PEASANTS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

By

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INTRODUCTION

In the last fifteen years there has been a resurgence of peasant studies especially in Asia and Latin-America. This coincided with loss of faith in «modernisation theories», the failure of conventional development strategies in Third World countries and the ascendency of the *«dependencia»* school. Whereas earlier there had been preoccupation with the modern sector which was presumed to hold the key to economic growth, in the late sixties and early seventies it became apparent that there was something missing in the equation. Far from promoting development or acting as a catalyst, the modern sector, which is vertically integrated with imperialist economies, was seen as creating underdevelopment in the backward sectors. Whether or not this was invariably the case, what is undisputable is the fact that the modern sector remained too small in most of these countries to compensate for the bulk of the producers in the so-called traditional sector. Thus, the question of the peasantry forced itself on the minds of development theorists.

The proverbial «dark continent» of Africa remained unaffected by peasant studies *per se* until very recently. This was not due to lack of social scientific attention on the part of the continent. One could surmise that while economists were pre-occupied with growth in the modern sector, sociologists with urbanization and political scientists with nation-building, social anthropologists who pervaded the countryside maintained their traditional fixation on «tribes». Since, historically, «tribesmen» and «peasants» had been treated as categories apart, the omission of the other was perfectly logical. In other words, before any studies on the peasantry in sub-Saharan Africa could arise at all, the question of whether the subsistence producers in the region were to be regarded as peasants or tribesmen had to be resolved. What were the necessary conditions for this to occur?

The objective nature of the African social formations would be one of the necessary conditions. The state of the arts in the social sciences would be another. Concerning the first point, we cannot make universal statements about Africa. The indications are that by the 19th century a peasantry had emerged in West Africa. The first anthropologist to insist on this was, curiously enough, an American who had never been to Africa, Robert REDFIELD. *(1)* Sensitized by his Mexican experience, he urged that the growth of markets in West Africa denoted the existence of a peasantry who supplied the markets with agricultural produce. Indeed, the traditional West African markets relied on locally produced agricultural commodities and crafts. Cowry shells, whether they be looked upon as money or

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something else, had become an effective medium of exchange. Generally-speaking, REDFIELD's plea fell on deaf ears among British anthropologists.

It was fully another ten years before REDFIELD's exploratory observations were vindicated. In 1962 BOHANNAN and DALTON published their classic study, *Markets in West Africa (2).* The book had a great impact on Africanist anthropologists and economic anthropologists in general. However, it did not herald the beginning of peasant studies in Africa. Instead, it helped to clarify the terms of comparison between self-contained, non-monetary, primitive economies and those economies which were governed by the market principle or exchange. According to prevailing theories of «social change», this signified a qualitative drift towards «modernity». REDFIELD's original thesis about the in-between and semi-autonomous status of peasant social formations did not feature as an issue in these studies. Social change was perceived as necessarily a tranformation of tribal, not peasant, societies under the impact of colonialism or western civilisation.

The second part of black Africa where there had been specific references to peasants at this point in time is South Africa. From the onset in South Africa the emergence of peasants had been associated directly with white colonialism. In 1934 H.M. ROBERTSON, an economic historian, wrote an article on the subject entitled «150 Years of Economic contact between Black and White» *(3)* As in REDFIELD's case, nobody paid much attention to his explorations until 1969, when Monica WILSON seized the nettle with both hands. She associated the rise of the peasantry in South Africa not so much with colonialism, but specifically with the advent of the missionaries. In her contribution to the *Oxford History of South Africa* she affirmed unambiguously: «Peasant communities, in the sense in which the term is used in this book, began in 1738 with the foundation of the first mission station in South Africa». *(4)* According to her, «Families were urged to settle; the hunters were pressed to become herders; the herders were taught to cultivate; the cultivators were taught to use a plough and irrigate, and all came into much closer relationship with the outside world». *(5)*

In 1961 Lloyd FALLERS, an American anthropologist who came from the same school as REDFIELD and who had worked in Buganda, had asked in an article which became very influential: «Are African Cultivators to be called 'Peasants'»? *(6)* In answering his own question, he laid much emphasis on the existence of a market and political subordination to a higher authority as diagnostic characteristics. Nonetheless, he was hard put to find a high culture or great tradition to which the African peasants were beholden. FALLERS was aware of the existence of European culture as a reference point in the colonies, but showed none of the self-assured Christian confidence which Monica WILSON radiated. Whether what is at issue here is the Protestant ethic or the rise of capitalism in the colonies is a matter which will be addressed later.

Suffice it to say, up to the time of BOHANNAN, DALTON, FALLERS and WILSON, the approach to the peasant question was generally cultural. The social values and the cultural horizons of the African tribesmen

were being torn asunder by an intrusive and universal European civilisation. In all cases this included an expansive capitalist mode of production which was taken for granted and regarded as felicitous. This proved to be erroneous, as was shown by later events and debates.

The Rise of Peasant Studies

Systematic peasant studies in sub-Saharan Africa did not start until the 1970s. In 1971 SAUL and WOODS tried to present a general synthetic view of the peasantries in Africa. Their first basic postulate was that: «despite the existence of some prefigurings of a peasant class in earlier periods, it is more fruitful to view... the creation of an African peasantry... as being primarily the result of the international capitalist economic system and traditional socio-economic systems». *(7)* Secondly, using the traditional criterion of a household economy relying on family labour, they argued that there was little point in trying to distinguish between African agriculturists and pastoralists. Politically, both groups were subject to the same higher authority, they urged. However, they failed to come to grips with the problem of land tenure in black Africa, where communal land tenure still persists, despite the introduction of capitalism. On this question Saul and WOODS chose to limit themselves to perfunctory remarks about undefined «certain rights in land».

It was POST who in a stirring attempt in 1972 confronted the issue of property versus usufruct rights in land in Africa. His final conclusion was that «in both the pre-colonial and colonial periods it would seem that, from the point of view of the individual, land *use* rights must be treated as more important than property rights» *(8)*. One does not have to agree with POST's formulation to appreciate the theoretical significance of his statement. Recalling Marx's injunction to Vera Zasulitch in March 1881 about «common ownership, divided petty cultivation», POST declared: this contradiction is exactly that at work today in Western Africa» *(9)*. Why is it a contradiction? Has it ever been otherwise? Or is it a matter of an anology derived from the Western European experience, as Marx himself acknowledged in the same letter to Vera Zasulitch: «... property in land is communal, but each peasant cultivates and manages his plot on his own account, in a way recalling the small peasant of the West». Implicit herein lie some conceptual problems which might be attributable to a western-biased historiography In his quest for determining «the threshold between the communal cultivator and the peasant», POST might have created opposed categories where none existed, as will be argued later.

The important point to grasp at this stage is that the studies by him, SAUL and WOODS, represented a conscious focus on class analysis and an evaluation of the impact of European capitalism on African societies. Unlike the earlier studies by FALLER or Monica WILSON, which emphasized the cultural factor, these studies stressed structural factors. This is notwithstanding the fact that both schools of thought are agreed on the determinate role of markets, the rise of the state and the political subjugation

of the peasantry. Nor was this simply a division between liberal and Marxist scholars. When peasant studies had become fashionable in particular regions in Africa, most writers, liberal or Marxist, espoused «political economy» almost as a fad.

The first area of concentration, not surprising given the prior introduction of European capitalism anywhere in the continent, was South Africa. In the 1970s there was an unprecedented flush of peasant studies in South Africa *(10),* carried out mainly by a group of South African white emigres or sojourners in England. Although at first they might have been equally shared between the London School of Oriental and African Studies and Oxford University, gradually Elizabeth House in Oxford became their research center under the influence of Stanley TRAPIDO – also a South African. The work of these scholars has been primarily historical, but distinguishable from that of the conventional historians, including the younger generation of radical liberal South African historians. Political economy is their overriding concern. However, differences between Marxists and non-Marxists among them are discernible.

In a series of studies on the Boer Republics of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal, and on the British colonies in the Cape and Natal, these authors were able to fix in time the emergence of the black peasantry in South Africa. This was around the middle of the 19th century. In the Orange Free State and the Transvaal this occured among black squatters and sharecroppers on white-owned land. While both types of contract guaranteed white landowners a ready supply of labour, they afforded the black cultivators access to land. In this situation the latter were producing for the market and were subject to the authority of the white state, but were deprived of property rights in land. Whereas some of the producers grew richer, some had to resort to jobbing on different farms or migrate to towns for off season employment in order to supplement their incomes from agriculture.

In the Cape and Natal, as is suggested by Monica WILSON, participation in a market economy got associated with missionary establishments and colonial imposition of taxes of all sorts. Conversion to Christianity would certainly imply initiation into a great tradition. Whether or not this would set the limits for the emergence of a peasant society is another question. But as BUNDY has pointed out, the emergence of peasant producers in South Africa was not confined to mission stations. It occured among the pagans as well. It would seem, therefore, that what was of critical importance was the introduction of a market economy, the imposition of taxes by the colonial government and the demand for industrial goods, which might have been greater among Christian converts who were under a certain amount of compulsion from the missionaries.

As POST has warned, all this was not contingent on property rights in land. Access to communal land, tenancies and sharecropping on white farms seems to have sufficed. However, it must be noted that in the case of South Africa the tendency by individual families to cultivate and manage their plots on what was theoretically communal land as if they were their property was re-inforced by payment of quitrent to the state. The combination of quitrent with a non-freehold system of tenure in the areas which

were reserved specially for Africans made the status of even subsistence producers ambiguous.

In this regard it is noteworthy that in South African peasant studies the question of property rights or their absence among black cultivators has not received much attention. Most writers have been happy to define the peasant mode of production in terms of production of cash crops for the market, adoption of new production techniques and reliance on family labour. This harks back to POST's point about the primacy of usufruct over property rights in Africa. While this assertion might be empirically justified, it detracts in no mean way from the classical definition of «peasant». A peasant mode of production which is not founded on petty bourgeois rights in land is unknown to classical theory.

The next area in Africa where peasant studies have featured, directly or indirectly, is East Africa. The Ujamaa policies in Tanzania drew attention to the role of the small producers in the development of the country and less so to the question of whether or not there was a peasantry in Tanzania. In general small rural producers were referred to, uncritically, as «peasants». Indeed, all were tied to an external market and were subject to state authority and taxation. But hardly any owned land. General access to land was determined by the communal land tenure system. Even after land had been nationalised in Tanzania, this system continued. Yet, individual families treated the land allocated to them as if it were their property. Once again, here the principle of communal property in land and private appropriation manifests itself. Under the so-called socialist policies in Tanzania, this gave rise to some interesting contradictions.

In-sofar as there was no limit traditionally to the amount of land each family could put under cultivation, better endowed families, financially and otherwise, were able to grab more land for themselves in a manner not too unfamiliar under capitalism. In the case of Tanzania the government could only hope to curtail this expansion by putting a ban on hired labour. However, this did not stop the emergence of what was variously referred to as capitalist farmers or kulaks. As ownership of land or of means of production was not the issue but rather instruments of production and, perhaps, production relations in the case of those farmers who hired labour, the categorisation between «peasants» and «capitalist» farmers or «kulaks» remained arbitrary or ideological. This is not to deny significant differences in income among rural producers in Tanzania and elsewhere, but merely to point out that neither size of income nor instruments of production define a class. If this is not a problem of empirical observation, then it is a problem of classical theory. This problem was faced squarely some five years ago by a group of young Kenyan social scientists in what became popularly known as the «Kenyan debate» *(12)*, which in its intensity and rigour was reminiscent of the «indian debate» on similar issues. The Kenyan scholars were concerned to see if there were any objective grounds for delineating between a rural bourgeoisie and a peasantry within the Kenyan agricultural economy. While all were agreed on the development of capitalism within agriculture in Kenya, there was dissension on the question of whether this implied the existence of the requisite classes, namely, an indigenous rural bourgeoisie, a rural proletariat, and an independent

peasantry. Starting with property relations, it was acknowledged that the introduction of individual land tenure under the 1-million acre scheme and the transfer of the white highlands estate farms to Africans after Independence established private property in land. However, some argued that ownership of land in itself and by itself did not imply the existence of an African rural bourgeoisie in Kenya. It was posited that ownership of capital was the essential condition for the bourgeoisie to realise itself. This property was largely denied to the Kenyan landowners by multinational corporations which held most of the agricultural capital in the country, some maintained. Therefore, the critical productions relations were seen as not between the Kenyan landowners and the rural workers but primarily as between international capital and local labour.

Among other things, this implied the proletarianisation of the Kenyan rural workers, without a corresponding development of a Kenyan agricultural capitalist class in the strict historical sense. According to this point of view, the individualisation of land rights and the accelerated rate of landlessness in the affected areas has made the formation of a rural proletariat in Kenya less ambiguous than in those areas or countries where workers still have residual land rights under the communal land tenure system. In this respect Kenya is comparable to Zimbabwe and South Africa, where private property in land and conversion of displaced Africans into cheap labour were the characteristic features of the settler agricultural economies. While this might not have meant complete disappearance of communal land tenure, it meant loss of its dominance.

The corollary of consolidation of land in private hands is not only landlessness, but also the reduction of the economically weak to small holders. In Kenya there is a class of small private landowners who fit the classical definition of «peasant». These have been referred to as «middle» or «small» peasants, «rich» or «poor» peasants by the Kenyan analysts, according to the size of the units of operation. The complicating factor, however, is that in either case production relations present a thorny problem. Over and above family labour, rich peasants rely on hired labour. The extraction of surplus value from such labour signifies capitalist relations. Poor peasants who supplement their income by selling their labour power intermittently in the towns or plantations are thereby co-joined with the propertyless proletariat. Far from enjoying an independent economic status, they get subjected to direct exploitation by capital. This is not to be confused with the exploitation of all producers in underdeveloped countries by international capital at the level of exchange relations. From these observations, one of the conclusions of the Kenyan debate was that, property relations notwithstanding, the peasantry in Kenya was either getting proletarianised or transformed into kulaks who employed labour.

In areas such as Ethiopia and the Sudan, where there is probably a formed peasantry which predates colonialism, there have been no systematic or specific studies on them. With the development of feudalism in both countries large sections of the population lost their economic independence and became serving tenants or clients. However, even in such circumstances they have generally been referred to as «peasants», which

makes them indistinguishable from those producers who were in effective occupation under the communal system and the semi-nomadic pastoralists who were relatively autonomous. With the introduction of capitalism and paid labour some of these producers lost their autonomy and joined the labour market. But, ideologically and politically, those who were not members of the landowning or employing class continued to be lumped together in the literature as «peasants». This in itself is a reflection of the relatively undeveloped state of peasant studies in most of Africa.

Reflections on the Question of the Peasantry in sub-Saharan Africa

In sub-Saharan Africa where, with very few exceptions, communal land tenure has persisted, there is an apparent contradiction between communal property in land and private appropriation once individual families have staked their claim on what is otherwise communal land. This has prompted analysts such as POST to postulate that in Africa use rights are more important than property rights. This observation is as fundamental as it is controversial, theoretically. Whereas POST and POLLY HILL *(13)* credit individual development and private appropriation under the communal land tenure system, writers such as Samir AMIN and COQUERY-VIDROVITCH *(14)* have attributed lack of progress or development of material forces in African agriculture to the continued absence of private property in land. This is an orthodoxy which is shared by both bourgeois and Marxist thinkers in the European tradition. POST's formulation overcomes this prejudice and sets the stage for the questioning of some of these assumptions.

First of all, it is apparent from the African experience that the absence of formal or juridical rights in land have not been a barrier to private appropriation and accumulation once individual families had laid effective claim on their allocated plots of land. This was, and still is, achieved through *sustained use* of the land. In other words, under the African communal system, security of tenure was guaranteed socially, and not legally. Indeed, there is no evidence of eviction of occupying families from their land, except on political grounds (disloyal citizens were, traditionally, deprived of their means of livelihood and excommunicated). This was to be expected since there was no pressure on land. Conversely, under conditions of increasing land scarcity and cultivation of permanent crops auspicious families were bound to exploit the principle of acquisition by use. Therefore, contrary to the unfounded belief that communal land tenure gave rise to insecurity, it can be shown that in general African families have always been able to old their plots of lands in perpetuity i.e. treat them as if they were their own, to use Marx's phrase.

It is customary in Marxist theory to treat property rights as fundamental to particular modes of production. It may be pointed out that property rights are a juridical notion which connotes a specific form of access. There could be any number of forms of access. From a strictly materialist point of view, it would appear that it is use which confers value on property, and not the other way round. Dynamically, people are motivated to establish exclusive rights over things only if their use value has been proven, socially. In east, central and southern Africa, various rulers

had ample opportunities for appropriating land as private property but they did not do so for they saw no value in it, except as a domain for settling numerous political followers – «A king is a king by virtue of the size of his following», a notion which hardly applies to the modern African President who has discovered the value of large private estates.

Viewed from this angle, barely any contradiction exists in Africa between communal rights in land and private appropriation. Substantively, *use* has already transformed the value of land. This is thoroughly consistent with the traditional African principle of usufruct rights. On the other hand, the communal system of land tenure might have been a facilitating factor insofar as it did not freeze the process by conferring exclusive property rights on any particular social group. It is on this point that POST's rationalism got the better of him. Relying on an analogy, he saw a logical contradiction where none existed, practically. Secondly, he put primacy on use rights in Africa, while retaining a strictly European notion of property rights. It is not uncommon in Africa for clans or lineages to regard certain tracts of land as theirs and reserve not only the right of use but also of disposal, without repudiating the wider notion of communal land.

Theoretically, POST might have benefitted from distinguishing clearly between ownership of land, possessionary or usufruct rights over land and system(s) of exchange of land. As has been suggested, these can vary independently, without creating a contradiction. For instance, extreme individualism in production can obtain under conditions of communal land tenure. Private exchange of land or rent can occur under the same conditions. Whether all these adaptations can be regarded as development or as a confirmation of the constrictive nature of the traditional communal system is subject to interpretation. But for those who like AMIN and COQUERY-VIDROVITCH equate communal systems with lack of development, apart from what has occured in Africa, reference could be made to Asia where communal ownership and production at the village level gave rise to an agricultural revolution and under-wrote great civilisations. Besides, under modern conditions of entrenched socialist bureaucracies in the East and budgeoning managerial class in the capitalist world, the relationship between property rights and private appropriation can no longer be treated as diacritical.

In a similar vein it can be argued that, if there is an African peasantry, its existence is not accounted for by property rights. If on the other hand private appropriation based on use rights were to be utilized as one of the diagnostic features a la POST, this would be of no avail since they have this in common with a whole range of other rural producers – capitalist, kulaks and semi-proletarians. Likewise at the level of production relations no clear lines of demarcation can be drawn. The better off producers are employers of labour and, therefore, are akin to capitalists. The worse off producers are intermittent sellers of labour power and, therefore, are co-joined with the proletariat. The interpenetration of these social properties militates against clean class categorisations and has predisposed several writers towards continua theories. In the hands of liberals this has taken the form of stratification theories, where differences in income or land holdings and farm equipment are used as indices. In the case of

Marxists this has issued in theories about an alliance between «peasants» and «workers». True enough, on the ground it has proved too difficult to say who is a peasant and who is a worker in Africa. But there is a noticeable ideological inclination on the part of the majority of Marxists who are concerned with this problem to derive as many proletarians out of the so-called peasants as possible on largely mechanistic grounds. In some cases this verges on crude proletariat Messianism.

Revolutionary expediency aside, if the theoretical implications of continua or mediations between classes-in-formation were contemplated at a deeper sociological level, there would be no necessity for contrived class categories. Logically, continua imply continuity in time or space, whereas mediations signify intermingling between contemporaneous phenomena of different qualities. Small rural producers in Africa are linked to the urban workers through labour migration, whilst a great number of urban workers still protect their usufruct rights in the countryside through their rural kinsmen. Historically, both have never known property rights in land. Whether in the countryside or in town both are subject to exploitation by international capital. This would imply involvement in identical production relations. This is only partially true for whereas the urban worker depends entirely on wages for the social reproduction of his labour, the migrant worker depends partly on the labour of his family for the social reproduction of his labour.

It transpires, therefore, that the importance of the usufruct rights identified by POST is not at the level of production relations but rather at the level of social reproduction of the labour of migrant workers or poor peasants. Out of economic necessity, they migrate to the urban areas and out of need for the social reproduction of their labour, they revert to the countryside. The contexts are different, but the social agents/subjects are the same. Are they a proletariat domiciled in the countryside, as Monica WILSON has suggested, or are they an industrialised peasantry? They are both. But from the point of view of comprehending their ideological or political reflexes, it is important to bear in mind that both «domicile in the countryside» and «industrialised peasantry» have a rural referent. Likewise, «industrialised» and «proletariat» have urban or worker connotations. As have been argued elsewhere *(15)*, this represents both continuity and ambiguity – peasant-workers.

As has been explained, the ambiguity resided not in property relations but rather in the social reproduction of labour. While not torn, the migrant workers straddle opposite ends of the spectrum. The relative weight they might put on either of the two moments cannot be judged abstractly or mechanically according to proportions of income derived from each end. Qualitatively, unlike permanent labour, their mode of existence is inconsistent.

SAUL and WOODS, along with the South African writers, have associated the rise of peasantries in Africa with the advent of colonialism and the introduction of capitalism. For strategic and analytical reasons, this is perfectly acceptable. But referring to African rural producers as simply «peasantries» obscures the ambiguities or inconsistencies discussed above. If capitalism through the introduction of a market economy created

peasantries in Africa, then it simultaneously destroyed them through a sustained demand for cheap labour. Labour studies from Southern Africa bear witness to this. After they had been deprived of land, the Africans were converted into itinerant wage earners. Taxation, cornering of markets and financial discrimination had the same effect on them in central and east Africa. In the event, SAUL and WOODS could have equally referred to them as «African proletarians», as Cohen has done. *(16)*

In a number of studies «peasantisation» and «proletarianisation» in Africa have been perceived as parallel processes. Logically, they should have been seen as antithetical. Under the circumstances the conclusion could have been reached that African peasantries, however defined, are a transient phenomenon. This would be unacceptable sophistry, for the African economies are predominantly agrarian. For a very long time to come there will be substantial numbers of people in Africa whose mode of existence will be agricultural production. Nor could it be assumed that these will be divisible into rural capitalists and proletarians. The question of the form which the agrarian revolution might assume in different African countries is an imponderable one. But for the time being, it is worth noting that the introduction of capitalism in Africa has not led to a capitalist revolution in agriculture, except, in South Africa and Zimbabwe. Whether this is to be regarded as the failure of the capitalist path to development in Africa under the present national and international economic and political conditions is a matter on which opinions diverge greatly.

Nonetheless, the current food crisis in Africa should be looked upon as a negative comment on the prevailing agricultural systems. The frenzied calls by development agencies for the rehabilitation of the «small producers» in Africa is the clearest recognition of the problem yet. Unhappily, it is based neither on an appreciation of the capitalist forces that led to an early abortion of the peasantry in Africa nor on an assessment of the political and economic capacity of this aborted peasantry to hold their own under the present conditions. It would seem that better prospects for them in the future are contingent on changed social conditions. Ironically enough, it is the present unfavourable conditions which are a breeding ground for that eventuality and which obliterated the dividing line between the would-be peasants and workers in Africa.

Therefore, if the peasants in Africa are, historically, contemporaries of the workers, their emancipation cannot be conceived of as the resuscitation of the petty mode production. If what they are being saved from is capitalist exploitation, then there can be no two ways about it. The expanded capitalist mode of production is not only a successor to the petty mode of production but is also an improvement on it. If so, the inequities of capitalism in Africa cannot be overcome by reversion to a prior state. The ineluctable truth is that expansive peasants beget capitalists ; capitalists prosper by the exploitation of displaced small producers. Any arguments or development strategies which fail to take this into account are either pure cant or sheer sentimentality which fosters false-consciouness.

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RESUME

Au cours des quinze dernières années, une résurgence des études sur le monde paysan en Asie et en Amérique Latine notamment, s'est amorcée, coïncidant avec le recul de la crédibilité des «théories de modernisation», l'échec des stratégies classiques de développement appliquées aux pays du Tiers Monde et la montée de l'école de la «dépendencia». Alors qu'auparavant la préoccupation majeure était le secteur moderne dans la mesure où il était censé détenir la clef de la croissance économique, vers la fin des années 1960 et au début des années 1970 il ne faisait plus aucun doute qu'il s'agissait là d'une équation incomplète. En effet, on s'est rendu compte que le secteur moderne, intégré verticalement aux économies impérialistes, était générateur de sous-développement dans les secteurs les moins avancés au lieu d'être un promoteur de développement et un agent catalyseur. En était-il toujours ainsi ? Peu importe ; ce qui est certain, par contre, c'est que dans la majorité de ces pays, le secteur moderne occupait une place trop limitée pour pouvoir servir de contrepoids au soi-disant secteur traditionnel qui regroupait la majorité des producteurs. C'est ainsi que la question du monde paysan s'est imposée aux théoriciens du développement.

Ce n'est que tout récemment que les études sur le monde paysan ont commencé à avoir une influence sur le proverbial «continent noir» de l'Afrique ; et ce n'est pas par manque d'intérêt sur le plan social et scientifique en Afrique. L'on pourrait supposer qu'il existait parallèlement plusieurs centres d'intérêt : celui de l'économiste pour la croissance dans le secteur moderne, du sociologue pour l'urbanisation, du politologue pour la construction de la nation alors que l'anthropologue (social) que l'on retrouve un peu partout en milieu rural restait comme toujours braqué sur les «tribus». Dans la mesure où les «tribus» et les «paysans» ont toujours été traités sur le plan historique comme des catégories à part, il était tout à fait logique qu'ils aient été passés sous silence. En d'autres termes, avant d'entreprendre toute étude sur le monde rural en Afrique au Sud du Sahara, il convenait de résoudre la question de savoir si oui ou non il fallait considérer les cultivateurs de la région comme des paysans ou des membres de tribus. Pour ce faire, quelles étaient les conditions à remplir ?