DEBATING LAND IN AFRICA: AN ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACTS OF COLONIALISM AND NEOLIBERALISM IN GUINEA-BISSAU'S AGRARIAN TRANSITION

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Introduction

This study examines que agrarian question in the African continent in general – relating it to Guinea-Bissau's specific experience since the neoliberal period. The main objective is to provide the underlying historical panorama of land debate in the continent by using authors from several African regions and confronting them with Cabral's perspectives (Cabral 1966) on how agriculture and industry should mutually stimulate each other, in a balanced and harmonized way, while considering the question of gender/labour, in order to promote African farmers.

In its first part, the article shortly investigates, without losing density, the academic debate among social scientists on agrarian transition in Africa. Special attention will be given to the farmers-land relation in colonial, post-independence and neoliberal times. In the second part of the study, we shall thoroughly approach current contradictions emerging from the African agrarian issue (gender and labour, food security and monoculture), articulating them with a closer look into Guinea-Bissau (our main object).

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African post-liberation government's failures in the agrarian/land question

It is estimated that around 60% of African population lived in the countryside (ECA 2015). Since families are usually distributed among both urban and rural areas, people in the city don't completely break their ties with the countryside (Moyo and Yeros 2011). This intrinsic rural-urban relationship which characterizes African societies is constantly under scrutiny, and the land issue, specially access to land for various means (agriculture above all) and agrarian reform have emerged as a priority of current debates. This "effective" involvement of African social scientists (but not solely) with the agrarian question/transition in the continent is also due to the fact that liberation movements, which had formerly found a significant base among African farmers to assert their claims and ideological discourse pro-emancipation, were not able (after taking control of the state structure in most African countries) of actually accomplishing the unifying principle of libertarian Pan-Africanism – which emphasized that revolutionary struggle was "only" the first step and the means to reach the second stage, which would be complete economic, cultural and psychological emancipation (Kodjo and Chanaiwa 2010). Characterized by Amílcar Cabral (1975) as the "Largest Program for the Reafricanization of Spirit and subsequent development of the continent", its main purpose was to create the environment for agrarian reform and for the promotion of agriculture, which would, in turn, harmonize income in urban and rural areas (cities and countryside), thus maintaining a proper balance between consumption and accumulation by investing in African small-scale agriculture, which, as this article suggests, still remains as a challenge nowadays.

Instead of channeling resources towards fully employing the continent's potential in terms of agriculture and democratizing access to land (by internally perfecting the already existing traditional lineages system responsible for the distribution of land in autochthonous African societies), most independent African states went in the opposite direction. The agrarian question and the promotion of agriculture as primary/priority sector, capable of boosting endogenous development, which had been promised during the struggle for independence, were substituted by the adoption of ambiguous strategies which have so far only resulted in some kind of "failed progress" (Amin 1981; KI-Zerbo 2006; Kabou 1991).

However, it is important to highlight that this is not only a challenge for Africa; this has also happened in many other countries considered "under-

developed". My point here is to refer specifically to a growing uncritical import of the Western model of development to other contexts, distinct from the Western reality, which disconsiders the pluralities and cultural specificities of the place of adaptation. Moreover, in the case of Africa, this uncritical import of exogenous development models contributes, as stated by S. Amin (1972), to the acceleration of the disarticulation process of the traditional lineage structures that guarantee access to land (despite having their internal contradictions, above all that of largely not recognizing and not responding to power disparities in terms of gender/labour) and also perpetuates insufficient agricultural and craft production on the countryside. This means that "underdeveloped" or "Third World" countries, specially African, have fallen into what Carlos Cardoso (1991, 6) characterized as "the entrails of modern development theories with an evolutionary and mimetic perspective". In this case, the mimicked model is that of hegemonic West.

Due to the fact that the "modern world system was formed and expanded based on recurrent fundamental restructuring, led and governed by successive hegemonic states" (Arrighi 2002, 23) it is hard not to follow another way other than that of the "restructuring" processes imposed by the aforementioned dominant forces through international cooperation agencies. Moreover, as S. Amin (1981) wrote, these dominant forces are dominant because they are able to unjustly impose their language to their victims. This can be verified when "specialists in conventional economics" persuade "Third World", "underdeveloped" countries to adopt an "imaginary/unrealistic economic strategy" (Amin 1981). In terms of Africa, and Guinea-Bissau in particular, the neoliberal period imposed to the continent from the 1980s (as shall be analyzed further in this text) seems like an example worthy of citation. A period marked by the adoption of imaginary/unrealistic economic strategies which have mixed concepts and "mistaken progress for capitalist expansion, market for capitalism" (Amin 2001, 74).

Furthermore, during the neoliberal period, African countries were submitted to a series of "reform" policies, and it is important to note that although their objective was to overcome the cyclic crises that the continent was facing, as a result they had the "necessary function to accelerate poverty, which urges, until today, that government officials and citizens of affected states continuously seek their re-entry to the world division of labour in conditions favorable to the state in its organic nucleus" (Arrighi 2002, 76). This is a result of the "African power elite" buying the discourse, itself part of the Western dominance maneuver, that African poverty derives from their economies not being sufficiently integrated to the global system (Amin 1981). That is, there is always something congenital that prevents Africa from developing

– not the fact that its "elite in power" could not understand the real problems of the continent and offer concrete and endogenous solutions, specially in the agrarian domain and in terms of agricultural financing, but rather it could never effectively implement the recipes imported from Western countries.

Consequently, African government officers' lack of endogenous ability to create favorable conditions for an agrarian reform in the continent (except for Zimbabwe[2]), along with international market rules which prescribe what type of production is sustained in the periphery, keep most African agriculture inert and make it completely dependent on natural conditions (Mafeje 1991). This means that, on the one hand, both state and private sector haven't been able, for example, to guarantee artificial irrigation of agricultural fields. Thus, if there is too much rain, farmers lose their yield, and if there is no rain, they suffer as well (Mafeje 1991; Moyo and Yeros 2011). On the other hand, the aforementioned state inertia and pre-established rules of the global value chain have also led farmers to adhere to non-developed subsistence farming, through which, sometimes, they can provide local markets, but which is mostly unable to achieve larger scale in terms of production, due to its material conditions and lack of investment (Amin 1972).

It must also be noted that this lack of investment in African agrarian sector has obliged small farmers to look for submarkets, which generally promote monoculture (Cardoso 1991). In the case of Guinea-Bissau, our object of study as shall be further discussed, there was a dependency on the monoexport of *mancarra*/peanuts, criticized by A. Cabral (1953) during the colonial times, and later there was the monoculture and, consequently, monoexport of cashew nuts. The ideological program of development through a diversified agriculture, advocated by A. Cabral (1966), has still not been implemented in contemporary Guinea-Bissau. The faithful support for the alliance forged during the fight for independence in Guinea-Bissau and Cabo Verde, comprising small farmers, workers and petite bourgeoisie in order to allow a "constant (re)evaluation of our own conduct in fighting our weaknesses", as stated by A. Cabral (1975, 8), has been put aside.

The improvement of living conditions among rural farming population has been dismissed and priority was given to a type of urban industrialization involving the creation of industrial complexes and assembly plants which had little integration with national agriculture (Koudawo 1994; Mendy1994; Jao 1999). To this process, centered in the capital of the country (Bissau), was added a lack of rural intervention policies by the Guinean state to minimize hardship among its people, specially farm laborers, which caused an accel-

2 Further reading: Sam Moyo (2005; 2008), Paris Yeros (2005; 2010)

erated flow of rural flight (Jao 1999). A significant part of farmers, who now had no means to reinvent themselves in order to assure their subsistence in the rural area, were forced to abandon their villages in order to search for a decent life in recently inaugurated urban factories. This was due to the fact that, among other difficulties, there was a lack of means to conserve and guarantee the durability of their scarce agricultural products and thus no way to prevent hunger in between harvests (Monteiro 1992). Besides, transportation difficulties hinder a viable flow of these products to the capital or to other countries, at the same time that the already mentioned lack of artificial irrigation limits farming to Guinea-Bissau's rainy season. The situation is even more challenging when the farming calendar is less productive due to reasons such as lack of proper material, calamities or natural disasters. For instance, when there is too much rain (Guinea-Bissau has a 6-month period of heavy rain) and the large quantity of water spoils cultivation (Monteiro 1992; Jao 1999).

With these material and symbolic demands, people substituted their "endogenous development" euphoria, translated by Amílcar Cabral as "walking with your own feet and guided by your own head" (Cabral 1975a, 3), for a disenchantment phase (Mkandawire 2005). It is worth noting that during the same time Guinea-Bissau was being regarded as a failed state, a platform for international drug trafficking, presenting itself in the agenda of international organizations and multinational or bilateral cooperation agencies as permanent client of loans and donations, of external debt renegotiations, and of planning commissions pushing more indebtedness, without which it seems impracticable (Augel 2016). By the way, these were the conditions which made Guinea-Bissau to be restrained by the agenda of bilateral and multilateral cooperation agencies in terms of what to do in order to keep receiving external financing – which was done in a process without national engagement (Gomes 1996; Monteiro 1996). This particular case relates to the aforementioned neoliberal project, to which the African continent was subordinated by the *Bretton Woods* institutions, then by European Union (EU) and United Nations agencies, involving "political and economic reforms" with the imposition of a "structural adjustment" program.

In general, considering this scenario, it is noteworthy that actual results in terms of "development" (comprising the agrarian question) have been negative in most African countries due to an uncritical import of exogenous models, which tend to clash with local culture, as is the case in Guinea-Bissau. Most African societies or states have seen and experienced a progressive fall in food production, accelerated rural flight, uncontrollable external dependency, permanent threat of economic collapse and the expro-

priation of land in the midst of intense demographic growth in the continent (Mighot and Adholla 1994; DFID 1999; Moyo 2018).

In order to better understand these land and development challenges that Africa is facing, the complex issues cited above must be further discussed. This demands a historical analysis to better understand the origins of the problem, which takes us back to the continent's colonial history. As shall be further analysed and discussed, the debate around land in Africa has been explored for a long time by social scientists, evoking various interpretations. Nowadays, new questions have emerged – such as gender and labour, for instance – reframing and expanding this debate.

Debating land in Africa: an epistemic dispute among titans

We started this study by demonstrating the political, social and economic challenges, especially related to land, which Africa has been facing. In order to further discuss the questions that have been raised previously in the text, this section will engage on a critical debate about land in Africa.

Neoliberalism has had particular (and continuous) impacts in the African continent, which have been heavy. According to Hilger (2012): "in many countries, the second wave of neoliberal policies (political liberalization imposed by international institutions) has reinforced the paradox of an omnipresent and completely absent state" (Ossome 2018, 14). In terms of land, as Amin (1992) certifies, neoliberalism has subordinated family production and working processes and has extracted surplus-value through inequalities in trade and political dominance, undermining the relative "freedom" of rural families' labour relations. However, Amin (2002) believed that if neoliberalism had impacts on the disarticulation of African agriculture, or undermined its improvement, it was more a continuity of colonial politics than a neoliberal (re)invention. He defended that colonization had been successful in breaking with the customary laws of consuetudinary power which regulated access to land in rural-ethnic African societies (Amin 1972). The post-colonial state, as stated by Amin (1981), after its empowerment, accelerated the processes of transforming communal land into private properties. In the case of Guinea-Bissau, as Nassum (1991) explains, it is from this moment on that the state will appropriate some of the land for state agriculture.

Following the steps of Amin (1972; 1981a; 2002), but with a significant change, Mahmood Mamdani (1987) approaches the institutional problem which colonization has created and which has never been resolved in terms of the agrarian question. According to him, colonial administrative

laws institutionalized "a form of managing rural areas which fostered despotism and disarranged the lineage societies , allowing traditional chiefs to grab land and other local material goods"[3] (Mamdani 1987, 24). According to Mamdani (1996), control of land by the indigenous themselves or by a communal rural system has paved the way for colonizers to manipulate and institutionalize the agrarian question for their benefit.

An author who has also offered a very substantial contribution to this critique of colonization in terms of African farm labourers, in fact before Amin (1972) and Mamdani (1996), was Amílcar Cabral (1953). After a practical involvement in the study of the old "Portuguese Guinea's" agriculture[4], and noticing that the average number of working units per cultivation and per ethnicity ranged from 3 to 7, while the cultivated area represented 12,21% of the territory's surface (that is, deducted the net part), he defended that this number was very low if we effectively consider all arable area. A. Cabral (1953) stated that Portuguese colonization had maintained the "rudimentary quality" of the technique employed by local farmers (notably in terms of agricultural implement), instead of stimulating its development through the introduction of more sophisticated techniques. Also, he maintained that the technical, economic and social conditions of colonial Guinea's agriculture prevented a substantial increase in arable land for national agricultural exploration (Cabral 1975). Cabral criticized the fact that Portuguese colonization left Guinean peasantry at their own luck, since there were many economically viable lands in Guinea at that time (1953) which were not utilized to diversify national production, and only about 41% of this arable area was actually cultivated.

From this, emerged a crucial question for Cabral (1953), which contained the basis for national self-determination and whose main characters should be the "good sons of the land". For Cabral, contrasting with Amin (1972) and Mamdani (1996), Portuguese colonization, for example, had not been able to dismantle the traditional consuetudinary structures that guarantee access to land in Africa (Cabral 1953), despite the formal apparatus created with this purpose. For Cabal (1953), the Portuguese colonial project of disordering traditional peasant structures failed due to a practical issue.

> Our peasant can not read or write and almost has no relationship with the colonial forces, except for the payment of taxes, which, even so,

3 It is important to highlight that it is also because of this interpretation that Mamdani has been accused of homogenizing rural African societies (as in Paris; Moyo 2005).

4 Cabral, as an agricultural engineer and employee of the Portuguese colonial regime, coordinated Guinea's Agricultural Census (in mid-1953). The results of the Census are scattered along 471 charts in a report sent to the Portuguese colonial authority.

> are not paid directly; the working class does not exist as a well-defined class, it is but an embryo in development; finally, there is not among us an economically valid bourgeoisie, because imperialism did not allow it to form. However, there was the formation of a social stratum, in order to serve colonialism itself, which is today the only one capable of directing and using the instruments that the colonial state used against our people: African petite-bourgeoisie (Cabral 1969, 121).

Colonial governments could usually take some land by force as long as it was "justified" (for the construction of roads, highways etc), but the fact that most farmers didn't have a relationship with colonial forces allowed for the normal functioning of this consuetudinary structure – advocates Cabral (1953). Specifically regarding the "Portuguese" Guinea, this was more patent, since the Portuguese colonial system did not grab a lot of lands, at least on a large scale, for state agriculture, construction of highways or anything like that – this can be noticed when we read Cabral's (1966) critique of the Portuguese colonization on Guinea's lack of infrastructure. It should also be taken into consideration that the Portuguese colonization was only able to capitalize Bijagós archipelago from 1936[5] and, even so, it was never able to directly interfere in the structure of power of Guinean rural-ethnic society (Mendy 1991).

The "success" of Portuguese colonization in Guinea, states Cabral (1966), differently from Cape Verde, where a tiny minority of local petite-bourgeoisie was financed to grab lands and create big farms, was that Guinean peasantry was scrapped – that is to say, abandoned. That was the reason why, for Amílcar Cabral (1977), the independence struggle should be the symbol of a fight to guarantee the equal distribution of lands in Cape Verde (agrarian reform, among other social issues) and, in Guinea-Bissau, an advancement of agriculture (development through the peasants' way or *vía campesina*) followed by the fight to overcome other social challenges.

For Cabral (1966), it was patent that there was an attempt by colonizers to institutionalize the management of rural areas in Africa with the purpose of disrupting the lineage societies, as Amin (1972; 1981) and Mamdani (1987; 1996) also noted. However, this attempt was not successful

5 Its is important to remember the many failed attempts of the Portuguese colonial government against the Bijagó troops lead by fearsome Queen Bijagó, Okinka Pampa, until the last "peacemaking" campaign in 1936.

everywhere on the continent in practical terms, as was the case of Guinea, for example[6].

As stated in the General Report about the national liberation struggle presented at the Conference of Nationalist Organizations of Guinea and Cape Verde Islands, which took place in Dakar (capital of Senegal) from July 12 to 14, 1961, Cabral, in what he called "the absurdity of our situation", showed that the peoples of Guinea, above all those characterized as "indigenous", "enjoyed" a "special" legal status according to the Portuguese Constitution. By presenting the Organic Law of the Overseas and the well-known "Statute of the Portuguese Indigenous", Cabral denounced a list of prohibitions that the "indigenous" was subject to, from a legal standpoint, which were:

> b) in order to change residency within the same circumscription, the indigenous needs to obtain an authorization from the local administrative entity; any change to another circumscription will be dependent upon the authorization of "interested administrators" (article 9, sole paragraph *ibidem*);
>
> c) the election, investment, deposition or reintegration of traditional chiefs are dependent upon the approval of the administrative entity (articles 11 and 14, *ibidem*);
>
> d) the indigenous has no political rights in relation to non-indigenous institutions which decide for his economic, political, social and cultural life (article 23, *ibidem*);
>
> e) the indigenous has no freedom to follow his traditions and customs if they are considered incompatible with "the free exercise of Portuguese sovereignty" (article 138 of the Portuguese Constitution);
>
> f) the prison sentences to which the indigenous is subject "can always be substituted for compulsory labour" (article 26 of the Statute) (Cabral 1977, 100);
>
> h) in order to be subject to common law in terms of family relations, inheritance, trade and real estate, it is mandatory that his "request is accepted by a municipal judge, after the guarantee, given by two respected citizens, that the indigenous has adopted, definitely, the presumed conduct for the application of such laws,

6 There were legal mechanisms created to meddle in the social structures of rural-ethnic African societies aiming at breaking them apart. However, the resilience of many of them enabled them to resist this "legal" attempt of prohibitions and lack of freedom in the rural area.

as well as other formalities that the judge might consider necessary" (articles 27 and 28, Cabral 1977, 100);

i) the indigenous cannot individually acquire rights for private land property, except in very special conditions, such as "continuous, peaceful and public possession, in good faith, for at least ten years, of previously vacant or abandoned lands, where he can prove the existence of well maintained trees or permanent crops by the owner" (articles 38, 39 and respective paragraphs, Cabral 1977, 100);

j) in exceptional cases in which the indigenous is the proprietor, he is "obliged to maintain the grounds always clean, to harvest the produce, to progressively transform primitive culture into orderly culture". If this doesn't happen and he moves away from his lands for longer than three months, "public obligations" will be imposed (article 41, Cabral 1977, 100);

l) the indigenous' rural and urban properties, in general, cannot be committed, nor are susceptible to serve as guarantee for the obligation (article 46, Cabral 1977, 100);

m) in special cases, though vaguely defined, the indigenous cannot sell his agricultural production freely, and the sale can be "conditioned, limited or forbidden by administrative authorities" (article 219, Cabral 1977, 100);

n) indigenous questions of judicial nature will not be judged by common courts and their "trial is appropriate to the municipal judge" (Base LXV of the Organic Law of the Overseas) (Cabral 1977, 100-102).

In other words , Cabral presents us a series of prohibitions which used to be part of the apparatus that the Portuguese colonial government adopted as a strategy to dismantle and to dominate African rural-ethnic structures of power. According to him, despite these prohibitions having a certain concreteness, they didn't have an impact to the point of eliminating any form of cultural organizational of the peoples of Guinea, for example.

For this reason, in the case of Guinea, taking into consideration the abandonment the Guinean peasantry was suffering at the time, in which only 41% of economically arable land was used, and still in a rudimentary form, in the opinion of Cabral (1953) the main focus was not the rebuilding of rural-ethnic social structures (as would be perhaps the case of Cape Verde), but how to improve the resilience of the existing autochthonous structure.

The question here, for Cabral (1977), was how to enhance agriculture or create the conditions for artificial irrigation which provided sustainability to an ecological industrialization of peasantry. Thus, he inquired:

> will it be viable to submit to farming the remaining 59% of effectively arable land? [And he answers that] the viability fundamentally depends upon factors of technical and social nature. A technique based upon scientific knowledge of the means (physical and human means), supported by investigation and experimentation, which is concurrent with the progressive improvement of the living conditions of the 'indigenous' farmer" (Cabral 1977, 44).

Here, in general, Cabral was already pointing to the paths that should be taken in order to solve Guinea's land problems after independence, above all in terms of agricultural exploration and substantial increase of the arable area, diverting from the colonial reality which was solely based on the instruments and arms available to national farmers (Cabral 1975). For Cabral (1975), independence would serve to eliminate the scrapping of Guinean agriculture, a process that had been happening during the Portuguese colonial system, and whose intensity lead to the national economy's dependence on monoculture and monoexport of *mancarra*/peanuts.

Now, almost 47 years after independence (September 24th 1973), it is important to ask : was the national policy to diversify the agricultural production, which had been defended by Cabral, actually implemented? Is the Guinean economy still a hostage of this monoexport policy or could it be overcome? Well, Guinea-Bissau's current situation provides us with controversial answers to those questions. Apparently, the country remains a hostage of monoculture, though even more profoundly now. The economy moved from the monoexport of *mancarra*/peanuts, which characterizes the aforementioned colonial period criticized by Cabral (1953), to the a monoculture and, consequently, monoexport, of cashew nuts (ECA 2015; FMI 2017; BM 2016). And if previously *mancarra*/peanuts – the first and, in fact, the most significant export product of "Portuguese Guinea" – had been responsible for 70,78% of all exports (according to data from the agrarian study of Guinea, 1953), today cashew nuts respond for over 90% of the total national exports (ECA, 2017).

Thus, other products which had been secondarily explored during the colonial period and which, as Cabral (1977) argued, should have a larger share on Guinean post-independence agricultural production (such as cassava, sweet potatoes, sugar cane, Brazilian maize, beans and other food crops),

unfortunately were not well-oriented from a technical, economic and social point of view by subsequent Bissau-Guinean governments (Galli 1989; Cardoso 1991). Even today's main crops (cashew nuts and rice) are still one-off and low-profit products[7]. Hence, one of the most urgent issues for Guinean peasantry is still that of diversifying and improving conditions for agricultural production. The increase of production, of diversification and of unitary profits for selected agricultural products, as taught by Cabral (1977), remains as a necessary first step for the progress of national agriculture (more profitable crops, larger cultivated areas, more production, better living conditions in rural and urban areas).

In other words, the post-independence period was marked by growing disappointment (Mkandawire 2005). Moreover, it is important to remember that this period was also characterized by a sharp deceleration of global economic growth, according to the World Bank report, and by poor agricultural production along with rapid demographic growth[8] in the continent (BM 1982), where, later in the 1970s, there was a decrease of 1,7% per year in the economies of the African Least Developed Countries (LDC) (Cardoso 1991).

Economic growth languished due to the persistence of the new African governments in following colonial strategies, fundamented on the inertia that breaks up the peasantry. It might not have been intentional by this new governments formed after the independence struggle in the continent, but, as the former president of the World Bank, A. W. Clausen, would implicitly recognize, "the [uncritical] import of the Western neoliberal model of development experimented by European and North American countries, is what failed" (Cardoso 1991, 5). Thus, in the specific case of Guinea-Bissau

> [...] the strategy for economic development implicit in all of A. Cabral's works and in his leadership of the national liberation struggle – whose theoretic legacy and historic legitimacy PAIGC, transformed into state, claims to hold – pointed to the key role of popular production, based on the effort and initiative of farm laborers and on the socioeconomic tradition of community and cooperation in the tabancas [villages], which was ignored (Cardoso 1991, 5).

The African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) tried to follow the development strategy advocated by A. Cabral (1966) by convening its III Congress (1977) to enunciate a development

7 In terms of the cashew monoculture which currently dominates exports, profits depend upon volatile international prices or global value chains.

8 The World Bank report is called *Le développement accéléré au Sud du Sahara*, 1982, p.5.

strategy which elected agriculture as primary/priority sector for investment as a step that would facilitate the country's industrialization (Cardoso 1991). This strategic plan for national development regarded agriculture and industry as the two main axis that should stimulate each other and which would tend to a balanced and harmonious relationship (Galli 1989). However, in practical terms,

> [...] it could be called taking stances *ad hoc,* for they were not of assistance for the enunciated strategy, instead, priority was given to large-scale state-owned industrial projects, financed with long-term loans and which functioned at an average 25% of their capacity. A great part of external resources was used to improve equipment, which was not followed, to the same degree/rhythm, by an evolution in productive, management or maintenance capacity. The country's new officials focused on Bissau to support the government's initial self-organizing effort, and investments equally followed this concentration in the capital, in complete opposition to the official development strategy (Cardoso 1991, 6).

This case shows that Cabral's teachings in terms of the permanent need for "discourse/theory to always follow practice and vice-versa" and for "thinking in order to better act and acting in order to better think [...] always involving the masses" were relegated to oblivion in the years following independence. "On the contrary, there was an economic policy of starting great state-owned projects, financed by foreign capital, privileging the city instead of the countryside" (Cardoso 1991, 8). And the land problem has only grown since then and expanded its effects.

Back to the debate around land in Africa in general, to say that colonization was successful in breaking the customary laws of consuetudinary power which used to mediate access to land in African rural-ethnic societies, as Amin (1972) advocates, or to say that colonization institutionalized authoritarianism to the point of creating a class-based system in which the so-called traditional chiefs could grab various lands and other material goods, as Mamdani (1996) states, are two realities which cannot be generalized for the continent, in Cabral's (1975a) opinion. He defends that colonization took different forms in the African continent (direct and indirect etc), therefore the way by which it interfered in the agrarian question was also different from place to place. For this reason, he proposes the study of the "concrete reality" of each case as a strategy to fully understand the continuities and ruptures of the aforementioned processes. Moreover, Cabral (1977) showed, as an example, the case of Cape Verde and Guinea, which were both subject

to the same type of colonization but with varying characteristics in terms of land. In the case of Guinea, he states that there was a significant and well-articulated attempt from the formal point of view, even fundamented in Portuguese Constitution (previously illustrated), by the Portuguese colonial regime with the purpose of disordering autochthonous ethnic-rural structures. However, the resilient capacity of these structures allowed them to be preserved (Cabral 1966).

Nonetheless, it is important to reiterate that the debate around land in Africa is not limited to Cabral (1953;1966), Amin (1972; 1981) and Mamdani (1987; 1996) as presented until his point. There are other and multiple contributions as interesting as the ones previously discussed.

Among them, we highlight another character who also contrasts the points made by S. Amin (1972) and Mamdani (1987), rather radically. We refer to the well-known South African thinker Archie Mafeje[9] (1981; 1991) – who defends that lineage societies are so resilient, specially in terms of land issues, that not even colonization – and even less post-liberation African governments – have been able to alter the customary laws of the consuetudinary code which guides the processes of distribution of land in rural areas.

As Mafeje (1991) points out, the theoretical and empirical relevance of Western European epistemologies for the study of Africa's agrarian transition are highly questionable. He rejected the assumption that the ideas of classical agrarian transition and capitalism could be applied to the transformation of African social formations (Mafeje 1981). His initial effort, as stated by Moyo (2018), was to specifically negate the "misleading dominant conceptions regarding Africa's land tenure system", pointing to the genealogy of land rights and elucidating its systemic basis, fundamented on resilient and autochthonous systems of lineage which control the land access procedures and its use for work (Mafeje 1991).

From Mafeje's (1991) point of view, it was the antagonism between, on the one hand, the reactionary petite-bourgeoisie and the dominant classes of the power elite, and small farmers on the other, which allowed for monopoly capital to excessively extract surplus value from domestic producers, preventing internal accumulation of capital and averting the perspective of investing in technological advancements. His critique is directed to African petite-bourgeoisie, which failed to take advantage of the state in order to

9 Archie Mafeje dedicated an important part of his writings to the study of the evolution of agrarian work relations in Africa, including the differences between the colonization and post-colonization periods. He influenced the works of many other African thinkers, among which we highlight Sam Moyo (2005, 2008, 2011) and Thandika Mkandawire (2004, 2005).

promote a national development project, "as the Africaner nationalism, for instance, had made rather controversially, while the absence of a developed proletariat anticipated social demand for an inward-looking development" (Moyo 2018, 214). Mafeje (1991) refuses the idea that deficits in land possession restricted the growth of agricultural productivity. He defends that in the old colonies, where there was a large-scale alienation of lands, capitalist agriculture based on the exploration of cheap labour generated an increase in agricultural productivity and accumulation to a certain degree, though at huge social cost (Mafeje 2003).

For Mafeje (1991), low agricultural productivity in post-colonial or independent Africa is more related to political and economic processes than to the system of property of land *per se*. Due to the fact that colonization was not able to destroy the system of lineage which had administered a more or less egalitarian access to land, he concludes that there was no land problem in former colonies, at least not in the magnitude that Amin (1972; 1981) and Mamdani (1996) defended. Mafeje's main contribution to the debate around land possession in Africa, as Moyo (2008) explains, is the claim that the tributary mode of production was absent in most pre-capitalist social formations of non-colonial Africa. Thus, small-scale family production from African lineages and their tributary regimes didn't lead to a social stratification based on concentration and work-related relationships (or leasing), as the experience of agrarian transformation in other places had demonstrated (Mafeje 1981).

We should remember that, for Amin (1972), capitalism subjected small-scale family production and work processes, and extracted surplus value by unequal change and political dominance, undermining the relative "freedom" of rural families' work relations. For Mafeje (1991), although some African social formations had developed tributary modes of production, this development didn't, as a rule, lead to significant processes of social stratification, not to mention class formation based on capitalist property and on the exploitation of land and labour. Instead, despite its broader political control of agenda and resources, kings, chiefs and other bureaucratic elites received a limited tribute of active "perishable" goods and services, which didn't form any basis for capital accumulation (Mafeje 1991). That means that there was not significant grabbing of lands by "traditional chiefs", at least not in the magnitude that Mamdani (1987; 1996) argues. Mafeje (1991) explains that

> [...] colonial capitalism failed to impose class-based land properties and work relations in Africa, even in cases such as Buganda, where it was wrongly assumed that there was feudalism before colonization and that after colonization the "owners" became "capitalist" producers, as Mamdani shows (Mafeje 1991, 92).

According to Mafeje (1991), the reason behind Africa's agrarian problem is in the lack of "surplus" to invest in the intensification of the use of land through enhanced agricultural techniques and processes.

Consequently, African farmers remained as autonomous producers, who used mainly family labour in lands which they controlled through a "redistributive land tenure system", based on the system of clans of autochthonous lineages (Mafeje 2003).

> Although social formations in non-colonial Africa had undergone some adaptation during and after colonization, their basic social structures or modes of rural organization and agricultural production hadn't been substantially reestructured, particularly in terms of land tenure and family work relations (Moyo 2018, 221).

However, Mafeje will only later admit that exploitative land-work relations, such as leasing and partnership agreements, were emerging in various parts of the continent before independence, especially in some Western African countries, such as Ghana (Mafeje 2003). As stated by Moyo (2008), Mafeje still believed that this had not substantially harmed the lineage-based mode of social organization and production, or had led to the extensive formation of a capitalist agricultural class.

While Mafeje conceptualizes the genealogy of most land tenure systems in post-colonial Africa with conviction, stating that the concentration of land and the formation of agrarian classes based on capitalist relations of property and the exploration of labour were limited before and during colonization, Sam Moyo (2005; 2008; 2011) tries to empirically prove that he had underestimated the processes of land expropriation, concentration and mercantilization which were being consolidated after independence – particularly when neoliberalism took root in Africa since the 1980s (Moyo 2018).

In turn, Moyo (2008) points to what was characterized as a change in land relations in Africa, stating that the increasing expropriation, concentration and commercialization of land that emerged since the 1980s demonstrated that the legal basis for the creation of private property and new systems for the allocation and administration of land had already been established during the last decade of colonialism, leading to a partial deposition of the family system of land tenure, which had been relatively egalitarian and socially fundamented. Back to the case of Guinea-Bissau at that time, Nassum (1991) writes that the structural adjustment imposed by international cooperation agencies would give incentives to the creation and formal registration of private properties, although there had been no legislation which regulated these relations until then.

Moyo proved to Mafeje that new notions and forms of land use and property, as well as the rights and responsibilities related to the administration of land and natural resources were emerging (Moyo 2008). Contrary to the ethnic-rural customary laws that give access to lands, Africans who lived under systems of land tenure would now occupy these lands with a legal permission issued by the state, which had became the final owner or radical holder of land titles (URT 1992, Moyo 2018).

Sam Moyo (2008) defends that autochthonous farmers kept using in their relations the consuetudinary laws that had ruled land issues, but every time that the state wished to occupy and use lands, it could issue an administrative decree to take them away, including actions such as removal. Still, only those who possessed a legal title issued by the state were considered the owners of that land. Thus, Moyo (2008) stated that, during the 1980s in "independent Africa" an increase in the number of "informal" sales and rentals of land was observed. Such formal and informal markets of land and non-mercantile transfers initially tended to be associated to growing population pressures and to a larger agricultural commercialization (André and Plateau 1995; Moyo 2018).

> The purchases of lands were considered to have a positive impact in each family's individual capacities to assemble food for their survival, although evidence also showed that the families which didn't sell lands were eventually absorbed by the labour market and could not sustain their subsistence. Empirical evidence also suggested that the privatization of land did not necessarily result in greater productivity or investment in agriculture (Mighot and Adholla 1994; Moyo 2018, 229).

In other words, since the state in independent Africa assumed greater power in terms of land property and other rights, allowing the sale and leasing of lands, the customary laws regarding land tenure became unsafe and less recognized. This means that Africa is now facing socially significant questions of unequal access and shortage of land, polarized both by demographic changes and by the expropriation of land.

As a result, Dzodzi Tshikata asserts that the resilience of unequal structures of social power based on patriarchy and on domestic structures of lineage-clan also proves that gender-based land inequality is increasing at the same time that the rights of young migrants become hazy, especially since the 1990s (Tsikata 2015). In this scenario, women generally find themselves in a peripheral position in terms of control and access to agricultural lands,

while being responsible for key tasks in agriculture, as well as the reproduction and maintenance of families in rural and urban areas (Tsikata 2015).

Besides that, the shortage of land and inequality of access to land also arise from other factors, such as natural calamities (droughts, floods) and displacements caused by civil wars and other growing conflicts (Moyo 2008).

Conclusion

This study presented and discussed the agrarian question in the African continent in general, relating it to the specific experience of Guinea-Bissau since its neoliberal period. It attempted to show a historic radiography of the land debate in the continent, which, until today, engages authors from Africa's various regions, and then confront this debate with the perspectives of Amílcar Cabral on how agriculture and industry should mutually support each other, in balance and harmony, while also taking into consideration the gender/labour issue, in order to develop African peasantry.

Since this is a research in progress, some of the authors brought to the debate in this study have not been exhaustively discussed. Our analytical option was to adopt an introductory and less complex approach, taking responsibility for all the risks implied in this methodological strategy. Nevertheless, we hope to have offered subsidies for a better understanding of the land debate in Africa.

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ABSTRACT

The present article presents and problematizes the agrarian question in the African continent in general - correlated with the specific experience of Guinea-Bissau from the neoliberal period. An attempt was made to present a historical radiography that marked the land debate on the continent and continues today, mobilizing several authors from different regions of Africa and confronting them with the cabralist perspectives (Amílcar Cabral) on how agriculture and industry should stimulate each other, in balance and harmony, also considering the issue of gender/work, to leverage the African peasantry. Constituting an ongoing research, we mobilized some authors for the debate but without exhausting their thinking. Our analytical stance sought to adopt a more introductory and less complex approach to discussions, incurring all the risks that this methodical strategy presents. However, we hope to have provided the input for understanding the debate on land in Africa.

KEYWORDS

Agrarian Transition; Africa; Guinea-Bissau; Peasantry; Colonization; Neoliberalism.

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