

Title: Livelihoods, Land and Political Economy: Reflections on Sam Moyo's Research Methodology.

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Title: Livelihoods, land and political economy: reflections on Sam Moyo's research methodology

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Abstract: This article focuses on the methodological lessons from Sam Moyo's scholarship. Sam's research is characterised by a combination of detailed empirical investigation, deep knowledge of the technical and practical aspects of agricultural production and farming livelihoods, and big-picture political economy analysis and theory. Sam's method is an insightful contemporary application of the method originally set out in Marx's *Grundrisse*. Many contemporary explorations of agrarian political economy fail to sustain the important tension, and dialectical debate, between diverse empirical realities, and their 'multiple determinations and relations', and a wider theorisation of the 'concrete' features of emergent processes of change. The implications of Sam's methodological approach for the analysis of Zimbabwe's land reform are discussed, especially in relation to the land occupations and the politics of agrarian reform since 2000.

Key words: Sam Moyo; agrarian studies; political economy; method; Zimbabwe

Introduction: why methods matter

Sam Moyo is best known as an agrarian political economist, with major contributions on the land issue in Zimbabwe and, more broadly, post-colonial agrarian change. Having been trained

as a geographer, he also spent considerable time focusing on environmental issues. This combination is important when reflecting on his massively important contributions, and, in particular, his methodological approach. Across his life's work, he combined wider theorisation of the structural political economy features of agrarian change with on-the-ground empirical studies, examining the differentiated practices and processes in agrarian settings. His focus ranged from detailed studies of livelihoods, farming practice, and agricultural production, to land use and environmental change, and to historically-informed interpretations of political dynamics. The scope, breadth, and impact is hugely impressive.

In this article, I want to focus on the methodological lessons we can learn from Sam's scholarship. I want to argue that the combination of detailed empirical investigation, deep knowledge of the technical and practical aspects of agricultural production and farming livelihoods, and big-picture political economy analysis, and wider theorisation, is especially important, and reflects a tradition in political economy that goes back to Karl Marx's original discussion of method in the *Grundrisse* (Marx, 1973). Such an approach is often lost in many contemporary applications, which fail to sustain the important tension, and dialectical debate, between diverse empirical realities and wider theorisation of the emergent processes of change. In looking back on Sam's work, I argue that we can learn a lot from his applications, in ways that will continue to be important for new generations of scholars and activists, eager to engage with the legacy of his work.

The next section lays out, selectively, Sam's research career and briefly traces a methodological journey over several decades. This highlights the move from geography and environmental studies to agrarian political economy, and how a productive conversation emerged between different disciplinary perspectives. The subsequent section reflects on method in political economy, drawing in particular on Marx's explications in the *Grundrisse*, and Stuart Hall's interpretations of these (Hall, 2003). I suggest that Sam's work offers a fine example of the application of these ideas in practice. The final two sections move to some examples from Sam's work on Zimbabwe's land reform, highlighting the power of such a methodological stance and how it throws up debates about both interpretation and political action.

In the conclusion, I attempt to summarise my interpretation of Sam's methodological approach to agrarian political economy, arguing that deep engagement in particular contexts, when combined with wider theorisation around political implications, provides both an analytically

rigorous approach and an opportunity for political positioning, in ways that combines evidence with action. For Sam was not only robust and thorough in his theorisation, collection of empirical data, and wider analysis, but also was engaged as a critical activist scholar in struggles that have not disappeared with his passing. Future generations of scholar-activists, engaged in land and agrarian struggles in Africa and beyond, would do well to reflect on Sam's methodological approach, learn from it, and extend it to new contexts.

Tracing a methodological journey

Sam started out as a geographer with a keen interest in environmental issues. His undergraduate studies were at Njala University College at the University of Sierra Leone. He graduated in 1976 with a BA in Education and Geography. He went on to get an MA in geography at the University of Western Ontario in Canada in 1979.¹ Returning to Zimbabwe after Independence, he worked at the Zimbabwe Institute for Development Studies (ZIDS), conducting research on a range of topics linked to land and rural development, and publishing an important paper in 1984 on land use and productivity (Moyo *et al.*, 1984). Based on his growing body of work on land in Zimbabwe, he did a PhD in Rural Development and Environmental Management at the University of Northumbria in the United Kingdom, graduating in 1994.

Working with the Zimbabwe Environment Research Organisation (ZERO), he published on a range of environmental themes (Moyo *et al.*, 1991; Moyo and O'Keefe, 1993; Moyo *et al.*, 1993a, 1993b). His work on NGOs and social movements followed, situating his interest in the social dynamics of agrarian change (*e.g.*, Moyo *et al.*, 2000). By then he had moved to the Southern Africa Political and Economic Series (SAPES) Trust and the Southern Africa Regional Institute for Policy Studies (SARIPS), where he became more immersed in political economy debates and analysis. Outside Zimbabwe, of course, his work with the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) was influential, and in 2009 he became the Council's president.

His classic book, *The Land Question in Zimbabwe*, was published in the mid-1990s (Moyo, 1995), and was based substantially on his thesis work, combining detailed fieldwork with wider analysis of the land question. It was the first major work on land in many years, since earlier

¹ See a summary CV at http://our-global-u.org/oguorg/en/?wpfb_dl=427, accessed 18 October 2016.

classics reflecting on the colonial context (e.g., Palmer 1977). This set the terms for his subsequent work, as well as the wider debate through the latter part of the 1990s, when he became increasingly engaged in the politics and policy of land in Zimbabwe (e.g., Moyo 1998, 2000a, 2000b). With the major land reform from 2000, Sam's work was in the spotlight, and his views were widely sought. In this period, his scholarship perhaps best exemplified the approach highlighted in the introduction. His background in geography combined with wider theorisation of political change following agrarian upheaval. There were heated debates between scholars on how to interpret the political transition of the early 2000s (e.g., Moyo and Yeros 2007a, 2007b, 2008a, 2008b; Yeros, 2002; Moore, 2004; Raftopolous, 2006; among others), highlighting the fracturing of 'left' positions in this period. But beyond the somewhat rarefied discussions in the pages of *Historical Materialism* and elsewhere, Sam and colleagues were also engaged in much more grounded, empirical work.

The major district-level study that was published in 2009 (Moyo *et al.*, 2009) was set in place several years before, soon after the establishment of the African Institute for Agrarian Studies (AIAS) in 2002. This was a hugely important, large empirical survey of new land reform settlements across the country, and complemented work being done in particular regions (Scoones *et al.*, 2010; Matondi, 2012). At the same time, drawing on both his wider political economy analysis and this growing set of data, Sam worked on policy-oriented engagements, particularly with the World Bank, on the implications of land reform for the agricultural sector (e.g., Moyo and Sukume 2006; Moyo and Binswanger, 2012). This illustrated Sam's ability to span the worlds of theory and practice, making use of empirical data to forward important interpretations of change.

His in-depth evaluations of Zimbabwe's land reform a decade on appeared in print in a series of significant articles in the *Journal of Peasant Studies* and the *Review of African Political Economy* (Moyo, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c); each becoming vital reference points, and each presenting extensive data combined with wider theorisation. His edited book with Walter Chambati, *Land and Agrarian Reform in Zimbabwe: Beyond White Settler Capitalism* (Moyo and Chambati, 2013) provided an opportunity to pull together in one place a broader array of work, much of it supported and supervised by Sam, and again this contribution soon became a classic. The Zimbabwe case also, in turn, contributed to wider debates in agrarian studies about how to interpret the contemporary conjuncture, with Sam's insights underpinning important contributions to this journal (Moyo *et al.*, 2012, 2013).

Over 40 years, then, Sam's scholarship moved from one focused on land use and environmental change to one much more deeply inspired by Marxist political economy, allowing a nuanced and effective analysis of the fast-changing dynamics of agrarian challenges, particularly of Zimbabwe. I first engaged with Sam and his work in the late 1980s, as I was starting out on my PhD in Zimbabwe. I had close contact with his work with ZERO, given mutual interests in environmental issues. I commented on his thesis draft in the 1990s, and learned much, but, like many, I was not engaged with a more fundamental debate about land until the 2000s, when radical shifts in agrarian structure occurred, and no one could ignore what was happening.

It was in this period that I learned much from Sam, and our debates about how to interpret what was happening became more intense. We both agreed and disagreed, and these discussions often, at root, reflected different methodological stances. Through Sam's influence, over time, we converged, as I saw the importance of the wider political economy analysis that he advocated, while I insisted on retaining the located, site-specific approach to analysis of people in places, that, because of his geography training, he also appreciated. We both agreed fervently that detailed, empirical information about what was happening, where, and to whom was essential if a more mature debate about Zimbabwe's land reform was to evolve and inform both policy and public commentary, and we spent many hours sharing findings from our various studies.

Methods for understanding the political economy of agrarian change

How, then, can we learn from Sam's work to think about methods for understanding the political economy of agrarian change? As already mentioned, a good starting point is Marx's treatise on method in political economy, the *Grundrisse* (Marx, 1973). In order to understand processes of agrarian change – production, consumption, reproduction, exchange, and the processes of accumulation, investment, and social differentiation that follow – we must, following Henry Bernstein (2010), ask some fairly basic questions: who owns what, who does what with it, who gets what, and what do they do with it? Answers to these empirical questions can then reveal wider interpretations of agrarian change, allowing us to define categories and processes in relation to what is happening in particular places at particular times.

This is essentially the argument of Marx in the *Grundrisse*. He argues that a critical political economy approach exposes the ‘rich totality of many determinations and relations’ and so exposes a ‘concrete’ understanding, which appears through iterations between conceptual abstractions and detailed empirical observation: ‘[t]he concrete is concrete because it is the concentration of many determinations, hence unity of the diverse’ (Marx, 1973: 100–101). To avoid ‘a chaotic conception of the whole’, a dialectical method is advocated. This, he states, moves ‘analytically towards ever more simple concepts, from the imagined concrete towards ever thinner abstractions until I had arrived at the simplest determinations. From there the journey would have to be retraced until I had finally arrived at the population again, but this time not as a chaotic conception of a whole, but as a rich totality of many determinations and relations’ (1973: 100).

According to Stuart Hall (2003: 118), in his interpretation of Marx’s 1857 Introduction, ‘to penetrate a structure as dense and overlaid with false representations as the capitalist mode of production, we need concepts more fundamentally dialectical in character’ (p. 118). Hall (2003: 127) continues:

the concept of a ‘differentiated unity’ is a methodological and theoretical key to this text, and to Marx’s method as a whole. This means that, in the examination of any phenomenon or relation, we must comprehend *both* its internal structure – what it is in its differentiatedness – as well as those other structures to which it is coupled and with which it forms some more inclusive totality. Both the specificities and the connections – the complex unities of structures – have to be demonstrated by the concrete analysis of concrete relations and conjunctions. If relations are mutually articulated, but remain specified by their difference, this articulation, and the determinate conditions on which it rests, has to be demonstrated. It cannot be conjured out of thin air according to some essentialist dialectical law. Differentiated unities are also therefore, in the Marxian sense, *concrete*. The method thus retains the concrete empirical reference as a privileged and undissolved ‘moment’ within a theoretical analysis without thereby making it ‘empiricist’: the concrete analysis of concrete situations.

How, then, does such a method for political economy operate, combining an empirical stance with a theorisation of ‘the concrete’, the result of multiple determinations and relations? According to Marx, ‘the abstract determinations lead towards a reproduction of the concrete by

way of thought' (quoted by Hall, 2003: 129). Hall explains, '[t]hought accomplishes such a clarification by decomposing simple, unified categories into the real, contradictory, antagonistic relations which compose them' (*ibid.*). He continues, 'Marx's "historical epistemology", then, maps the mutual articulation of historical movement and theoretical reflection, not as a simple identity but as differentiations within a unity' (*ibid.*: 137). Hall, in turn, argues that 'Marx's method depends on identifying two dialectically related but discontinuous levels: the contradictory, antagonistic 'real relations' which sustain the reproductive processes of capitalism, and the 'phenomenal forms' in which the contradictions appear as "equalized"' (*ibid.*: 140). This, he states, '*not only* lays bare the "real relations" behind their "phenomenal forms", but does so in a way which *also* reveals as a contradictory and antagonistic necessary content what, on the surface of the system, appears only as a "phenomenal form"' (*ibid.*: 141, *italics in original*).

While presented in somewhat abstract terms, I would argue that this was exactly Sam's methodological stance. He was no 'vulgar' political economist, only interested in deterministic, historical 'laws', nor a simplistic 'structuralist', uninterested in the 'multiple determinations and relations' of complex realities. He was always interested in exactly the sophisticated dialectic that Marx describes, and which Hall interprets as the core feature of method in political economy. Such an approach to political economy allows for engagement with the diversity of livelihood strategies, production practices, and social arrangements across sites, while at the same time understanding longer-term livelihood trajectories and their structural conditioning and shaping. It also focuses attention on the political and economic alliances being forged between different classes, and so the structuring of the wider political economy.

As Henry Bernstein argues (2010a: 209), a movement between the specifics of diverse livelihood contexts and the wider 'abstractions and tendencies', associated with a relational and dynamic understanding of class, offers vital insights into longer-term processes of social differentiation and agrarian change. This, in turn, must include perspectives on gender, ethnicity, and other dimensions of difference often missed out in classical Marxist analysis. It was this combination of approaches that made Sam's work so powerful, and his scholarship so impressive, and, as already argued, emerged from his cross-disciplinary engagements in the social sciences. Of course, he knew his physical geography and agronomy too, and so the underlying determinants of 'the material' bases of change were always incorporated in his perspectives.

Reflecting now on our many conversations over the years, Sam was always critical of the ‘livelihoods approach’ that I have advocated (Scoones, 1998, 2009). In the terms elaborated above, I was clearly too focused on the ‘multiple determinations and relations’ – the detailed specificities of everyday life – rather than the wider ‘concrete’ features that allowed an interpretation in relation to wider processes of change. Sam, instead, always defended an analysis that encouraged a dialogue between diverse empirical contexts and wider structural interpretations. Sam made good use of a comparative survey method, and his detailed fieldwork across sites helped expose the ‘multiple determinations’ very effectively. His wider theorisation of agrarian change drew out broader ‘concrete’ understandings, making use of the analytical categories of Marxism. My critique was always that a survey method sometimes failed to engage with all such ‘determinations and relations’, and so ignored particularity and nuance, requiring a deeper, ethnographic perspective in combination. Equally, a theorisation that focused too much on class as a defining characteristic perhaps missed other dimensions of ‘the concrete’ – whether gender or ethnicity – that provided insights into wider dynamics of change.

Over time, and highly influenced by Sam’s work, our perspectives converged. My reflection, (auto)-critique and extension of the livelihoods approaches of the 1990s (Scoones, 2015a) drew on exactly this argument, inspired by Sam and others. Locality, place, context, and the specific, textured understandings of differentiated livelihood strategies and their changes all are vital, but are merely descriptive without a wider appreciation of political economy and structural forces of power and politics that intersect with them. Pathways of change are always co-constructed in this way. As with Sam’s work, greater analytical power, and more effective, generalisable arguments, can emerge through an interaction of deep empiricism and intelligent theorisation. Theory cannot exist in a vacuum, though, as it never stands up to scrutiny without being rooted, engaged, and supported by empirical foundations.

Dialogue and debate: interpreting land reform in Zimbabwe

In this section, I want to share two examples of where empirical insights and theoretical frames combined, resulting in divergent interpretations. In one case, my view differed to a degree from that of Sam, while in the other, Sam’s work directly informed a change in my perspective. Both

examples highlight how methodological choices are important, and why sustaining the dialogue between field realities and wider theorisation is vital.

The first example relates to the interpretation of Zimbabwe's land invasions from the late 1990s, accelerating in 2000–01. These took place across the country, and resulted in the invasion of large tracts of farmland owned mostly by white farmers: the now famed *jambanja* period. This was read by some as a chaotic, violent confrontation, organised by the party-state following the Constitutional referendum in 2000. In such a reading, the invasions were coordinated, deliberate, and supported by state forces, including the army and security services, as part of a desperate attempt to reassert power, being challenged by the rising force of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change party (Hammar *et al.*, 2003; Raftopoulos and Phimister, 2004). The invaders were cast as 'cronies', agents of the party-state, and the land reform, therefore, was seen as an illegitimate 'grab' by politically-connected elites (Zamchiya, 2013).

By contrast, others argued that this was the result of a new, revolutionary social movement, emerging from the grassroots, and responding to liberation war demands for the redistribution of land, as well as genuine demand from peasant farmers living in cramped communal areas. The invasions of 2000–01 were, it was argued, a continuation of other protests and land invasions in previous years, organised by local people with the support of the war veterans, confronting the state, and a white land-owning elite, head on (Moyo 2001; Moyo and Yeros, 2005). This became, according to these commentators, a cross-class mobilisation that involved the state on its terms, allowing the facilitation of a wider involvement beyond disenfranchised peasants to include the middle class and the political-business elite. The result was a political compromise within the 'fast-track' programme that accommodated diverse interests, across different types of resettlement models, from villagised to self-contained A1 models, to medium-scale A2 farms and large-scale A2 farms (Moyo and Chambati, 2013).

In these two versions of the land invasion period, theorisations of the political character of land reform differed dramatically. In one, land reform was the result of a corrupt, failing state and party, exercising its power ruthlessly and violently; in the other, a popular movement transformed into a cross-class accommodation between citizens and the state, responding to genuine demands.

In this instance, my view has been that theory – and with this particular political positions – ran ahead of the empirical realities. In practice, both interpretations had some elements of truth embedded in them, but neither was sufficient to explain such a dramatic period in Zimbabwe’s history. The problem with much of the discussion of the *jambanja* period is that it often proceeds without attention to the empirical realities on the ground, or, if cases are referred to, they are single instances, often outliers, whether the Svosve invasions of the late 1990s (Magure, 2015) or particular contexts of a certain site (cf. Marongwe, 2003; Zamchiya, 2011, 2013). Too much discussion of this period is coloured by intense political emotion and extremely distorted media reporting (Willems, 2004). There was not much research going on in the rural areas in 2000–01, as it was very volatile, sometimes dangerous, and so empirical grounding was limited, and the crucial tension for political economy analysis lost.

Our work in Masvingo from this period showed a much more variegated picture, reflecting both narratives (Chaumba *et al.*, 2003a, 2003b; Scoones *et al.*, 2010, 2012a). It varied massively, farm by farm and over time. Early invasions may have been quite spontaneous, led in some cases by farm workers who knew the area; later others joined, including war veterans, who organised people into ‘base camps’; later still they may have garnered assistance from the state and security forces, including support for planning, as well as food and logistics. Across 16 sites, we did not find a single pattern, making it difficult to interpret the process. Indeed, both narratives applied in different places at different times.

Attention to the empirical realities, I would argue, forces us to temper interpretations, and sometimes forcing us to accept that no singular explanation will do. Interpretations of conjunctures emerge from diverse threads, and piecing these together requires attention not only to the bigger picture, but the complex, sometimes contradictory, realities on the ground (cf. Li, 2014). Our understanding of the bigger story has only slowly emerged over time. Here, the argument for a hedged compromise, involving diverse cross-class alliances seems appropriate. But again, this is different in different places: for example, deals struck in the Lowveld sugar estates have been very different to those in the core resettlement areas of Masvingo province, and different again to areas where high-value commercial contract agriculture grew, as in parts of Mashonaland through the tobacco boom (Scoones, 2015b, 2016; Scoones *et al.*, 2012a, 2012b, in press).

My second example, relates to this broader interpretation of the politics of land reform in Zimbabwe. Here Sam's work – with Paris Yeros, Walter Chambati, and many others – has been vitally important. While I do not subscribe to a singular interpretation, as in the particular case of the *jambanja* moment, making sense of the period since 2000 does require the wider theorisation that Sam and colleagues have offered. In the 2000s, many of us spent a huge amount of time and effort on detailed empirical studies. Large datasets were amassed, asking very basic questions about what was happening to who and where. Data on production, investment, patterns of accumulation and reproduction added to a rich picture of the post-land reform scene. This emerged from the district studies of AIAS, led by Sam (Moyo *et al.*, 2009); from our work in Masvingo (Scoones *et al.*, 2010), and subsequently Mvurwi in Mashonaland (Sukume *et al.*, 2015) and Matobo in Mataberland, and from studies led by Prosper Matondi and the Ruzivo Trust (Matondi, 2012). Together, these added up to an impressive body of qualitative and quantitative data that could confront some of the oft-repeated 'myths' about land reform. Since then, our early insights have been added to substantially, extending the geographic scope, deepening the focal areas, and on occasions challenging some of the findings (*e.g.*, Murisa, 2011; Chambati, 2011; Chigumira, 2014; Chiweshe, 2014; Mkodzongi, 2013; Mutopo, 2011; Zamchiya, 2011, 2013; among many others).

While these studies answered important empirical questions, few added up to a wider interpretation. This was an important – and legitimate – critique of our earlier work (Rutherford, 2012), a view echoed in a different way by Sam in our many conversations. He argued that we were getting stuck in the detail, not seeing the wood for the trees. We needed to understand not just what was happening in particular villages, but in the wider political economy, including geopolitical pressures affecting flows of finance and capital, in the context of 'sanctions'. We could not understand the relations of A1 and A2 farmers simply in terms of exchanges of tractors, but these had to be seen in relation to cross-class alliances, and the ways patronage networks from the state influenced outcomes. Further, we had to understand how a large mass of people on the land, with different affiliations and alliances, as well as class positions, were, in turn, influencing the state and party.

In other words, Sam and others were urging us to link our empirical work with a wider political economy theorisation, exploring what this meant for agrarian change more broadly; and not only in Zimbabwe. This was a vitally important encouragement to engage with exactly what Marx offered in the *Grundrisse* as a guide to method in political economy. The book on

Zimbabwe as a post-settler economy (Moyo and Chambati, 2013), and a number of other publications (*e.g.*, Moyo, 2008, 2007; Moyo and Yeros 2011) began to lay out Sam's interpretation. It was sadly unfinished work, but allows us glimpses of what he was thinking. Continuing to engage with these ideas, extending them in new ways that engage fully with the hugely complex and varied empirical realities will be an important legacy of Sam's work.

Methodological lessons from engaging with land reform in Zimbabwe

What, then, do we take from these reflections on methodology from engaging with Sam's work, especially on land in Zimbabwe?

First, and perhaps most obviously, empirical detail really matters. Whether from surveys or case studies or biographies or deeply immersive ethnographic engagements, the data that highlights the texture, nuance, and variation of what is happening is vital. Using mixed methods, combining quantitative and qualitative insights, is essential. This is not just the formulaic approaches of the standard consultancy, with a rushed survey and a focus group or two providing the data, but requires deeper, engaged work that allows confidence in the material produced. Such work becomes especially powerful if carried out over a long time, to get a sense of temporal dynamics, and over space in multiple locations, to get a sense of spatial variability. Comparative analysis, over time and space, can in turn add to our depth of understanding. Context, contingency, and conjuncture are all, as the examples above vividly show, vital features of any dynamic situation, and essential for grasping what is happening. Sam's work, especially with the impressive team at AIAS, showed all these features of empirical methodology and a commitment to fieldwork in particular places over time, even when funding was very short.

Data that accumulates as solid evidence is essential when confronting contested issues. Having reliable and robust data is the core of a strategy for influencing change. It may not result in a simple narrative, and may add layers of complexity, but it provides the grounding on which challenges to existing policies, or media and academic commentary, can be made. In the period from 2000, when the global media and many academic colleagues too, railed against the land reforms in Zimbabwe, without having done any recent empirical work, and with scant attention to any that had been produced, having a solid basis to develop arguments and counter

misinterpretations was important.² In this, the work of a growing group of committed scholars in Zimbabwe, with Sam central to this network, was essential.

Second, without a wider theorisation, it is impossible to make sense of the diversity, variety, and general confusion that much empirical work throws up. Single cases are insufficient, and theorisation must emerge from engagement with diverse sources. Theory that is grounded and robust must engage with the ‘many determinations and relations’, defining the ‘concrete’, while at the same time avoiding a ‘chaotic conception of the whole’. To reiterate Marx’s point above, ‘the concrete is concrete because it is the concentration of many determinations, hence unity of the diverse’. For Sam, an analysis centred on class, but sensitive to other axes of difference, including gender, was at the core. But empirical contexts meant that static class assignments were inadequate, and a sophisticated, fluid interpretation, appropriate to the southern African context, had to emerge. Thus ‘real relations’ informed what Stuart Hall (above) calls the ‘differentiated unity’ of analytical phenomena, such as class. Linked to a located understanding of class relations and struggle, Sam’s work articulated with wider understandings of finance and capital in the context of globalisation, within an unequal, evolving post-colonial world order. These broader assessments, inspired by the likes of Samir Amin (1972, 1978) and Giovanni Arrighi (1994), for example, in turn informed more micro-analyses of particular places and processes.

As I hope this paper has shown, Sam was deeply committed to both these elements of method in political economy, and deployed them effectively in combination, one dialectically informing the other. The key lessons from Sam’s work were to keep both strands of thought and action alive, and in dialogue. For him, both the geographer and the political economist were ever-present. The lesson for us all is: neither to disappear into grand theory, nor into micro-empirical detail, but capture them both, holding them in tension. Sam’s impressive approach combined a sustained commitment to fieldwork, to people and places – a direct result of his training in geography – and his ability to theorise the political economy of land, emerging from his engagement with radical scholars rooted in agrarian struggles around the world. It is

² This was perhaps most extreme in the depths of Zimbabwe’s economic crisis in the late 2000s. Mahmood Mamdani’s 2008 piece for the *London Review of Books*, ‘Lessons of Zimbabwe’, for example, led to a collective signed letter from a group of academics: <http://concernedafricascholars.org/reflections-on-mahmood-mamdani-lessons-of-zimbabwe/>, accessed 18 October 2016.

a rare skill to observe in one person, and across such an impressive career, but a skill that is essential, and one we can all learn from Sam's work.

Rigour in method arises from keeping these tensions in play, always being reflexive about how evidence is constructed, and for what purposes. Big surveys, micro-case studies and wider political analysis can all come together, but only with a really deep sense of how connections are made, and how each informs each other. This was Sam's great skill.

Conclusion

Sam's methodological stance was mature and sophisticated. It was often not directly articulated, as he engaged across such a wide range, but reflecting back on an impressive 40 year career, tragically cut short, we can see the influences and how these combined so effectively.

An appreciation of context, spatial difference, and comparative insights, and a commitment to sustained empirical fieldwork comes from human geography; at least the kind taught in places avoiding the worst excesses of the post-structuralist turn. From his PhD, through the range of outputs in the 1990s, to the crucially important AIAS district studies in the 2000s (now being repeated), a solid commitment to detailed empirical study is highly evident in Sam's massive corpus. But, as I have shown, this was not all. This background of empirical work could only be made sense of through wider theorising of how 'concrete' features of class, gender, social relations, capital, labour, and political formation created such diversity and variation. And rather than theorising in a vacuum, as sadly too many do, Sam and colleagues were able to challenge simplistic theories drawn from elsewhere and make them real for a Zimbabwean context.

Knowledge – especially in the context of a field as contested as land in Zimbabwe – is inevitably political. This means rigour in methodology is especially important, as challenge comes from all sides. Sam was, of course, positioned normatively and politically around a commitment to land reform, a stance he had made clear long before the land reforms of the 2000s. As a public intellectual, and a policy actor operating on an international stage, especially through his associations with CODESRIA, Sam's research came under especial scrutiny. This meant that being explicit about how data is collected, how theories are constructed, and how

findings are presented was essential. It meant ‘speaking truth to power’, even when this was uncomfortable. Uncovering patronage, illegal dealings, and corrupt practice threw a sharp light on land reform, but was balanced with a wider assessment of the land reform as a positive, and long overdue, move that benefited many, and provided the opportunity to set in train a process of agrarian reform that, with qualifications, addressed poverty, inequality, and social justice. You could disagree with some of Sam’s analyses and interpretations – and sometimes I did – but you could not doubt the integrity of the work and the dedication with which it was put together. This was not sloppy, casual research masquerading as scholarship, with conclusions already formulated, but thorough, perceptive and profound research that his critics could not counter in substantive terms.

Sam’s formidable, enquiring mind, his dedication to extreme hard work, and his methodological approach – never formulaic, sometimes rather eclectic, but rooted in a more rounded interpretation of method for political economy, as I have argued here – all contributed to a massively important body of work that will influence Zimbabwe, and the region more widely, for many years to come. One of his major commitments was to support a next generation of African agrarian studies scholars, and he did this with generosity and enthusiasm. Hopefully, some of his students, and their students in turn, will take lessons from Sam’s remarkable journey, as I have, and think not only about the findings of his scholarship, but the way it was conducted, and its sophisticated methodological approach, combining different approaches to understanding both the empirical realities of ‘multiple determinations and relations’ but also structural features of ‘the concrete’ in a rigorous, enlightening way.

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