

AGRARIAN QUESTION AND UNGOVERNED SPACES IN AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to alert the reader to the dynamic nature of ungoverned spaces and its interconnectivity with agrarian question, which can have significant impact in shaping an adverse future for Africa. The paper relied on qualitative data collected from secondary sources. This paper, which is descriptive in its approach, argues that the contemporary world is organised into a system of governed/governing in which governments(s) exercise authority inside clearly defined boundaries and recognise the authority of other rulers outside those boundaries. It also argues the power of resistibility by the peasants to create an entirely separate niche for themselves outside of the authorised landed/territorial jurisdiction of the 'class' (governments) in a world where a state (or states) claims just about every piece of land, will remain concerned with the consequences created by a territory's lacking a single and sovereign central government. The paper concludes that the agrarian structure has certainly transformed from its earlier versions, and this transformation has influenced as well as changed all those structures with which it intersected in its journey to change. It recommends that re-evaluating the classical agrarian question and its implications for twenty-first century agrarian politics from a global perspective, which understands that agriculture is a political construction is posed within the novel dynamics of comparative advantage, and this would birth a new regime as agrarian discourse expands.

Keywords: Agrarian questions, Africa, State, Ungoverned Space.

Introduction

This paper argues that the contemporary world is organized into a system of governed/governing in which government(s) exercise authority inside clearly defined boundaries and recognize the authority of other rulers outside those boundaries (International Relations). To develop a body of analysis which explains the nexus between the underlying concern of agrarian question; capitalism, peasantry, land ownership, industrialisation, territoriality, mode of ownership and bourgeoisie-proletariat in Africa starting as far back as the earliest century contributed to the development of the concept 'ungoverned' as relative, rather than absolute (Amin, 2016). However, there are degrees of 'ungoverned-ness,' which includes but not limited to: exploitable areas, contested areas, misgoverned areas, under-governed areas and—the most extreme case—ungoverned areas (which in spatial relations, some scholars described as a misnomer), which are not within the scope of this paper for further analysis but highlighted for the purpose of scholarship. The 9/11 Commission Report alluded to this in its executive summary that 'To find sanctuary, terrorist organizations have fled to some of the least governed, most lawless places in the world... areas that combine rugged terrain, weak government, room to hide or receive supplies, and low population density with a town or city near enough to allow necessary interaction with the outside world' (Extremism, 2019). The interrelationship with the outside world raises the potency of the Agrarian question as it connects to the 'un-governability' spaces in Africa.

Consequently, the dominant perception and claim among scholars of politics remains that the state is indispensable, and that its absence depicts images of Hobbesians anarchy. 'Ungoverned' brings with its attendant powerful overtones of threat, instability, and insecurity, as well as the sense that an ungoverned space is something the affected territory and international state system should avoid at virtually any cost (Welsh, 1988). Yet, the absence of government does not necessarily imply the absence of governance. Contested and disputed territories will have governance. Admittedly, this governance may not be very attractive. Since the mid-1990s, the international community has identified 'hybrid

political orders', state-like entities,' 'proto-states,' and 'actually existing governance' as breeding grounds for security threats (Taylor, 2016:7). Leads could be taken from the multiple National Security Strategy (NSS) documents and speeches made by former US President Bill Clinton where he noted the trend that grave, even existential, threats could and were emerging from ungoverned and poorly governed states. Although these systematic observations originally rejected by his successor, became a driver of United States and global foreign policy trends post-September 11, 2001. Therefore, many perceive so called ungoverned spaces as a significant global order about which something must be done (Taylor, 2016:15). Assuredly, history shows that poor governance and fragile states that cannot control fully their territory are very much likely to portend security risks, including some that threaten African interests: the jihadist and insurgents' extremism are a frequently cited instances contesting the link between these areas and the kind of threats they supposedly produce. However, the resilience of the failed state paradigm suggests that these actors may develop state like administrations. In the case of unrecognized state of Somaliland, which display objectively, though not legally, recognizable governments. An increasing number of policy analysts and scholars acknowledge that ungoverned spaces are ruled by alternative authorities and the recognition is often folded into category of threat analysis—these alternative authorities and their operations often become the focus of the debate's underlying concern. Any attempt to policy addressing ungoverned spaces should confronts the realities of why they exist and how they operate. While policymakers and scholars increasingly recognize that these spaces are governed, failure to appreciate how and why they are ruled outside the state apparatus can lead to poor outcomes. Ungoverned spaces may also exist because states rationally limit their territorial control extending authority only when the benefits of doing so outweigh the costs. While extending hierarchy can mitigate risks and reduce the costs of negotiating with uncertain and multiple parties, there are good reasons why a state might choose not to control these areas.

Agrarian Change and its Question

The idea of change has been conceptualised into various disciplines for the past many decades, and it remains to be one of the important projects since infusion of research into academics. A very typical explanation of the nuances and structures of Agrarian question is embedded in the classical Marxist writings and its opponents, both dealing with analysis of change in society especially in the Russian Countryside (Balyan, 2019). The main actors in the debate were Kautsky, Lenin belonging to Marxist camp and Chayanov belonging to Non-Marxist Camp (Borass, 2023). And the major debate was regarding differentiation of peasantry or the effects that peasantry have due to development of capitalism in Russia. According to the classical Marxist conception, with the development of capitalism in agriculture, the agrarian class structure will be like that of industries. That is to say that there will be two classes, the capitalist bourgeoisie, and the rural proletariat. Farms will be capitalist's estates run through machinery and landless labours. According to this analysis, the petty commodity producers will vanish and there will just these two antagonistic classes (Konforti, 2022).

'Borrowings'- Marx's Ground Rent Theory (GRT)

The structure of this discourse under the Agrarian 'feather' would lean with one of the most pertinent predictions using Marx's Ground rent theory which talks about the development/penetration of capitalism in agriculture. The system of ground rent that he came up with differs from pre-capitalist rent in being only a part of the total surplus value created in agriculture (Bhattacharya, 2022). Marx's theory of ground rent depends on the relation and consequent influence of two economic processes, i.e., land rent and profit and it presupposes a capitalist mode of production and capitalist landed property (Huber, 2022). Following Marx's ideas, Lenin argued that available evidence shows that capitalism as a general mode of production has already entered the agriculture sector, and a process of 'Depeasantization and Differentiation' was taking place leading to the division of agrarian class into two antagonistic classes: agrarian bourgeoisie and proletariat (Celik, 2023).

In contrast, A.V. Chayanov (Brass, 2022) argued that Russian economy can best be categorised as peasant economy operating according to its own laws and logic by using largely the family labour to satisfy their subsistent needs (Harris-White, 2023). Unlike Lenin, the main force to bring change was change in life cycle of the family. The difference in family income was due to variations in consumers versus worker's ratio in family farms. Hence, the change was brought through demographic differentiation. Following more or less the same arguments as those of Lenin, Karl Kautsky argued through his analysis of agrarian situation in Germany in the late 19th century (Patnaik, 1979), that capitalism has surely penetrated, but this does not mean a total dissolution of small-scale peasants. Moreover, cultivation through family labour was effective way of decreasing the production cost, which in the long run is beneficial for the development of capitalism. But despite being linked to the capitalist mechanisms, its autonomy was not jeopardised, hence no depeasantization but still lot of differentiation through different trajectories (Mckay, 2022). Kautsky's use of Marxist approach is much relevant even today to answer any agrarian question. His theory has some amount of dualism i.e., on one hand he talks about borrowing the classical Marxist way how capitalism will enter the agriculture and on the other hand he observes certain trends specific to his days, which do not fit with classical Marxist way, hence he deals with them at the theoretical level (Suzer, 2022). He starts with classical Marxist conception where there is concentration of capital, application of scientific temper which would gradually force the peasants out of production and will convert them into landless wage labourers. The big estates lost, and the middle peasants gained grounds, while the small land holdings got fragmented. The breakthrough in this system will be brought in by the ability of the peasants to resist (Borass, 2023).

The connection(s) with Ungoverned Spaces in Africa: Definition, Reasons and Experiences

By alluding to other definitions as presented in related literatures by different scholars for the purpose of knowledge production, the point of convergence, by way of definition of ungoverned spaces as related to Africa in this paper, is: The power of resistibility by the peasants to create an entirely separate niche for themselves outside of the authorised landed/ territorial jurisdiction of the 'class' (government) in a world where a state (or states) claims just about every piece of land, we remain concerned with the consequences created by a territory's lacking a single and sovereign central government (Battaglia, 2020). Here, then, ungoverned spaces are a concept not about threats that emerge from the absence of governance, but about certain potential threats that emerge from the way a place is governed and is perceived as ungoverned territories not in its entirety but pose as a security threat because the borders of weak territory/state can produce spillover effects, with turmoil spreading like an ink-blot (Clunan and Harrold, 2010). As state capacities are challenged, withdrawn, or ejected, porosity created by these conditions tends to promulgate further turmoil and ungovernability. This occurred in West Africa during the 1990s when the Liberian conflict metastasised, undermining Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, and Sierra Leone. In the Central Sahel, illicit networks, local insurgents and, to a lesser extent, jihadi groups have instituted their own overlapping governance systems where the state is weak or absent (Conkar, 2020). Sometimes they work side by side, as in the Fezzan; at other times, they replace local institutions.

In the Libya Chad-Niger region, criminals have allied with the Tebus to dominate cross-border human smuggling and control a significant portion of the illicit transit of goods (mostly drugs and cigarettes) into Libya, as well as the export of such subsidised items as fuel and food (Romanet, 2019). In northeast Nigeria, Boko Haram replaced the weak local authorities with its own appointed leaders (Brechenmacher, 2019). Bad neighbour rare as characterized by an absence of order and stability, can encourage failure in vulnerable states. More specifically, shared borders can transmit unrest from a singular ungoverned space to neighbouring states whereby affiliations that challenge the state create transborder territorial networks based on ethnicity, political affinity, or economic self-interest (Bassey and Oshita, 2010). In some cases, the resulting multinational networks resemble proto states. Ungoverned spaces pose different degrees of threat. Those that harbour terrorism associated with global jihadism; provide bases for non-jihadi terrorism and criminal networks; and which are areas of

humanitarian crisis prove to be the most threatening (Taylor and Taylor, 2013). It is also the case that a humanitarian crisis could precipitate a process that moves beyond a population criticizing the ineffectiveness of the present state to one that seeks to supplant the present state leadership, for purpose of illustration (Chestermann et al., 2005), ‘Political philosopher David Miller (1994), posits a triangular relationship between a land, its residents, and a set of political institutions, whose usual configuration is the national sovereign state but which can generate configurations of land, people, and institutions different from the consolidated national territorial sovereign state. Importantly for Miller, therefore, a territorial entity need not wield jurisdictional authority (in the sense of being recognized by other similar entities and its people as the legitimate authority) but still possess many of the appurtenances of statehood; it is also, moreover, a matter of debate whether jurisdictional authority lies with the state (state sovereignty) or the people (popular sovereignty).’ So, mapping the space as completely ungoverned may generate approaches that invite a military form of strategy to state shortcomings. There are major concerns about security and the extent of the jihadi groups to exploit the lack of state presence in underdeveloped peripheries, but policies should be designed on a clear understanding of these regions and the root causes of their local conflicts (Wars, 2015:15).

Statehood and Territorial Sovereignty in Ungoverned Spaces

Weber (1994) argued concisely about what a state’s definition must consist in its unique features as a political association, namely its relationship with coercion and territory. Specifically, Weber defined the state as ‘a human community that successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory.’ In contrast, Article 1 of the Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States defines the state ‘as a person in international law with features such as a permanent population; a defined territory; government; and capacity to enter relations with other States’ (Bachmann and Prazauskas, 2019). These two definitions immediately raise questions of territoriality, particularly what happens when a state’s monopoly of legitimate force does not run throughout its territory-ungoverned spaces. Weber’s state is the sole claimant of legitimate authority in a territory, delineated from other states by mutually recognized borders. For Weber, therefore, an association claiming statehood must demonstrate—and not simply claim—that it maintains its borders and controls its territory (Weber, 1994). Loss of control over territory can result in secession or the formation of quasi-independent or what could be described as a sub state by those hostiles to central government. Recognized borders define states, but the degree of territorial control typically associated with the state is of relatively recent historical origin; ‘distorted’ boundaries are the basis of ungoverned spaces. ‘Distorted’ territoriality and an inability to control territory bring us back to why ungoverned space is defined as a security threat (Van Langenhove, 2013). The threat unattached territory poses to international stability has long been recognized in international law. Throughout history, the principle *uti possidetis juris*, which means that prior internal administrative boundaries become international boundaries, has generally applied in international relations and international law, in part for the laudable aim of avoiding territory motivated conflict (Taylor, 2016). However, in practice many situations have arisen where established boundaries have little or no linguistic and ethnic relevance. Thus, the right of self-determination creates potential for conflict based on territorially geographically concentrated disaffected minorities (Hannum, 1993). Robert Jackson (1992), for example, has suggested that frozen borders are a major cause of conflict: The changes outlined above meant that many of the states produced by the dissolution of formal empires retained jurisdictional and geographical existence in the absence of a dominant central government—and therefore the presence of ungoverned spaces. This tendency reflects an uneasy coexistence between competing types of sovereignty, a particular territorial area, namely international legal sovereignty, and the absence (or weakness) of domestic sovereignty. The globe formally divides into peer polities, namely states that interact with one another according to shared principles and norms relating to domestic and international sovereignty, which focus on the inviolability of borders and freedom from external interference in a state’s domestic affairs, and whose interactions are not determined by a single, dominant actor (Geldenhuis, 2009). However, despite formal equality

across these polities, not all states within themselves are equal in either power or effectiveness. This brings us to the question of statehood (Hurrell et al., 1999). Central to thinking about the relationship between the state, territory, and control is that a state must deliver a minimal level of functions and collective goods, notably maintaining order and an effective government capable of retaining a claim to rule the contiguous territory (Hirst and Thompson, 1995). This is statehood, or consolidated statehood which hinges on internal and external sovereignty; the possession of legitimacy and authority; a monopoly of armed force; and, more debatably, on institutional and normative restraints on the exercise of government power (Deng et al., 2010). The core assumption is that an ability to make, implement, and enforce authoritative decisions throughout a territory is fundamental, and the remedy for any political association failing to do so is state building. Historically and globally, consolidated statehood is of relatively recent emergence. Historically, limited statehood has been more common. Inherent in limited statehood is the feature of ungoverned spaces, where the government rules do not extend. This implies a causal chain underpinning a claim to statehood. First, the right to roll out rules flows from effective control of territory (Risse, 2013). Who exercise the right to govern a territory is frequently the outcome of violent political competition. Second, the linking of a state's right to govern a territory free from external intervention leads to a status quo bias, which means that when a state has demonstrated control, it is legitimate for the state to resist challenges and for it to call other states to support it in its efforts. These are, of course, key features of the Charter of the United Nations (Boone, 2014). However, it is irrelevant that alternative groups within a territory challenging the state might be better at governing that territory and its people. Thus, challenges to territorial control should be resisted and only if the state is utterly incompetent do other considerations, such as how to respond, become operative (Gibler, 2012). However, determining when a state is incompetent, failed, or collapsed is difficult to determine, as has been demonstrated with respect to the supposed "Responsibility to Protect," whose overall effect seems to have been to reinforce, not reduce, national state sovereignty (Doyle, 2015). This leads to two conclusions: (a) if a state is not effective, and this is liable to lead to areas of a set territory coming under the control of non-state actors, the state's territorial right comes into question; and (b) any group able to impose order or demonstrate effectiveness could gain territorial right in a given area, which raises the possibility of a "might is right" argument that is contrary to international law. Addressing the problem of ungoverned space is neither easy nor straightforward. Conflicts such those in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen invariably were characterized by, facilitated, or were even caused by external intervention and have served to emphasise the scale of the challenge posed by ungoverned spaces (Felbab-brown, 2017). Western states and their public opinions have shown that they neither have the resources or political will to sustain long-term state building, and that their actions tend to exacerbate already adverse conditions. Moreover, existing unofficial forms of government in these spaces may be in better positions to achieve order and more effective at addressing the local population's needs than the legitimate government (Taylor, 2016). This is premised on the ability to make, executive, and carry out authoritative decisions throughout a territory which is fundamental, and the remedy for any political association failing to do so is state building (Thomson, 1995). The US Department of Defense report on ungoverned areas noted, 'For diplomatic, legal, and practical reasons, the local state cannot be ignored or bypassed, but nor should it be permitted to impede progress against safe havens when other entities are positioned to help.' Thus, 'Legitimacy without capacity is unproductive. Capacity without legitimacy is counterproductive... with respect to illicit actors (Taylor, 2016:15): Efforts to reduce their capacity to operate are more effective when bolstered by efforts to reduce their legitimacy in the eyes of key populations.' and—the most extreme case—ungoverned areas. The ungoverned areas report captured the problem: A weak, failed, or collapsed state performs none of its governance functions effectively in a given area, freeing illicit actors to pursue threatening activities (Esty et al., 1998). All ungoverned areas have the potential to become comprehensive safe havens, but not all of them do; those ungoverned areas that do become safe havens, many are exploited not by transnational illicit actors but by groups whose activities and interests remain strictly local. The diagnosis above points directly to the potential security

issues raised by ungoverned spaces and prompts the question: do ungoverned areas constitute an external security threat (Stanislawski, 2008).

Globalisation: The conflict of interest between the capitalist bourgeoisie and the rural proletariat

One common image of globalization is that of the diffusion of a singular market culture. In this formulation, globalization is depicted (and/or advocated) as a process of growing economic and political integration. Rather than conceive of globalization phenomenally, as a trend, it is more usefully conceived of as a contradictory historical project - a mechanism of political and economic restructuring (Perlas, 2019). It is a response to, if not a cause of, the breakdown of the Bretton Woods system of national regulation. The globalization project is manifested in a variety of ways, unified by the belief in market liberalization. The belief is projected at the international, as well as the national, level by ideologues, administrators and development strategists (McMichael, 1997:630). It gives licence to schemes for privatization, dismantling of the social infrastructure of Third World states, deregulation of investment, trade and banking laws, dilution of environmental and employment protections, reductions in social entitlement, social subsidies (e.g., food prices), and wages and so on (Sandbrook et al., 2007). The outcome is to strengthen market forces, meaning those institutions and corporations that organize circuits of labour, money, and products. As a historical project it is by no means inevitable and is already generating new forms of opposition. How does the historical project of globalization mean- (Siderius, 2002). Globalization has always been a substantive tendency in modern capitalism. There have been global civilization projects like colonialism, but they were embedded in the expansion of rival nation-states. Only now is globalization conceived of explicitly as a universal way of organizing the social and natural world (Crary, 2022). It could be asserted that modernization was the touchstone of US hegemony in the post-war nation-state system; globalization plays a parallel role in the post-hegemonic era of corporate world market rule. Each discourse embodies a conception of world order. For modernization it was 'learn from, and catch up with, the west', while for globalization it is 'find your niche in the global economy'. The former held out replication as the key project, the latter holds out differentiation as the path to economic glory. Of course, there are subtexts (McMichael, 1997). Modernization theory was deployed as a tactic of decolonization and the institutionalization of western rationalism to secure the geopolitical frontiers of the Cold War. Globalization, on the other hand, is a tactic of recolonization, niche building being a polite way to restructure economic sectors, labour forces and nation-states to serve global investors (Hayward and Laffey, 2020).

It can also be argued that the current processes of globalization crystallize the agrarian question in new and challenging ways. Conventional wisdom understands the 'agrarian question' as an ingredient of national politics, concerning the political outcome of the process of incorporation of agriculture into capitalist relations (McMichael, 2008). According to Savino (2022), the agrarian question was a social cum political question with specific economic answer: that is, attempts to define the peasantry and its input into national politics usually generated analysis of its class location (Berstein, 1996). In this chapter, I want to explore two alternative propositions: First that the agrarian question has always been a national interpretation of a global process; and second, that current processes of globalization made clear this issue in diverse and challenging ways (Ezquerro-Cañete, 2020). This exploration implicitly addresses Savino (2022) concern with the capital-dominated knowledge of the classical agrarian question, super- imposing a Eurocentric history on Africans. The general explanatory interpretation subordinates the class explanatory framework to a political understanding of capitalist history, rejecting a capital-logic approach. The goal is to situate localism within changing fields of power, understood as global relations embedded within state practices (McMichael, 2007: 166). It identifies successive state-sanctioned projects, including state-system regimes, that organize commercial agriculture, and in so doing implicate adjacent rural communities and natural resources within broader political and ecological relations. Local agricultural communities may retain a local dynamic, but they must negotiate retention of that dynamic with various instituted market processes as the reach of states and international agencies expands. It is these overlapping relationships, inhering in specific ways in local communities, which

constitute the field of negotiation/resistance, and through which communities confront their (ongoing) history (Wolford et al., 2013).

There is no doubt that the configurations of agrarian classes, and their relationship to the industrialisation process of the twenty first-century, nation-states, were politically consequential (Teeple, 2000). However, from a different perspective there were conditioning global forces. These were identified by Robinson (2004) in his juxtaposition of markets and agrarian protectionism in Europe: In Robinson's account the peasantry, along with the landed aristocracy, formed the backbone of the protectionist counter-movement across Europe, in the face of cheap grains from the New World (Spalding, 2004), which is the world of globalisation.

Agrarian Change: The African Dimension

The Journey of agrarian Change in Africa has no specific trajectories because of its complex nature. Therefore, the studies done either in rural context or related to developments in agriculture are largely separated in Pre and Post-independence phases so that the complexity can be articulated properly (Balyan, 2019). And it was most probably one of the main entering points before independence for scholarly research in traditional African society. Villages have been a locus of cultural and social elements characterising the African society. For many sociologists and social anthropologists, it represents African in microcosm and lot of characteristics about African society at large can be deciphered through it (Gupta, 1998). This could partly mark the beginning of rural studies in Africa via study of villages which have been called peasant communities in Africa. African village has been a subject of scholarly for a century year starting from the classical studies in the 19th century by numerous scholars. It has not only been a subject of scholarly research but also an important subject in African consciousness, for instance, African villages had values that stood close to African civilisation (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1991). Similar importance to African villages (both academically and for the formulation of state policies) have been assigned by scholars who had developed interest in African studies where focus was placed on the popular images of African village through related studies of the ideologies of three prominent Indian political figures (Gandhi, Nehru, and Ambedkar) in India by doing a sociological analysis of nationalist movements (Gyamfi, 2022). There are ideal-typical villages in Africa which were exposed to change through wars, conquests, migration, colonisation, land revenue and other policy systems and it was probably change in the village structure which propelled further research (Mahoney, 2010). Talking about the major factors of change then land reforms notably stand as one of the prominent factors. They cannot be dealt with strictly as an economic measure, nor can we view them only as a matter of administrative strategy (Sidanius and Pratto, 2001). They are both and much more. In a country where agriculture is way of life for the dominant section in population, ownership and management of land has several cultural, psychological, and sociological dimensions, two African countries could be cited to gravitates the analysis in this section: which is South Africa, Ethiopia, and South Sudan, to mention but a few (Shipton, 1994).

Rethinking: African Dimension to Agrarian Change

The classical agrarian question concerned the political consequences of the subordination of landed property to capital within a problematic assigning rural society a declining importance (Akram-Lodhi and Kay 2012). If we could 're-think' the agrarian transition within a world-historical context the problematic becomes more complex. Thus, the classical nation/class of the problem of ungoverned spaces (though, as a misnomer to some scholars) is contextualized, and becomes increasingly residual in (or at least subordinate to) an emerging global/peasant problematic. It could be a general response to the assessment of capital's subordination of landed property, nor the assumption that the assault on rural cultures is inevitable or desirable, is sustainable. The political counter-movement - in both proliferating social movements and in the declining legitimacy of development is generating alternative paradigms (however utopian) that acknowledge the destabilizing impact of rural assault and privilege the voices and practices of those who experience the assault (Munck, 2006). What were once perceived as residual

political and social phenomena - e.g., ethnicity, citizenship, rurality, and urbanity) - have emerged as social forces and/or social calamities, necessarily re-evaluating national political landscapes. The new agrarian question is situated within this process of re- thinking.

Crisis in Africa: The Agrarian Question and Ungoverned spaces

This study adopts the ungoverned spaces thesis as a theoretical framework. Ungoverned spaces relate to spaces, both physical and non-physical that are outside the control of the government. However, the presence of ungoverned spaces may not necessarily imply the absence of governance by the state, but the government may deliberately be unwilling to control, exercise effective governance because of deficient political will, inadequate government capacity, lack of penetration of governance, resentment, and intractability of conflict, or restrictive models of behaviour in society (Hedderwick, 2008).

Poor Africans with homes in rural areas with little or no government formations are no longer simple peasants or rural wage labourers. They are also dependent on migrant wage labour, on working in the rural non-farm economy and on petty commodity production and trade in the capitalist economy (Long and Roberts, 2021). This calls for revisiting the relevance of categories such as poor peasant, middle peasant, and rich peasant by exploring the significance of the links that almost every single rural household seems to have with the wider economy beyond the village confines (Hann, 1993). How has the African agrarian economy transformed over the last decades especially during the 1970s and 1980s that saw a proliferation of scholarly research on the agrarian economy not just in Africa (Berry, 1993). The classical agrarian question set the terms of the debate: How can the rural peasant economy make the transition to capitalism and also be squeezed to provide the resources needed for industrial, urban economic development and what are the obstacles- The question of whether African agriculture is capitalist, to what degree, how unevenly it has developed, how recent it is and the related questions of whether the dominant mode of production is not capitalist but pre-capitalist or semi-feudal are subject of discussion for another research in the future, without moving out of the scope of the study (Timmer, 1988). However, with the rise of the critique of agrarian studies (especially the political dimension), the problems of categorising modes of production, and the push for scholarship to move to urban studies and address the urgent problems of liberalisation, in-depth research and reflection on the agrarian economy declined. Meanwhile, understanding the agrarian economy remains central to the strategy and tactics of all the sub themes to the study of globalization (Borras, 2016). One of the crucial questions for Africa is the very basic political one that concerned Engels at the end of the 19th century - the question of what kind of alliances need to be formed in a country with a large peasantry? Whether for instance the struggle ought to be between the agricultural labourers and the big landowners; whether the peasantry should align with the land less labourers and the capitalist farmers against feudal landlords; or whether Africa ought to forget about land to the tiller altogether and resurrect a struggle against capitalism rejecting any exclusive alliances with the rich peasants or capitalist farmers (Shah and Harriss-White, 2011). It should be maintained that the place of the peasantry as the main force of their revolutionary party of the proletariat and strategise the content of the revolution as the peasant war to seize land and replace feudal authority with people's authority (Scott, 1985).

Leaving aside the compelling political importance of scholarly analysis of the agrarian economy, partly because of liberalisation policies, there have also been fundamental shifts in the relationship between the rural and the urban, and agriculture and industry which, until recently, have fallen off the scholarly agenda of Africa (Cotula, 2012). Meanwhile, in Africa, Latin America and south-east Asia, agrarian transformation continued to have keen observers. Highlighting the massive changes in the global economy, Patnaik (2003) argues that access to global capital may allow developing capitalist economies to generate surplus for industrial growth of the development of agriculture. He even asks whether under neo-liberal globalisation, what he calls the "agrarian question of capital" is relevant any longer. International finance capital has become a source for private sector investment in Africa. From the mid-1980s there has been a significantly weakened linkage between agricultural growth and industry. Non-agricultural sectors have grown rapidly, and the agrarian economy has certainly been neglected by

the policy reformers, hell-bent on ushering in a supermarket society with its highly capital-intensive supply chains. Lagging the rest of the economy in terms of growth rates and productivity, agriculture contributes larger percentage to Africa's GDP today (Lerche, 2007). However, paradoxically, many Africans are dependent on the rural economy and in complex ways. Reflecting global patterns, more than 60 percent of the population of sub-Saharan Africa is smallholder farmers, and about 23 percent of sub-Saharan Africa's GDP comes from agriculture (Eastwood and Lipton, 2011). Agriculture for Development stresses the fact that three-quarters of the world's poor live in the countryside, engaging in farming as their principal activity in conditions that do not foster a secure or sustainable livelihood (Dethier and Effenberger, 2012). The processes of peasant differentiation may still be grinding away, despite the claims for the vanishing village and people's aspirations to move away from farming, Africa does not appear to be witnessing a great civilisation shift from country to the town. A quarter century ago, after Lenin - laid out that there is no standard or inevitable path of the transition to capitalism, and this was so even in Europe. In the last three decades, Africa as, one of the continents with the largest agrarian population in the world, has been experiencing processes of social change that are unfolding not only in very different ways to that of the classic paths but also with vast diversity across the countries (Bernstein, 2010). A limited number of scholars have realised the serious need to research, understand and theorise these changes. Some, such as McMichael (2007) and Patnaik (2003) have attempted to develop their ideas into general formulations. However, only a few scholars have the research data to investigate these changes in any great depth. There is reliance on continued long-term engagement with people from a particular set of villages in Africa. Others have restudied rural areas that they or others worked on in the past (Shah and Harriss-White, 2011:13). This growing body of work raises several fundamental issues which need further exploration. Lack of concentration of land and the persistence of small-scale cultivation have been interpreted by some as signs of semi-feudal relations but almost everywhere the logic of semi-feudalism no longer seems to be at work (Turnock, 2003). The asymmetrical changes amount to the direct confrontation that small peasants faced with exploiting classes within villages that characterised semi-feudal relations rarely exist in the same way today. These transformations have massively affected social relations in rural areas. To what extent does farming income provide a major livelihood for households reported to engage in tenancy (Shah and Harriss-White, 2011:15). In fact, these households are more likely to run on the salaries of teachers, government servants, shopkeepers, or traders than the income from the rent of the farm or its produce. Tenancy can be part and parcel of capitalist social relations where people who have risen the class hierarchy no longer wish to till their land themselves (Montshwe, 2006). The case for redistributive land reform certainly needs rethinking that classic push away from agricultural work at home, in which the farmer or farm labourer moves away from the village to become a factory hand in the city is not taking place as the dominant process of labour transformation in Africa. Neither is the classic divisive differentiation of the peasant classes - the formation of a large rural proletariat and an agrarian capitalist class (Dethier and Effenberger, 2012). Farm incomes then are no longer sufficient to provide for the needs of most rural working people. However, growth in regular employment has been extremely slow (Haggblade et al., 2010) and most people are being pushed to work in the unregulated informal and unorganised sector which has almost no labour protection but accounts for over 50% of the African workforce (Arfat, 2013). This is not constricted directly to industry alone but seems this labour is being absorbed in other sectors such as construction, workshop manufacturing, large-scale capitalist farms of other regions, or services. The vulnerability, mobility and marginality of this informal sector labour may explain the persistence of small-scale cultivation (Moser, 1978). The multiple livelihood options are necessary for the reproduction of rural households. So, the rural economy has developed in very complex ways. What are the means by which rural households reproduce themselves and what kinds of differentiation might result? To answer these questions, recent studies of labour raise the importance of the circular migration of labour for work in Africa's informal economy (Scoones et al., 2012). In most areas the labouring poor leave the village to work but keep coming back in a pattern of migration that is not just about becoming ordinary labour (Lipton, 1980) but remaining footloose. Some have estimated that there are over 50 million Africans

circulating as labour, others have suggested the figure is nearer over 100 million (Fergusson, 1999). 'Casualisation' is the primary feature of this labour and others have shown, different degrees of bonded labour relations are a common condition of this capitalist work relation. While some need the advances, which tie them to contractors in moments of crisis, others often submit to bondage simply to get employed (LeBaron and Ayers, 2013). Brass (2022) opined that, this neo-bondage is significantly different from the forms of agrarian bondage of the past as it comes without the guarantees of provisions of basic needs in slack seasons or when labourers were not able to work because of ill health, old age, and other dependent phases of the life cycle. He finds conditions of the rural proletariat in different places (Arfat, 2013). There is an important regional dynamic to this massive labour migration. The predominance of eastern and central Africa are noted to be reservoirs of seasonal casual labour migration for the rest of the African economy (Hanna et al., 2009) or instance, will commonly go to work as wage labour for six months to the brick factories of their home villages for the rainy season where many will have small plots of land to cultivate rice that may last them a few months stresses the fundamental importance of temporary migration on the marketising and monetising of the rural economy and the decline in the political exactions and social mechanisms of semi feudalism (Menz, 2010). The great transformation to industrial society does not appear to be taking place in Africa, but rural areas are being fundamentally transformed through migrant labour. And it is possible that this complex dynamic of rural-urban connections through circular migration is here to stay in Africa. Moreover, while seasonal casual migration is important, there is also a significant non-farm economy which has developed within rural areas. The nonfarm rural economy in 2004-2005 accounted for one fifth of total employment and for 50 million jobs more than in the rural farm economy. This includes work in construction, "trade and hotels", manufacturing, as well as transport and storage (Mitra and Mitra, 2013). According to some similar data, the largest number of new jobs is increasing in the category of the self-employed. The National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector argues that 65% of the agricultural sector is in fact self-employed (Osei-Boateng and Ampratwum, 2011). There is a vast section of the African population that is involved in petty commodity production (Peters, 2004) where households control their means of production for exchange as well as exploit their own labour. Labour lawyers and economists treat it as disguised wage work. But this is often a form of independent productive activity for the market, reproduced through relationships mediated by the exchange of commodities, in spheres of manufacturing, trade and services, almost all of which is in the informal economy. For instance, not just food from agricultural production, but hunting, fishing, milk production, brewing, weaving, pottery, carpentry, construction, small shop keeping and producing and selling food in a restaurant or tea stall. Most petty commodity producers are extremely vulnerable, struggling to survive, sustaining themselves in conditions where they will not be able to grow and any surplus will be accidental (Scoones et al., 2012). They are, as Peters (2004) points out, easily susceptible to exploitation through exchange on several markets: property, raw materials, money, and the finished product, other than that of the classic one of labour for wage work. And, as in the case of labour migration, there is need to urgently research and understand the widespread significance of the transformation of rural economies of Africa and in processes of class differentiation. Also, the paradoxical role of the African state ostensibly outside its own reach in the informal economy in both propping up the poor in village Africa in providing infrastructure, and as a potential driver of class differentiation must not be overlooked. In Nigeria for instance, herder-farmer conflicts have been linked to diminishing natural resources engendered by climate change. Herder-farmer conflicts in North Central Nigeria have caused the death of almost 4000 people as of 2018 (Chiluwa and Chiluwa, 2022). The records of the destruction of farms and other material resources are unquantifiable. While the farmers have attributed the conflict to the tendency of cattle to damage their crops and pollution of water sources, the herders argued that rustling, cattle theft, and barricade of traditional grazing are the major drivers of the conflicts (Karyah, 2018). With the counterpoise of accusations, desertification underlies the competition between herders and farmers for economic spaces for survival. Indeed, desertification is a major but often neglected driver of cyclical attacks between the two groups. In an atmosphere of ungoverned spaces, the violent conflict between

herders and farmers in Nigeria has thrived, primarily in the Savannah region and partly in the rainforest areas (Lenshie et al., 2021). Therefore, the burgeoning violent non-state actors, far extremists and criminal gangs often undermine the unintended vacuum created by ineffective security governance to advance sectarian interests and threaten national sovereignty, investigations of herder-famer conflicts tended to gloss over situating the conflicts within the logic of ungoverned spaces amidst increased desertification (Lenshie et al., 2021). The Africa kind of agrarian change is not the classic agrarian transition. If they ever were, poor Africans with homes in rural areas would no longer be classified as simple peasants or rural wage labourers, but people who have complex livelihoods involving both forms of work: tilling their small plots of land and now, dependent on migrant wage labour, on working in the rural non-farm economy and on petty commodity production and trade in the capitalist economy to reproduce their household. This is a circumstance which needs new conceptual tools (Scoones et al., 2012). We have known for a long time now that villages are not republics but the importance of seasonal casual labour migration, of the rural non-farm economy and of petty commodity production, stresses a new need critically to revisit the relevance of categories such as poor peasant, middle peasant, rich peasant by exploring the significance of the links that almost every single rural house hold seems to have for its reproduction with the wider economy beyond the village confines (Celik, 2023). Scholars of agrarian change in Africa will need to think through the relevance and classes of labour to the segmentation of labour in Africa (Peters, 2004). Scholars like Levien et al. (2018) gives some clarity about the classification of labour but scholars also need to consider whether Africa is witnessing a transition from peasant production to petty production in which producers embody micro capital as well as labour and do not lose entire control of the means of production but are compulsively incorporated through circuits of exchange. They also need to think through the suggestion of the Indian state and its many phases which are increasingly holding back the transformations of capitalism (Harris-White 2023). The state has an incoherent project, encouraging small-scale livelihoods, destroying them, protecting them, ignoring them, or allowing them to survive as an unintended consequence of other intentions altogether. Changes are taking place in different ways and at dissimilar speeds across the country. Development within Africa means that there could be several different agrarian questions, driven by regionally disparate class constellations and development trajectories. Some agrarian regions of Africa have also been much better studied historically without any conjuncture with ungoverned spaces than others and more theoretically informed empirical work is needed in these latter regions (Ali and Raza, 2022).

Emerging Trends and a Way forward

The kind of analysis presented here has explored the possibility of identifying varying conditions for the agrarian question in the late twenty first century. This involves re-evaluating the classical agrarian question and its implications for twentieth-first century agrarian politics from a global perspective, which understands that agriculture is a political construction. The story begins with the late-nineteenth-century agrarian question being posed within the novel dynamics of comparative advantage as an initial food regime emerged (McMichael, 1997). In the twenty first century, the major political dynamics are the undermining of colonial agricultures by replacement through national agricultures by the process of replication, and, potentially, of global agricultures by reclamation, as a melange of local movements redefining economics and politics (Hubber, 2022). It has been argued during this analysis that conditions of the late-twentieth- century agrarian question lie in the reformulation of the politics of agriculture. The reformulation addresses the opposition between globalization, rural and social stability (Battaglia, 2020). Reformulation in the sense of re-addressing the questions of food security as agriculture has been increasingly subordinated to profitability criteria, generating southern food dependencies; reversing environmental deterioration resulting from agricultural intensification; the elevation of management of agro-food exchanges, and of the commons, to the global arena; and a growing rejection of agro-industrialism, including its links to global ecology (Balyan, 2019). All these elements of reformulation pose the problem of the political organization of agriculture, i.e., who governs decisions about land use

and its product- this is where the nexus is emphasised, for the question of 'Agrarianism' and ungoverned spaces in Africa (Hubber, 2022). Market rule comes up against substantive concerns, as farm, local consumer and environmental constituencies begin to formulate a post-developmental vision of social life in the wake of economic and social crisis and environmental degradation. In a world in which the limits of the industrial paradigm are fast becoming apparent, we are rediscovering the historic fact that control of land and food has been fundamental to the political equation - within and among states on the one hand, and through the construction and reconstruction of diets on the other hand (Rigg, 2005). The passage, through this century, from the land tenure question (the classical agrarian question) to food and green questions now appears to be undergoing recursion. That is, global movements resisting the corporate-sponsored self-regulated market ideal are seeking to reintegrate these historically separated questions. In this movement of integration, the food and green questions have the potential to challenge the productivity paradigm which stood behind the nineteenth-century agrarian question (McMichael, 1997). Consequently, it would orderly and gradually amount to a concerted renewal of interest in rural and sustainable agriculture which might reverse the anti-agrarianism narratives of the development paradigm before it is too late (Barham, 1999).

Conclusion

To conclude, the agrarian question and ungoverned spaces in Africa was formulated differently by scholars, practitioners and theoreticians of politics and International Relations depending on the context in which they were located, the perspective they were using and the theoretical school they belong to. But there was still something in common among them all, which held them together. Also, the plethora of literature dealing with separate issues in agrarian context shows that the agrarian structure has certainly transformed from its earlier versions, and this transformation has influenced as well as changed all those structures with which it intersected in its journey to change. Though an attempt was made in this chapter to give a review of all possible trends in agrarian question, the journey toward change is still on, hence expanding global space for further economic cum political discussion.

Recommendations

If ungoverned spaces generate threats, the policy solution is to extend state control into these areas and to both improve the national/regional government's provision of security, services, and political representation by reforming them.

If ungoverned spaces generate threats, the policy solution for African states should be out-competing them for local loyalty.

If ungoverned spaces generate threats, the policy solution for Africans should be encompassed by coopting and using them for the benefits of the recognised, formal, and governable state.

However, the points above suggest that policymakers should consider putting less pressure on states to absorb ungoverned spaces. This analysis deliberately set aside the issue of threat inflation. Which to a greater level, the gravity of threat policymakers sees emanating from ungoverned spaces, pose more likely that, they are to pursue policies to incorporate them, even if these policies have substantial political and economic costs and connected outcomes.

Even if ungoverned spaces do not pose significant threats to the United States or its interests, the persistent debate suggests policymakers may face the world with an unnecessarily constrained view of statecraft.

Policymakers may decide that the risks posed by some areas and actors outweigh the costs but understanding the architecture underlying the status quo will allow more accurate assessments of the financial costs and the political risks of disturbing current political systems.

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