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Land in transition: from social reproduction of labour power to social reproduction of power

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ABSTRACT

Ifi Amadiume's seminal work, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands* developed significant insights into the relationship between gender, wealth and power, and anticipated the centrality of gendered labour processes in the survival of the family/household by highlighting the articulation between reproductive labour and the productive economy. In this epoch when various postcolonial states are grappling anew with land and agrarian questions, Amadiume's detailed study of the decommodification of land is especially salient for feminist inquiry as she has already drawn attention to the ways in which land functions generationally in the reproduction of authority, ritual, governance, kinship and power. This paper proposes a similar move beyond the present discourses which emphasise women's roles in the social reproduction of labour power, asking how a critical reading of Amadiume might help us understand the significance of social reproduction in relation to land as a contemporary realm of feminist power and struggles.

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Introduction: major interventions on the question of power

One of the most significant contributions of postcolonial feminist thought in countering western hegemonic discourses on gender has been to restore to gender its salience as a social and political category: that is, to locate its materiality in the historical institutions and structures that gave it meaning against the long shadow of enslavement, colonisation and imperialism. To think gender in its historicity is to confront questions regarding its conceptual validity, the practices through which it enhances knowledge of the subjects defined through it, and the subjectivations that daily reproduce it as an organising principle in society. These are among the tasks to which Ifi Amadiume, in her seminal work *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* dedicated her analytical lens. Arguing that 'roles, rights and interests were maintained and safeguarded by men and women in culturally constructed categories, which sometimes meant that sex did not correspond to gender', Amadiume turns our attention to the 'socio-cultural dynamism of the gender' and how women were 'guaranteed, achieved, or were cheated out of power' (1987, 21).

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Out of this dynamism and shift between structures that reproduced gendered notions of power, the sexual division of labour emerges materially through its interaction with ecological factors and gender ideology: that is, what women did and what men did, and their social positions in society were not extrinsically determined. By historicising the sexual division of labour, the book traces and locates the gender ideologies behind the Nnobi people's labouring practices as key to understanding the social relations of production, but also how in this regard, certain people in society were in turn able to emerge as powerful decision makers depending on their social and economic location. Furthermore, two factors (ecology and gender) which emerge as core analytical lenses in the book – through Amadiume's (1987) examination of the relationship between ecological factors, the sexual division of labour, and gender ideology – are now acknowledged in recent agrarian literature as major determinants of contemporary agrarian questions (see for instance Moyo, Jha, and Yeros 2013; Naidu and Ossome 2016). To emphasise the concern with these factors in precolonial society is crucial as it shows that the questions of ecological sustainability and equality are not modernist claims. This historical interaction between gender, ecology and the sexual division of labour was also the basis upon which a negotiated and flexible system of power could be understood as emerging: in essence, a dialectical relationship between material accumulation and the accumulation of power. Power in this regard was socially reproduced through processes of exchange, reciprocity, and comparative advantage in the production of food, wealth and livelihoods. Its materiality was articulated to social location and not identity, in this regard different from the contemporary liberal iterations of power claimed in the name of 'rights' – universalist claims that are fundamentally identitarian and individualist.

Amadiume's primary preoccupation in *Male Daughters* is with the question of power as conveyed and emerging through a gradual consolidation of various male and female symbols of wealth, which she showed were related to particular social and economic constraints:

> As a result of the low productivity of the soil, population pressure and the scarcity of land, an economic system whereby women did most of the farm work and men became ritual specialists, *dibia,* evolved. Traditionally, even though the supposed patrilineal system of inheritance and succession prescribed that males allocate and own land, women controlled the subsistence economy. They were, and still are, involved in both local and external trade, as the farm does not meet all their subsistence needs. (1987, 21)

Amadiume's dual concepts of 'female husbands' and 'male daughters', however, complicated the biological sex/gender allocation of wealth and power. Male daughters were women who in the absence of sons, brothers and close relatives, had remained in or returned to their natal home as a male in order to inherit her father. In such cases, women could be accorded full male status in order to guarantee continuity of the homestead, line of descent, and property associated with it. The institution of male daughters contradicts formalist anthropological assumptions that land did not accrue to women because patrilineal lineages did not allow them to inherit their fathers. Closely related to this was the institution of female husbands, which illustrated that '[i]n social process, gaining access to land, or the right of use of land [may have been] more important than actual ownership' (1987, 34). In a society (Nnobi) in which there was 'a direct link between the accumulation of wives, the acquisition of wealth and the exercise of

power and authority' (1987, 42), female husbands, recognised through the practice of woman-to-woman marriage,[1] were a conduit through which women could command labour power, and power that could accrue on the basis of prosperity and honour of the title *Ekwe* which was strongly associated a woman's economic abilities. Significantly, access to power through this formal recognition followed the cleavages of what people *did* (a structuralist approach) and was not overdetermined by who they *were* (which resorts to a kind of identitarianism):

> Descriptions of the *Ekwe* phenomenon show its economic base. People were quick to notice thrift, industriousness, a money-making ability and leadership qualities in a woman. They would begin to point out such a woman as a potential candidate for the *Ekwe* title. Even a young girl could be identified as a candidate and thenceforth she would be encouraged in her economic ventures. (1987, 43)

Yet we must also critically engage Amadiume's claim that the power with which these social institutions are endowed draws on myths, deities and ritual practices – akin to what some literature terms as Goddess feminism[2] – practices which in *Male Daughters* later meet their limitations with the advent of Christianity under colonialism:

> [t]he [*Ekwe*] title was taken only by women, and associated with the goddess Idemili. From all descriptions of the title, it was believed to be based on involuntary possession (beyond one's wish or control), but, in reality, it had a strong association with a woman's economic abilities and charismatic attributes, real or potential. Thus taking the title might mark the climax of economic success, but the Nnobi people would generally claim that it was the goddess herself, through her possession of the woman who would give her the money or wealth with which to take the title. (1987, 42)

In the Marxian dialectic, such an abstraction, which conveys power through the pre-science of deity, is problematic in relation to class analysis within feminism as it eliminates the 'politics' of emancipation – or freedom as a political question – when freedom is fashioned, as with the Nnobi, as mediated by structures and institutions over which one has no direct control, let alone power over. This problem is compounded by the fact that this realm of spiritual identification is also the one in which possibility of power through economic emancipation is embedded. What does this mean for those subjects who cannot access the divine, and thus the economic providence that articulates it to power? What does this mean for a subaltern feminist politics that seeks to account for those who do not seem to exist politically – the excluded, the silenced, the exploited (including their tendency to self-exploit)? Consider this:

> The tendency was for women to take the *Ekwe* title, which was involuntary, and granted through divination. Though based on the idea of social recognition of hard work, candidature was *controlled* through ritual, and thus *only a limited number of women were chosen*. The *Ekwe* phenomenon … [was] an essential part of a system which sets a high premium on female economic success. (1987, 39, emphasis added)

What does this portend for the ways in which women find themselves located today, within agrarian servitude, in relation to access to land and landed resources? How does this kind of reverential approach to power reconfigure our understanding of power as political and a basis for feminist claims? And finally, how does such a configuration foreshadow the debates around land that have increasingly become articulated to a rights discourse conferred with recourse to the neoliberal capitalist state, its attendant attrition

of surplus labour, and the demands on mostly women's reproductive labour towards the sustenance and survival of families and households? The discourse of women's 'industriousness' and 'efficiency' are well treated in the literature on empowerment and have been illustrated in many instances as a foil for the appropriation and exploitation of gendered labour – which in much of the global south depends on access to nature and landed resources including the commons – especially when accompanied by conditions of agrarian distress. An empirical illustration based on a brief review below of the gendered outcomes of Zimbabwe's recent radical land redistribution programme place these questions in practical light, highlighting struggles between procedural and substantive gender power relations in relation to land.

Land redistribution and redistribution of power in Zimbabwe

The land redistribution programme in Zimbabwe, described by some scholars as the 'most important land reform after the Cold War'[3] provides some pertinent insights into the ways land reforms effect changes in gender relations at the level of the family/household, market, and state – the triad that facilitates processes of social reproduction. In 2000 Zimbabwe imposed radical redistributive land reforms with the objective of addressing the racial, social and economic injustice of the country's colonial past. At the time of the country's independence from the British, 6,000 large-scale white farmers, along with a few nationally and foreign-owned agro-industrial estates controlled most of the prime land, water bodies and biological reserves in the country (Moyo and Chambati 2013). While the Lancaster Agreement signed at the time of Independence in 1980 allowed for land reform, it expressly restricted it to a 'willing buyer-willing seller' approach, or market led agrarian reform pushed under a neoliberal agenda. The 2000 reform, known as the Fast Track Land Reform Program (FTLRP), led to the distribution of 10 million hectares of prime agricultural land held by 4,000 white and 200 black large scale commercial farmers (LCSFs) to over 145,000 peasant families and over 20,000 small and middle-scale capitalist farmers by 2010 (Moyo 2011a, 2011b). Land reforms there were meant to address racial inequities, but they also reconstituted the country's agrarian structure and its attendant labour relations, as well as gender and ethno-regional control and access to resources.

Existing literature and scholarly research have highlighted a number of aspects in relation to the gendered outcomes and the role of women in Zimbabwe's land reform process. Prior to FTLRP, four percent of women from white households owned large-scale commercial farm lands (Moyo 1998; Rugube et al. 2003) and 5% of women from black households controlled land in previous resettlement areas and communal lands. Since the FTLRP, women's ownership of land has increased significantly. Actual figures vary from 12% to 18% (Utete 2003; GoZ 2007; Moyo 2011a) to between 10% and 28% of the total (WLZ 2007; Chingarande 2008).

The data points to the insufficiency of income derived from farming, and to the semi-proletarianization processes that have accompanied land redistribution. They show that the social reproduction of rural households has continued to depend on a combination of incomes from wage work, exploitation of natural resources, petty-commodity production, and remittances. This cornucopia of livelihood strategies conceals at its core, the reproductive labour that: (a) is necessary in order to convert wages into use values

for individual consumption; (b) is sustaining the rural labour force, a significant proportion of which has suffered attrition (mainly farm workers), or been compelled to enter the labour force as farm workers despite ownership of land; and (c) is sustaining both rural food production *and* capitalist production, where productive investment and capital formation has mainly focused on cash crops and livestock (Ossome and Naidu forthcoming).

The majority of the women offered land in their individual right under the FTLRP were predominantly from the 'vulnerable' groups, such as widows and divorcees across the three land tenure regimes.[4] Women also accessed land in some provinces like Masvingo using the system of self-allocation as the mode of acquisition of vacant fields deserted by families that had retreated to communal areas (Mutopo 2014). Others were able to challenge patriarchal inheritance norms thus allowing them to access land even if their names did not appear on land titles. So for instance, while one study focused on agentic rather than structural questions that shape women's relationship to land post-FTLRP, a central insight it develops is the sidestepping of institutional structures and means in excess of political and economic structures, through which at least 25% of rural women accessed land during the FTLRP (Mutopo 2014). This both suggests demand for land among women and the insufficiency of targeted redistribution.

Resettlement policy, however, also maintained the approach to land which is commonly associated with customary practices that prevent married women from gaining access in their own right. Resettlement permits were previously assigned to married couples in the husband's name only (ibid, 153; see also Jacobs 1984; Chenaux-Repond 1993; Goebel 1999), and although the fast track Land Tenure Arrangements (article 3.2.3.5) provided that 'land leases and title deeds for married couples should be in both spouses' names' (Zimbabwe 2001, 13), current practice continues to follow the old way of writing only the husband's name on titles/permits, reflecting in part a failure in implementation (Goebel 2005). A statement attributed to then President Mugabe that '[i]f women want property, then they should not get married' (Cheater and Gaidzanwa 1996, 200; quoted in Goebel 2005, 145), furthermore highlights the contradictory ways in which gender norms were instrumentalised to not only deny women access to land, but also to conceal the familial and kinship relations that determine social relations of production, outside of which it would be difficult to make sense of the social reproduction matrix underpinning women's claims to land. The state's response to women's call for equal rights to land has as such been to threaten them with social exclusion (Goebel 2005).

Nonetheless, despite spotty data, studies on land and livelihoods suggest that in some regions the reforms have been fairly successful in encouraging women to subvert conventional norms and demand land rights. Existing studies suggest the breaking down, or at least potential alteration of the patriarchal structure that has historically affected women's land use and access, arguing that the relatively redistributive gendered outcome has endured despite the open and clandestine resistance it faces from some dominant patriarchs within the state apparatus, among some customary leaders, and within some lineage household leaderships (e.g., Mutopo 2011, 2014). Increased access to land by women in both small/medium scale (A1) and large scale (A2) areas also suggests a new dynamic in the gender relations in land access and use: *more women have been offered land in their individual right under FTLRP than in the past* – notwithstanding the fact that although 80% of women in fast track and Communal Areas are agricultural producers

with men taking on managerial roles (Mutopo 2014), the proportion of women title holders is dismal.

The attendant demands for (mostly male) labour for growing commercial interests in land is key to understanding the FTLRP outcome. Agricultural productivity generally declined due to reduced and uneven access to inputs and output markets. This particularly affected smaller producers who nonetheless deployed their labour to expand cropped areas (ibid). The gendering of this labour, with the retention of women in small scale and peasant arrangements, and pull of male labour towards large scale, commercial and contract farming labour plus non-farm wage labour suggests that food security remains highly dependent on the former. If the significance of the FTLRP had been pegged to the dismantling of racially skewed ownership patterns, the resulting reconfiguration along gendered and class lines leave unattended the question of inequality, and in agrarian social formations, the significance of land as a core basis for resolving this question.

A critical interrogation of the nature of gendered outcomes: specifically, what may be termed as the *agrarian question of gendered labour* provides a concrete lens through which to understand both the gendered dimensions of the FTLRP, and the nature of 'new' contradictions that may undermine agrarian and democratic processes. Land reforms have been centre stage to the economic reforms implemented as a direct response to the economic and political crises that emerged as a result of SAPs imposed on majority of African countries. While there are innumerable problems with the entire economic package implemented by the Zimbabwe state, FTLRP has indeed been redistributionary. It has not only changed the agrarian structure but also the social relations of production as well as gender relations in the household and community to some degree. More importantly, it has impacted women in ways that were not wholly anticipated. It has not only provided some measure of economic security, but has also benefited women in certain regions and certain households the possibility of economic mobility and hence has initiated class differentiation.

This brief overview of gendered outcomes with regards to the land redistribution programme in Zimbabwe highlights a number of important issues that can be placed in conversation with Amadiume's study of the Nnobi society. Firstly, it highlights the limitations inherent in the heteropatriarchal formulation of a rigid biological sex-gender distinction which identified beneficiaries as either male or female/ married or widowed. The exclusions here are myriad: they do not consider differently-constituted households that may include queer and non-gender conforming bodies, and against Amadiume's elaborations, do not allow for the possibility of claims to land which are not attached to patriarchal notions of ownership and inheritance. As such while women can and in many instances, do access/use land as wives and in some cases as daughters, ownership, production and control of income in their own rights is less likely. Women remained, through the patriarchal structure, constrained by the expectation not only that they will produce (preferably male) children to propagate the clan, but also that the condition for their access to land shall still be tied to the expectation of social reproduction of the labour power that is required by the labour market. Amadiume (1987) is clear on this point, noting that 'a very important source which women did not own was land' (1987, 31) is significant, given that the Nnobi people were traditionally subsistence farmers and traders and land (which could be owned both communally and individually)

constituted a major economic resource. Poignantly she argues that 'were we to go by strict patrilineal rules of ownership, succession and inheritance … the dynamism of gender would seem irrelevant, women would be marginalised, and their role in the economic structure invisible' (1987, 31).

Secondly, the relevance that land retains for the social reproduction of agrarian households, even when statistics across the continent indicate a diminishing contribution of agriculture to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Stated differently, in the current conjuncture of neoliberal capitalism that is marked by massive job attrition, an ever growing surplus of labour and diminished livelihood alternatives, land attains significance not only as a basis for subsistence, but also because much of the other livelihood activities to which households can resort (including petty commodity production, peasant farming and foraging), depend on some form of access to private and common lands. At the same time as these changes have been taking place, the casualisation and flexibilization of labour markets have mainly disadvantage poor and working-class women, meaning that their bargaining power in the household and market is significantly diminished alongside their earnings. Under such conditions, access to land (whether or not this is accompanied by some form of control), is a critical source for the re-empowerment of women. Zimbabwe's example illustrates this demand for land among women, especially in instances where they have been literally written out of laws and policies that would guarantee them greater access – in which instances the women resorted to various forms of extra-legality that included taking control of unutilised or unoccupied land. Power in this regard is conditioned upon the lived demand for land – often not for the purposes of accumulation, given the poverty stricken and under-serviced conditions of their claims – but rather as the very basis for the survival of their families/households. Concealed within these claims is the social reproduction of labour power, function that is assuaged, although not eliminated when land redistribution is hampered by economic and political limitations as was Zimbabwe's.[5]

Land in transition: the social reproduction of labour power

Feminist economists writing today recognise this economic squeeze that properly locates 'care' labour performed mostly although not exclusively by women, beyond the confines of the household subsistence economy, and properly into the productive economy due to the insufficiency of the former in meeting the needs of reproducing labour power. Termed as a 'crisis … of social reproduction', Fraser (2017), for instance, shows this reproductive labour, 'comprising both affective and material labour and often performed without pay, [as] indispensable to society' (2017, 21). Every form of capitalist society, Fraser argues, harbours a deep-seated *social-reproductive* 'crisis tendency' or 'contradiction'. On the one hand, social reproduction is a condition of possibility for sustained capital accumulation; on the other hand, capitalism's orientation to unlimited accumulation tends to destabilise the very processes of social reproduction on which it relies (2017, 22). She thus views this 'social-reproductive contradiction of capitalism' as lying at the root of the so-called crisis of care: capitalism's need for labour power whose reproduction it externalises to a realm it neither values nor remunerates, but without which it could not exist.

The notion of social reproduction would broadly include biological reproduction, everyday survival, accumulation of education and skills to participate in the capitalist

economy (for workers' participation in the formal and informal labour market), acquisition of skills to ensure the survival of the house- holds (i.e., skills to engage in household production and care work) and inculcating the necessary value system to ensure the reproduction of the patriarchal and capitalist economy (Naidu and Ossome 2016). Katz (2001) adopts a more basic definition of social reproduction as the daily reproduction of working-class households through the acquisition and provision of such basic needs as food, shelter, clothing and health-care.

Social reproduction in contemporary capitalist economies hinges on the interplay between three major institutions: households, markets and the state (Dickinson and Russell 1985; Antonopolous and Hirway 2010). The roles that these institutions play in ensuring social reproduction may both contradict and complement each other. Luxemburg's (1951) insights that non-capitalist forms of production are essential for capitalism even if the latter is waged in a continuous struggle to undermine the former also remain central to how we understand social reproduction. Non-capitalist social formations of household and family labour, specifically articulated to peasant modes of production, include unpaid labour that directly benefits the market, as well as unpaid and invisible domestic productive and reproductive labour. The latter supports the reproduction of the working classes and the reserve army of labour, thus assuming the costs of supporting a labour pool. The incursion of capital and consumer goods into rural areas and the dispossession that accompanies commodification forces rural populations to purchase from the market what they used to produce for themselves. The accompanying shrinking of the non-capitalist strata means that some rural households cannot keep up with the socially determined level of consumption, thus lowering the living standards of all workers. However, capitalism does not benefit from the complete destruction of non-capitalist economies, as it would lead to a 'standstill of accumulation' (Luxemburg 1951).

The double bind in this formulation might be posed as such: the reproductive realm of the household subsistence economy suggests ironically both agency and power for those who are doomed to perform this labour. Why then does it remain undervalued? How do we explain the objective fact of its indispensability to late capitalism and concomitant abjection as unpaid, undervalued, even despised labour? To this question, Naidu and Ossome (2021) have further asked what it means to be both part of surplus labour yet be integral to the reproduction of that surplus. Labour has in general been talked about as factory wage labours (the capital-labour relation). Domestic labour is not governed by the capital-wage relation but is nonetheless essential to it, even though on its own it may not be sufficient for the surplus population, which survives because of other forms of labour that continue to exist (petty commodity production, peasant, domestic).

The peasant farm in this regard, as illustrated in the case of Zimbabwe, continues to be integral, if not much more important in the past few decades (where it seemed that the main objective was to push everyone into capitalist forms of production). Labouring here is not in the Marxian sense, towards surplus value production, but in terms of *labouring to survive*. Land, and the peasant economy, as we argue in our work, retains relevance and centrality in this regard, even (or especially) when we account for the significantly lower contribution of agriculture to gross domestic product (GDP) across much of the global South. That an increasing number of social upheavals – from South Africa to Zimbabwe and India – are articulated to claims on land and landed resources demand a more eclectic

envisioning of the role of social reproduction, as not just related to capitalism's inherent crisis of reproduction (given that reproduction takes place whether or not people are employed), but also with regards to the broader meanings (nuance) to which claims for land appear to articulate at the present moment.

It is here that Fraser's framing of the crisis of social reproduction falls short, as it does not in this regard consider other sources from which power derives, but remains incarcerated in a modernist capitalist frame and does not account for the legacies of slavery and colonialism, which inflected both racial and gendered subjectivities in the exploitation on the basis of social reproduction as we understand it today. Here we must argue, alongside Amadiume, for the decommodification of land – that is, a shift away from the measurable, the quantifiable, the knowable, and thus the saleable – towards a notion of land as uniquely valuable through the social entitlements it accords to people, and as priceless, and as mediating societal relations which exceed the market for it. *Male Daughters* highlighted this latter articulation of land to a social-cultural relevance: as a symbol of authority around which ritualistic practices were organised, and which extended to kinship ties and generation significance. The contemporary fetishization of land, its codification as commodity – itself an outcome of the racial capitalism of the colonial project – strips land off such symbolic, cultural significance.

The cost of social reproduction is being transferred to previously non-capitalist realms of the family/household, which increasingly is not exempt from the commodification of labour, time and resources. Of concern here is that the articulation between the peasant, petty-commodity and wage economies fundamentally expresses a relation of exploitation and self-exploitation that approximates men and women's unpaid, unremunerated and self-exploitative reproductive labour. Furthermore, while capitalist production enhances cooperation in the organisation of production, it also accumulates differences and divisions within the proletariat through its organisation of social reproduction (Naidu and Ossome 2016). This point is crucial, given that economic policies have ostensibly paved the way for women to participate in the wage economy without mitigating the historical burden of reproduction. While extraction of absolute surplus is now less likely in the wage economy, it remains a possibility in the reproductive household realm, in which members, especially women expend increasing amounts of labour time that does not constitute accumulation, but rather the self-exploitation necessary to meet the consumption deficits compelled by the immiseration of wage labourers and petty commodity producers (Ossome and Naidu 2021).

Critically, Amadiume's work was a precursor to radical feminist political economy theorisations of the household subsistence economy, not only of its recognition of this realm as one predisposed to process of exploitation and self-exploitation for its own survival, but also highlighted its contribution to the productive economy. As she shows, the redirection of money back to subsistence and household needs meant that women had to be extremely successful economically, and have a large labour force (again as we understand it today, a foil for access to free 'family labour'), to save enough money to be able to participate in the achievement-based title-taking (1987, 39). Apart from the achievement-based mediations of power discussed above, the literature shows continuities between these precolonial demands on women's labour and the demands that neoliberal capitalism places on women's reproductive labour. An important distinction, however, lies in the vastly different pathways that determine the organisation, distribution and control over resources and income at household and national levels at present.

The book also presented an important critique of contemporary liberal discourse on land ownership for women, a discourse that valorises individual ownership through land titling. The focus on *control* (of crops, livestock, poultry) through a sexual division of labour and gender division of crops is correlated to the decommodification of land: that is, because land was a resource that women did not customarily own but whose use was clearly demarcated by a gender ideology that defined male and female space (interest in land was understood through this dual functioning), dispossession would result in collective rather than individual losses. Control (rather than ownership) ensured that women retained their own profit and that 'nothing considered female and nothing belonging to women was sold by men' (Amadiume 1987, 39). Furthermore, 'women marketed most of what was considered to be male and as belonging to men, and kept some of the profit. The control of goods and cash by women was as a result of their *monopoly of market space*' (ibid, emphasis added). 'Rights' here were derived from the social relations of production existing in society, and not defined from above by recourse to the state.

This should be further contrasted with a more contemporary literature on land which shows the influence of market forces on customary institutions of land management (Mamdani 2015). The land policies promoted in Africa during the 1960s and 1970s were based on the premise that customary systems did not provide the necessary 'security' to ensure agricultural investment and productive use of land. Because the lack of security was thought to lie in the absence of clearly defined and enforceable property rights, the appropriate policy direction was taken to be the state creation of such rights – most often, individual, private property rights (Peters 2004). However, a number of studies showed that the move toward formalisation of customary tenure did not carry the main aim of securing individual rights to land or of aiding transferability of land. Moreover, these rights and functions had not been highly constrained under customary tenure (ibid). Critiques of the conventional view came from research on the actual practices of African landholding rural economies, which included documentation of widespread cash cropping and 'price responsiveness', with the most quoted cases being cocoa production by farmers on customary land in West Africa. Such cases were used to reject premises that customary tenure inhibited investment in agricultural production and agricultural commercialisation and to demonstrate the flexibility customary tenure allowed to farmers adapting to changing conditions (ibid).

The present tendency by governments in many African countries to link customary land tenure to economic development through land registration are, according to Manji (206), a product of World Bank driven land reforms which carry the aim of breaking customary-communal land tenure relations so as to individualise and open a land market for 'poverty eradication' and economic development. It is a wide arch shift from land as a means of consolidating wealth and power for communities, to land as articulated to poverty alleviation, economic growth and access to capital, the latter of which is the primary aim of the neoliberal project of commodification of women's land rights aimed at freeing land for credit markets while silencing the negative consequences to women of commodification of land rights (Manji 2006). Land in this neoliberal milieu retains significance precisely because of the precariousness associated with capital and industry and the surplus labour it relentlessly expends and whose sustenance depends on continued access to private and common land. Land was a key medium through which women's

power was (socially) reproduced. At present, women are increasingly alienated from land although still retain a fundamental relationship to it due to their role in the social reproduction of labour power. Under capitalism, however, social reproduction takes on an entirely different form and function.

Legacy: social reproduction under neoliberal capitalism

Economic policies have ostensibly paved the way for women to participate in the wage economy without mitigating the historical burden of social reproduction. As far as the household constitutes the reproduction of labour power, it also bears a disproportionate burden imposed by the exploitation and immiseration of workers, and thus constitutes a crucial sphere of class struggle. Under the current conditions of neoliberal capitalism, we are faced with phenomenon of jobless growth under neoliberal capitalism. The primary question that haunts agrarian scholars interested in, and politically articulating the land question in relation to the peasant question is as follows: what is happening to urban wage labourers and migrant labourers when capital no longer needs it? How are we to understand the fate of labour that is being expelled *en masse* from industry/urban areas? How is their maintenance (or more aptly, warehousing) as 'surplus labourers' being assured? Stated differently, under what conditions are the rural and urban poor reproducing themselves?

Reading Amadiume (1987) for the present, this transition of land, from an entity containing the possibility for the accumulation to power, to its contemporary functioning in the service of capital towards the social reproduction of labour power may thus be summarised in the following ways. In a capitalist economy, wages constitute the primary form of reproducing the household. However, the capitalist wage economy also constitutes the roots of immiseration as capital-intensive production produces an ever-increasing relative surplus population. This poses a significant dilemma as reproductive costs accrue irrespective of whether the population is employed by the capitalist economy or not. Yet the actual processes of *reproduction* remain outside the value-producing economy. This labour remains outside (though not divorced from) the commodity relation, is unaccounted in official statistics, and hence becomes 'invisible'. A feminist lens foregrounds the question of reproduction of the labouring and surplus population as capital accumulation proceeds unabated and creates potentially immiserating conditions. Under conditions of inadequate absorption of labour, insufficient capital investment in employment generating sectors, or weak bargaining position of workers, the working classes are forced to turn to two other institutions that play an important role in the production–reproduction system – the family-household and the state (Naidu and Ossome 2016).

The family-household facilitates the processes of reproduction by converting wages into goods and services, but in lieu of an adequate wage economy, it can also engage in non-capitalist production. This subsistence economy largely depends on peasant agriculture and access to the commons – through labour that is overwhelmingly, although not exclusively performed by women. The state, on the contrary, affects reproduction at the collective level through legislations and social grants – what we might consider as the displacement of clan/kinship system by the state. However, global economic policies have allowed the contradiction of immiseration in the face of economic prosperity to resurface thereby deepening the disconnect between the cycles of social reproduction

and capital accumulation, thus increasing social fragmentation and leading to new contradictions (ibid). The result has been to compel the labouring classes to engage in multiple livelihoods – straddling regular and casual labour markets, and domestic economies – and to increase dependence on the state for their survival even as many states are increasingly abdicating or unwilling to undertake provisioning.

This economic reality means that immiserated relative surplus population, along with pauperism, is a condition of capitalist production, and of the capitalist development of wealth, thus placing a higher burden of reproduction on the household, particularly women in the household. It is this gendered nature, the 'hidden basis', of the social relations of production and capital accumulation which feminist agrarian scholars view as having an immiserating tendency (Naidu and Ossome 2017). The neoliberal milieu has subjected commodified work, that is, waged labour, to increasing levels of informalisation and precarity at the same time that capital has progressively become more formal and mobile (Breman 2013). Without addressing household reproduction, it is likely that we will continue to observe the contradiction of immiseration of the working classes at a time as some economic indicators signal economic prosperity. In contexts where it has been implemented, land reform (to varied degrees of success) has been shown to be a critical basis for alleviating this burden of reproduction precisely because of the extent to which social reproduction continues to depend on land and landed resources in agrarian societies.

Amadiume's work helped us think though the sexual division of labour, the cost to households of minimising or negating women's roles in production and reproduction, the cost to communities of the shift in the basis of social relations of production from a notion of control to that of ownership, and the ways in which gendered relations around land took on a materiality conceptually defined by social embeddedness. These are, again, the contemporary arguments being carried by radical feminist political economists in their commitment to challenging the hierarchies of wealth and power that are at present divorced from our social realities and women's lived experiences, and which instead rest on the wilful exploitation and self-exploitation of women's reproductive labour.

Finally, it is necessary to note, however, that the feminist political economy theoretical and methodological framing of this paper sits contentiously with some of Amadiume's reflections regarding the significance of her work. In particularly her argument that 'Marxist materialism or economism is limiting in that the role of culture is denied', and that the 'equation of power with the control of the means of production, and female high status with the degree of contribution to subsistence, can explain achieved but not ascribed, power and authority' (1987, 190) fails to grasp the ways in which ascribed power (e.g., as exemplified in the debates on caste and race) have historically configured social, political, economic and cultural subjectivities: structure *and* agency as mutually reinforcing categories of understanding the social reproduction of power. Through the lens of agrarian relations then, women might be re-centred as bearers of tradition, mediators of culture, reproducers of families and households, mediators of capital, and as such, central to our understanding of the historical transitions in any society.

Notes

1. Amadiume (1987) writes that 'there were two ways in which the potential *Ekwe* [*Ekwe* was a wooden drum used in traditional Igbo societies for public summons and announcements.

The women so titled had rights of veto in village constitutional assemblies and were also considered as the mouthpiece of the village and town] title-taker controlled the services of others. People went to work for her voluntarily or she practiced what was called *igba ohu*, woman-to-woman marriage. Such wives, it seems, came from other towns. The 'female husband' might give the wife a (male) husband somewhere else and adopt the role of mother to her but claim her [economic] services. The wives might also stay with her, bearing children in her name. Potential *Ekwe* women were, therefore, wealthy women, who through control of others' services were able to create more wealth' (1987, 42).

2. The charge that embracing spirituality is an apolitical copout from feminist struggles is viewed in the feminist literature as a Marxism-derived theory about the relationship between politics and spirituality (Rountree 1999), with critics also accusing the Goddess movement of reinvoking the essentialist connection between woman and nature. These critiques are countered by those who show goddess archetypes as powerful inner forces which shaped women's behavior and influenced their emotions, and that talking about 'goddesses' [as] a way for women to talk about themselves outside the restrictive dichotomies of masculine and feminine, mother/lover, careerist/housewife (ibid).
3. Moyo, Jha, and Yeros (2013), 97.
4. The provisioning for widows was aided by a stipulation in the 2013 new constitution that 'all laws, customs, traditions and cultural practices that infringe the rights of women conferred by the constitution are void to the extent of infringement' – a provision which rendered the custom of a widow losing her deceased husband's land entirely or partially if she refused to marry a male relative, redundant (IRIN 2014).
5. A discussion of these limitations goes beyond the scope of this paper. However, see the following for a detailed critique: Moyo and Chambati (2013); Moyo and Yeros (2005); Moyo and Yeros (2007).

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