supply is bound to assert itself. Somehow, this eludes the FAO experts. They talk about labour shortages in African agriculture, without being able to explain it. Yet, it is obvious that African households which still have reasonable access to land or cattle will try to retain as much labour as possible or, conversely, will not release labour to other production units unless the returns seem to warrant it. The abandonment of unproductive agricultural plots in favour of labour migration and the shunning of farm labour are two sides of the same coin.

Accordingly, it must be recognized that improvement of chances for self-sufficiency among households in African agriculture implies either a decline in the rate of labour migration or increased rates of payment in the centres of employment. It also puts the would-be-capitalist farmers in direct and immediate competition with urban/industrial employers. For those who, like the FAO experts, believe in "unduly high urban salaries", this creates a problem of "structural adjustment". But for those who associate development with increasing social equity, the problem is how to combine consumption with production. This is not so much a problem of rural-urban differences, as the FAO experts are inclined to think, but of a dynamic exchange between agriculture and industry in terms of both labour

value and commodities. Thus, it has to be decided as a matter of national policy what is going to be the basic unit of production in agriculture which matches the factory in industry in which labour is largely socialized. All these unanswered questions and contrary deductions mark the limits and foibles of bureaucratic and abstract social science, which is part of the craft of international experts. Even so, there is no immediate reason why FAO, as a specialized agency on food and agriculture, should have allowed itself to be over-shadowed by the World Bank on the current debates on the agrarian crisis in Africa.

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RESUME

L'Afrique traverse une crise politique et économique d'une gravité telle qu'elle a attiré l'attention des organismes internationaux et de leurs "experts". Il est désormais manifeste que contre toute attente, l'idéologie des experts étrangers et leur culture intellectuelle compliquent le problème africain au lieu de les amener à procéder à une réévaluation critique de celui-ci en ce sens qu'ils se réfugient derrière de vieilles hypothèses et théories de développement jugées fiables à l'époque; ce qui revient trop souvent à louer les mérites de la théorie et de la pratique bourgeoises. Par ailleurs en se faisant passer pour les seuls à disposer de connaissances valables, ils font perdre aux connaissances africaines leur valeur. Cette attitude englobe inéluctablement les chercheurs africains que l'on estime donc incapables d'avoir des connaissances expertes. C'est là l'une des tragédies du système international d'aide extérieure et d'"experts" étrangers.

L'article exhorte les universitaires africains à faire preuve de vigilance et à ne plus "consommer" tout simplement les connaissances reçues. Pour ce faire ils pourraient, en se fondant sur leurs propres connaissances acquises sur place, soumettre les prétendus rapports d'experts à un examen critique, seul moyen pour eux de parvenir à la vérité et de révéler aux populations africaines ce qu'on leur cache. Une telle attitude appelle cependant une bonne connaissance préalable de la situation locale et une forte sensibilité aux besoins et aspirations des populations locales. Cela nécessite aussi que les universitaires africains laissent tomber l'épistémologie des sujets et des objets lorsqu'ils produisent des connaissances à des fins de développement social et qu'ils écartent l'instrumentalisme des agences internationales, qui tente d'isoler les facteurs techniques des facteurs sociaux.

La totalité des rapports rédigés depuis peu sur l'Afrique, notamment ceux de la Banque Mondiale et du FMI contiennent des exemples illustrant bien notre propos. C'est cependant le rapport de la FAO intitulé *l'Agriculture africaine: les 25 prochaines années*, qui est le plus édifiant du point de vue du développement agricole. En effet l'accent y est placé sur les facteurs techniques et physiques. Les institutions sociales en Afrique y sont mentionnées, bien sûr, mais la plupart de celles-ci sont perçues de façon erronée du fait même que leur dynamique interne ne soit pas correctement appréhendée. La lacune la plus perceptible apparaît néanmoins au niveau de l'étude des rapports sociaux dans les sociétés agraires en Afrique; capital et travail d'une part et répartition du pouvoir politique et extraction de surplus d'autre part figurent respectivement dans ce rapport sous la forme

"absence de main-d'oeuvre agricole" et "tendance dans les villes". Or il ne fait aucun doute que l'un des éléments sous-tendant la crise qui sévit actuellement en Afrique c'est le problème de l'exploitation des classes et de la domination politique. Nous avons là la preuve qu'il s'avère indispensable de revoir les relations politiques et les rapports de production en Afrique. Sur le plan théorique cela signifie qu'il convient de réviser les hypothèses en vigueur concernant l'orientation du développement de l'agriculture africaine et son objectif. Pour la FAO c'est un fait que l'agriculture africaine est marquée par l'accumulation capitaliste d'une part et par le développement de rapports capitalistes de production d'autre part. Compte tenu de la réalité africaine ce postulat se justifie-t-il?