



Without the Blanket of the Land

Agrarian Change and Biopolitics in Post-Apartheid
South Africa

BICAS conference on the BRICS and agrarian change in the rural South
20 – 21 April 2015
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What are the responses – from above and below – to processes of jobless deagrarianization?

What are the dynamics and the consequences of the inclusion of poor, vulnerable and unruly populations within processes of capitalist change in post-agrarian, post-industrial SA?

*This land will be folded like a blanket
Till it is like the palm of a hand*

*.... Our girls
Will have their lobola paid with paper,
Coins that come and go, come and
go.*

St J. Page Yako

The birth of the SA distributive regime



Looking at agrarian change through the lens of the analysis of distributive regimes and biopolitics can illuminate the connections with South African politics more broadly

Distributive Regime

Welfare & Social Protection

Fiscal Redistribution

Industrial Relations

Growth Strategies

Informal/agrarian institutions

The SA distributive regime was decisively formed by the social struggles of the 1920s, which produced a social compact centred on the citizen-worker nexus

The biopolitical calculations that shaped this regime depended on the role of 'Native Reserves' and Bantustans as sites of welfare production and distributive labour

The post-Apartheid distributive regime is based not on the transformation of this distributive regime but its deracialization

The project was still essentially the inclusion of all South Africans in a biopolitical regime founded on the citizen worker nexus

But a biopolitics based on the citizen worker nexus has been unable to support beneficial forms of inclusion...

... because, inter alia, of the ability of the economy's corporate core to hijack the regulatory agenda and the fruits of economic growth



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The return of rural containment?



The return of strategies of rural containment, influx control and brute force signal the failure of modernist biopolitics but do not resolve any of its problems...

... instead they undermine the sociality and social solidarity on which any modernist project of inclusion depends

Out of the agrarian ghetto...

Debates about land reform should be liberated from the productionist paradigm that conflates it with agrarian reform

Land is the material basis for a wide range of activities including distributive labour, welfare production, and strategies for decommodification

Food sovereignty discourse does not provide much guidance for dealing with the tensions and trade-offs of modern distributive politics...

Without the blanket of the land

Can progressive agro-food alternatives and beneficial forms of biopolitics be founded on the existing terrain of post-agrarian, post industrial South Africa?