

# Emancipation Betrayed: The Failures of Derg's Land to the Tiller Policy

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## Abstract

*Being situated within the debates within intellectual histories of Marxist revolutionary movements in Africa, the aim of this paper is to show why the land to the tiller policy of the Derg regime failed to realize its emancipatory intent of liberating landless and poor peasants. Through the usage of the method of ideology critique, the paper shows that the land to the tiller policy failed since it was used as an ideological instrument rather than as a reform that had the aim of replacing the feudal economy with small-scale farms.*

**Keywords:** *Derg, land to the tiller, emancipation, social fabric, ideology, Marxism.*

## *Introduction*

Marxist revolutionary movements of Africa were born out of the need to develop an anti-colonial and anti-imperialistic emancipatory struggle that can succeed in laying the foundations for social progress (Visentini, 2020). These revolutionary movements were heavily dictated by the idea of a class struggle and the need to mobilize the masses having the goal of introducing a new egalitarian order (Burawoy, 2000). The Marxist revolutionary movements were developed in a closer relationship with pan-Africanism and the attempt to introduce an African form of collective struggle that is rooted in local cultures and traditions (Armah, 1984). As part of such an undertaking, attempts were made by African revolutionaries to appropriate “socialism to their own national circumstances” (Hughes, 1992, p. 10). Marxism was seen as a paradigm of social liberation that can usher in the transformation from colonialism into the liberated African state (Visentini, 2020). In the current stage, the legacies of Marxist revolutionary movements in Africa are seen in African political systems, the usage of the thesis

of class struggle as an organizing principle in the body politic and the quest for social justice and equality.

One of the sites of experimentation where Marxist revolutionary ideals assumed the position of state ideology in Africa is the case of the Derg regime in Ethiopia. The Derg came to power in Ethiopia promising the introduction of a new political order that promised a radical break from the feudal past (Belluci, 2016). Having an aim of developing a socialist state, the Derg introduced major policies including agrarian reform, nationalization, land policy, educational reform, military mobilization and a command economy (Abbink & Hagmann, 2016). Ultimately, the policies of the Derg failed as they did not have popular support; there was weak governance, international isolation, internal factions and a disregard for the question of identity (Clapham, 2009). Being founded on the analysis of Marxist revolutionary movements in the African context, the aim of this paper is to identify the reasons why the Derg's new land policy that is expressed by the slogan of land to the tiller failed to materialize. Through the usage of ideology critique as a methodological tool, the hidden meanings behind such a policy, the emancipatory intent that the policy carries and the ways in which counter hegemonic approaches could be developed will be explored.

The land to the tiller policy will be situated as a state policy that had the emancipatory goal of ending the relations of exploitations between landlords and tenants in the imperial regime and in return setting the foundation for a new egalitarian economy. The policy was characterized by the redistribution of land, the reforming of tenancy and the introduction of cooperative farming and small-scale farms (Yemane-ab, 2016). The study of such a policy and its failures needs to be situated in the study of revolutionary Marxist movements in Africa. Like the different policies like nationalization and collectivization that were introduced by other Marxist revolutionary movements in Africa, the land to the tiller policy was motivated by the need to develop a mode of revolutionary practice that is able to serve as a foundation for an egalitarian practice (Tibebu, 2008). Not just in Ethiopia but in other African nations, Marxism was seen as the ultimate foundation for an emancipatory practice since by its very essence it stood against the capitalistic mode of exploitation (Bracking & Harrison, 2003). It provides a path towards the realization of social justice through a collective struggle that is mounted by the alienated and the dehumanized.

Through the development of a broader discussion that situates the development of the Derg's land policy within the history of Marxist revolutionary movements in Africa, the paper has the goal of understanding the ideological foundations of such a land policy, the emancipatory intent that it sought to realize,

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its internal tensions and contradictions, the reasons why it ultimately failed and the ways in which an alternative approach could be pursued in. There is a need to develop an analysis that shows the reasons why the Marxist revolutionary practice failed to serve as a foundation of a social progress in the Ethiopian soil.

The paper starts out by situating the land to the tiller policy within Marxist revolutionary movements in Africa and this is followed by a discussion of the place that is occupied by this policy in Derg's state ideology. After this, a discussion of the ideological assumptions that are found behind the land to the tiller policy and the reasons why the policy failed will be made. This will set the foundation for a discussion that centres on the need to develop an alternative approach that is participatory and is situated in the lives of the people. Such an analysis will be made through the usage of the method of ideology critique. This is useful in terms of identifying the ideological foundations that are found behind this policy, the reasons why it failed and the spaces within which a counter hegemonic practice could be developed within.

*Land to the Tiller in the Context of Marxist Revolutionary Movements in Africa*

The land to the tiller policy is a radical policy of the Derg that was aimed at freeing peasants from the system of tenancy in which they were forced to share the largest percentage of their crops to the landlords and live a life of poverty (Stellmacher, 2007). The policy is part of an agrarian reform program that was aimed at the redistribution of land from the landlords into the tenants (Ottaway, 1977). The land to the tiller was motivated by the need to create a new egalitarian order where the formation of agricultural cooperatives and small-scale farms will lead into an increase in agricultural productivity. The policy is similar to other radical policies that were introduced by Marxist revolutionary movements in Africa like nationalization, redistribution of land, state control of the economy and the focus on trade unions (Samoff, 1982). Land to the tiller constituted a part of Derg's attempt to introduce a new political order that is defined by central planning, mass mobilization and grassroots development. In this section, the land to the tiller policy will be situated within the intellectual history of other Marxist revolutionary movements in Africa.

From the very beginning Marxism in the African soil was seen as an instrumentalist ideology that can be used to create a new society that is founded on social justice and equality. To such an extent "African Marxism began as a political and ideological instrument" (Copans, 1985, p. 27). It was introduced in the African soil as a philosophy of mass mobilization that promises not only the

dawn of a new era but also a collective practice that has the capacity of preserving the cultural values of the continent and developing a sense of a commonly shared identity (Markakis & Waller, 2013). Such a philosophy is founded on the assumption that in the world of capitalism, there is an antagonism between workers and those who own the means of production (Marx, 1959). It had the goal of showing that the capitalistic era leads into the fetishism commodities and elevates historically situated relations of exploitations into the position of universality (Marx, 2000). Such a process strips the individual of the capacity to create the world through one's labour (Marx & Engels, 1968). In such a context, what Marxism promised is the restoration of the creative power of labour against the processes of commoditization that characterises the world of capitalism (Comninel, 2019). In the African soil, Marxism was presented as a path towards modernity that defies the logic of western colonialism and the myth of unlimited progress.

Marxist revolutionary movements originated in the different parts of the African continent being guided by the need to emancipate the masses and also build a new society that is founded on relations of equality (Ishiyama, 2005). Among others, one can mention the Derg, ANC, MPLA, FRELIMO, SWAPO, PAIGC AND ZANU-PF. The Derg's rise to power in Ethiopia is situated within the context of a discontent with the imperial regime and the need to usher in a process of social progress that is founded on the empowerment of peasants and the working class (Keller, 1984). The Derg saw Marxism-Leninism as a way of introducing a process of state building that is centred on central planning (Legum, 1977). Such an effort expressed itself in different reforms like the introduction of a new land policy, and the nationalization of key industries and collectivization of agriculture.

As a regime that is founded on the need to lay the foundations for a social progress that is guided by the principles of Marxism-Leninism, the Derg had the goal of dismantling the feudal regime and introduce a new order that is defined by the rule of the working class (Kebede, 2003). One of the aspects of such a revolutionary practice of the Derg constituted the introduction of a land policy that was expressed by the slogan land to the tiller (Abebe, 2016). This was a policy that was motivated by the need to liberate the peasants from serfdom and lay the foundations for social and economic progress through the increase in agricultural productivity and the reduction of rural poverty (Yemane-ab, 2016). It was not only the Derg that had an interest in using Marxism as a revolutionary philosophy of class struggle.

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In looking at other Marxist revolutionary movements in Africa, one observes that in South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC) being inspired by Marxism in conjunction with pan-Africanism, introduced an anti-apartheid struggle that stood against racial segregation (Nash, 2014). The ANC experimented with different Marxist ideals like nationalization and the redistribution of property. Both the Derg and the ANC saw Marxism as a foundation of social justice and equality. In the case of Angola, the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) introduced different Marxist modernization programs like land reforms and nationalization (Ishiyama, 2005), while the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) used Marxism in the struggle towards Portuguese colonialism. Its initiatives focused on the need to redistribute land and nationalize the main industries. The leadership of FRELIMO believed that “only revolutionary war can form the proper basis for a socialist society” (Henriksen, 1978, p. 444). The radical redistribution of land as a policy was also pursued by the Derg.

Marxist ideals also provided the foundations for emancipatory struggles that were introduced by SWAPO, PAIGC and ZANU-PF. In the case of South West African People's Organization (SWAPO), the focus was on the need to use armed struggle to dismantle the white rule (Vigne, 1987) while the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) introduced an agricultural collectivization with a focus on rural development and the nationalization of industries (Lyon, 1980). Lastly, the Zimbabwe African National Union-patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), introduced a Marxist revolutionary struggle that was focused on land redistribution and the need to nationalize industries (Shaw, 1986). All of these attempts to use Marxism as a foundation of a revolutionary movement in the African context are defined by the need to develop a critique that can identify ways of overcoming the colonial order (Moreira, 1989). Just like these radical measures that were taken by the Marxist revolutionary movements in other parts in Africa, the Derg also introduced radical policies and the land to the tiller was one of such policies.

### *Derg's Rise to Power and the Land Reform Agenda*

The Derg came to power in a context that is characterized by the autocratic rule of Emperor Haile Selassie, widespread poverty, famine, landlessness and rural unrest and a political climate of a radical student movement guided by the principles of Marxism (Assefa, 2022). The Ethiopian student movement headed the protests against the imperial regime and Marxism emerged as the guiding philosophy in the quest for social justice and equality (Zewde, 2014). The

revolution took place against an imperial order that is defined by the “unification and embodiment of the body politics in the person of the king” (Toggia, 2008, p. 110). It was an order that rests on divine authority and had a complete disregard for basic liberties. There was a widespread dissatisfaction against the rule of the Emperor who was “exercising undivided, absolute, single-handed rule” (Vestal, 2013, p. 40). In such a context, the Derg came to power as committee that is made up of military officers and made promises to introduce a new egalitarian social order (Ottaway, 1978). Once it came to power, the Derg tried to introduce a vision of a new socialist order that is defined by a command economy and a centralized process of planning.

The Derg had the goal of modernizing the nation and this was to be realized by making a transition from a feudal society into the establishment of a new egalitarian society (Gebeyehu, 2010). It promised to address the root causes of poverty and inequality although in reality what it managed to attain was a transition from an aristocratic feudal regime into a Marxist-Leninist totalitarian and autocratic regime that did not tolerate any dissent in the name of meeting the goals of the revolution (Tiruneh, 1993). The Derg saw the imperial regime as failing to create a broader political landscape and not having the strategies that are needed in order to modernize the nation in the face of the threat that has been posed by western powers (Ottaway, 1976). Seeing itself as a revolutionary regime that will introduce a new emancipatory practice that is guided by Marxism-Leninism introduced, the Derg sought to mobilize the masses and lay the foundation for a new society. At the very beginning, the Derg constituted “democratic movement within the armed and police forces” (Legum, 1977, p. 306). Such a movement had the goal of addressing the foundations of inequality within the Ethiopian state. One of the major aspects of the conception of modernization that the Derg tried to introduce in order to liberate the nation from the feudal order is characterized by the development of an agrarian reform that is seen as the foundation of social justice and equity. Such an urge involved the introduction of the land to the tiller policy (Chekol, 2017). It had the goal of empowering disenfranchised subjects.

The land to the tiller policy was introduced by the Derg as a policy that sought to liberate peasants from the system of feudalism and allow them to freely exercising their labour under agricultural cooperatives (Rahmato, 2009). The land policy of the Deg had the aim of addressing landlessness among peasants that were dwelling in the feudal system. Under the older land rights system, it is seen that “only those people with land use right or rist land were considered as a liberated or free” (Getahun, 2015). This subsequently resulted in the alienation and

impoverishment of the masses. Against such a background, the Derg introduced land to the tiller as an emancipatory project that situated the landless and the poor peasants as the subjects that have been marginalized so far within the feudal regime. In a nation that is defined by an agrarian economy and where most of the peasants are landless, the Derg tried to introduce a new political economy that is characterized by the nationalization of key industries, the redistribution of land and the introduction of a common economy (Keller, 1984). In 1975, it introduced the National Land Reform Program that was situated as the foundation of rural prosperity and a policy that will lead into the dawn of a new order through the abolishment of the feudal land tenure systems.

The land to the tiller was motivated by several goals. First of all, it had the goal of redistributing land, and this was to be met by taking away land from the landlords and then giving the land to peasants that assumed the role of small scale farms (Yemane-ab, 2016). This was seen as a crucial step that is needed in order to realize the communal ownership of land which is the foundation for the emancipation of peasants. Secondly, the policy focused on the need to reform the tenancy system. The peasants were deprived of their rights since they lived under a system of share cropping where they were made to give the vast majority of their harvests to the landowners (Abebe, 2016). This was a source of their alienation as they did not have control over the products that they have created and the land to the tiller had the goal of emancipating the peasants by making them landowners through the establishment of cooperatives (Rahmato, 2009). To such an extent, the emancipatory vision of the land to the tiller is found in the quest to make the transition from tenancy to cooperative framing (Benin & Pender, 2001). Still, from the very beginning, the policy faced a resistance from the “institutions and elites of the old order” (Harbeson, 1977, p. 3). The main goal in the introduction of this policy is the communal ownership of land and this was in return seen as the foundation of a higher level of agricultural productivity.

The idea of creating a new society that is defined by equity and social justice was the goal of the Derg's modernization programs. The replacement of the system of tenancy with cooperative farms and the redistribution of land were regarded as necessary steps that are needed in order to liberate peasants (Crewett *et al.*, 2008). The emancipatory vision that is found behind the land to the tiller expressed itself in terms of the class struggle that is found between landlords and tenants (Chala, 2016). It is the revolutionary practice of the peasants over the landlords that will lead into the creation of a new egalitarian society that is defined by the relations of equality (Freeman, 2003). The Derg developed images of cooperative farms that are inhabited by peasants that are working in unison for the

good of the nation. Still, rather than introducing a modernization program that is supported by technical experts and a properly functioning system of administration, the Derg was more interested in using its policies in order to disseminate its ideological visions.

*Ideological Assumptions Behind Land to the Tiller*

The land to the tiller is founded on a Marxist-Leninist philosophy that is motivated by the need to emancipate the masses. Setting itself against an autocratic feudal regime that subsumed all political power and authority, the Derg believed that it can introduce a new order that can empower peasants and the working class (Gebeyehu, 2010). There are several ideological assumptions that are found behind the land policy of the Derg that need to be taken into consideration. First of all, land to the tiller is grounded on a Marxist understanding of alienated labour. It is founded on the idea that human beings do not have a fixed essence and that it is through their creative capacity to labour that they get to mould and fashion the world that they are living in (Markakis & Waller, 2013). This analysis of labour was used in order to explain the relations of exploitations between landlords and tenants and to introduce the land to the tiller as an attempt to go beyond such a system of tenancy. Seen as an attempt to restore the creative value of the labour of landless peasants, land to the tiller was introduced as a “radical agrarian reform based on the distribution of land” (Deverux *et al.*, 2005). Within the system of feudalism that defines the imperial regime in Ethiopia, peasants were alienated and dehumanized. The land to the tiller in such a context constituted the revitalization of labour through the abolishing of relations of exploitations and the introduction of a system of cooperative farming.

Secondly, the land to the tiller was also grounded on the ideological assumption of a class antagonism that is found among different social classes. These social classes are represented by the tenements that are dwelling under a system of share cropping and the landlords who get to take the vast majority of the shares (Ottaway, 1976). There is an antagonism between the landlords and the tenants and what the land to the tiller constitutes is the empowering of the tenants through their emancipation from the position of tenancy and the reclaiming of their autonomy and personhood through collective engagements in collective agricultural practices. Under the imperial regime, the tenants were not producing for themselves but for the landlords and because of this, they did not have the creative capacity to create the world that they are living in (Tiruneh, 1993). The Derg in return tried to usher in a new era that is defined by communal ownership



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and where each and every member of the community was going to have a fair share.

Thirdly, the ideological construct of collective struggle also runs through the land to the tiller. The policy is permeated with the assumption that it is through collective struggle that the exploited will dismantle the relations of exploitations and in return lay the foundations for a new political order that is defined by relations of equality (Gebeyehu, 2010). Such a call for a collective struggle under land to the tiller expressed itself in the idea of a collectively owned land, the need to transfer land from the landlords into the hands of the tenants and the calls for justice, and an equitable distribution of resources (Ottaway, 1977). It is not the individual farmer but peasants that are seen as the main object of analysis in this practice. These excluded and marginalized farmers work in cooperation with one another in order to dismantle the system of feudalism and create a new socialist order.

Fourthly, an ideological vision of an agrarian revolution is also found within land to the tiller. This is a revolution that has the goal of significantly transforming the nature of the rural economy and social structures within the feudal order (Getahun, 2015). The hierarchical relations between the landlords and the tenants are replaced with the symmetrical power relations among farmers who work within cooperatives (Crewett *et al.*, 2008). The social order that sets the nobility and the landlords at the social ladder is now replaced by a system where farmers work in unison with one another in order to create the foundations of an egalitarian society. It is the emancipation of peasants that is situated as ultimate goal of the land to the tiller. The Derg thus introduced the land policy as a way of creating a new society that is grounded on the triumph of the labourer.

### *Failed Emancipation: Ideology and Societal Dynamics*

The land to the tiller had the goal of redistributing the land that was owned by the landlords into the hands of landless peasants. It was a land policy that formed part of the policy of the Derg that had an aim of dismantling the feudal regime and in return introducing a new order that will lead into the modernization of the nation in line with the ideological assumptions of Marxism-Leninism (Abebe, 2016). Such a land policy was not just developed in Ethiopia, and there were other experiments in nations like Kenya, Namibia and Tanzania. The goal within these experiments was the development of an emancipatory practice that has the goal of modernizing the nation (Armah, 1984). Unfortunately, the land to the tiller failed to realize its emancipatory intent and such a failure could be

attributed to the fact that it was primarily used as an ideological tool and thus it was not grounded on a proper understanding of the societal dynamics.

Although at a theoretical level, the land to the tiller was introduced as an emancipatory practice that had the aim of redistributing land, getting rid of the system of tenancy and realize agrarian revolution, still in practice; it was just like the other modernization programs of the Derg like nationalization of industries, being used as an ideological tool to control the masses (Tadesse, 2016). The policy was imposed from the above and as a result of this; there was no proper consultation that was made with the peasants. It was not grounded on the lives of Ethiopian peasants led into the decrease in agricultural productivity and it even resulted in the displacement of peasants. Peasants' associations and cooperatives failed to meet their objectives since they did not have the adequate resources and the proper manpower and the expertise that is needed in order to properly implement the policies (Nichola, 2006). Thus, the land policy resulted in the decline in agricultural productivity.

What the Derg tried to introduce was a state centred and a cadre-controlled form of land distribution (Adal, 1997). Although the ideological assumptions of the system of land redistribution emphasized the need to empower the masses, still, in reality, there was a system that was being run by cadres and military officials. The cadres confiscated lands and there was a highly corrupted system that is not founded on the background of a democratic culture that is able to meet the needs of the farmers (Tariku, 2020). The land to the tiller thus constituted one aspect of the leftist social reforms and policies that were introduced by the Derg and was not founded on the existing beliefs and practices of the people (Tadesse, 2016). Such policies were not run by expert personnel but by cadres that had the goal of inculcating ideological visions in the minds of the masses. These cadres and military officers did not have an appropriate knowledge and understanding of the farming practices that are found in local communities.

The ideological commitments of the Derg made it completely oblivious to the local cultural values and practices that should have a huge role in the implementation of the land policy. As an ideological vision, the idea of a collective farming practice was imposed on the people and this run contrarily to the fact that in many Ethiopian rural communities, land is a property that is owned by the individual (Zerga, 2016). One also sees that the customary land tenure practices were being disregarded and as a result of this, there was a disruption of the social fabric of the rural communities. Socialist ideals dictated the land policy that the Derg introduced, and the aim was not gradually reforming the existing practices but ushering in a new order that is founded on the logic of social development that

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is reflective of the trajectories of modern European societies (Freeman, 2003). Not just in terms of its land policy, but in the other practices like the agricultural reforms that the Derg tried to introduce, there was the undermining of the existing practices and structures of the community, and this led into the failure of many of its policies.

The land to the tiller was not only imposed as a state ideology on the people but led into the disruption of the social fabric since it was not founded on a proper understanding of social dynamics and the nature of communal existence (Rahmato, 2009). When one looks at the impact of the land policy on the social life of the people and the nature of communal existence, it is seen that besides leading into a sharp decline in the levels of agricultural productivity, the most harmful impact of the land policy is seen in the loss of traditional knowledge as it pertains to the management of land (Chala, 2016). There was a complete disregard for the beliefs and the values of the community. Instead, a new theory of modernization that is founded on the need to control nature was introduced. Such an approach was not efficient and productive since it was not introduced in the background of a proper system of planning and the existence of technical experts.

In the end, the consequences of Derg's land policy which was motivated by the need to introduce an emancipatory practice but ended up being an ideological tool are seen in the existence of rural poverty, the decline in agricultural productivity and a process of social disruption. In reality, the radical distribution of land was grounded on the need to use land as a way of controlling the people (Zewde, 2004). Thus, it did not lead into the realization of economic equality. Rural communities and the nature of social life were disrupted as a result of the introduction of the land policy; the fabric of social life was disrupted and radically altered (Yemane-ab, 2016). This led into a lower level of social cohesion and the loss of a cultural identity. What was needed was an effective process of land planning that is situated in the beliefs of the people and has the capacity of distributing land in a manner that is able to meet the demands of equity and social justice.

### *Customizing Land Policies*

Considering the failure of Derg's land policy in terms of emancipating the masses and setting the foundation for the realization of social progress and modernization, there is a need to introduce an alternative approach that has the power of developing a mode of practice that is participatory in its nature and is grounded on the lives of the people. To develop an alternative paradigm that is attentive enough towards the needs of the people, there are several things that need

to be taken into consideration. First of all, there is a need to introduce a more participatory land policy. This is a policy that is not just imposed from the above but is grounded on the local community's knowledge, cultural values and social and historical facts. One of the main drawbacks of the Derg's land policy was that it was not founded on a theory of social progress that is attentive towards the lives of Ethiopians. It tried to forcefully impose reductionist Marxist categories like dialectics, social class and classless society on the lives of Ethiopian farmers without accounting for historical facts and existing needs (Mennasemay, 2005). Learning from this, there is a need to introduce a land reform that is founded on the lives of Ethiopians that are coming from different backgrounds.

Secondly, learning from the limitations of the Derg's land policy, there is a need to introduce a better approach that is grounded on the nature of communal existence and the lives of the people. Such an approach needs to strike a balance between collectivism on one hand and individual land rights on the other hand. There is a need to distribute land in a manner that appeals to the demands of social justice, and this is particularly relevant in a nation like Ethiopia where land has been the exclusive possession of the large landowners (Rahmato, 1984). One of the things that the Derg's land policy neglected was the psychological makeup of peasants and their perception towards land. Land is not just a physical object whose value is being determined in purely economic terms and it occupies a huge role in the individual's sense of patriotism and belongingness to the nation (Tsfahunegn *et al.*, 2016). Thus, rather than simply imposing a collectivist approach to land on the lives of Ethiopian farmers, there is a need to seek a middle path and develop an approach that recognizes the right to land as an individual right to property but also has the capacity of meeting the demands of equity by making sure that land is not only possessed by the rich and the powerful. Most importantly, there is a need to realize the engagement of the local community and their knowledge and beliefs needs to be incorporated into the land policies.

Land policies need to be customized into the local contexts. This could be realized through the carrying out of a comprehensive analysis of the local land tenure systems, the agricultural practices that are prevalent within a given community and also the social and the economic realities of a given society (Zerga, 2016). Hand in hand with this, there is also a need to address historical injustices and to make sure that all citizens have an equal access to land. There is a need to cultivate trust and a sense of ownership in the lives of farmers and one way of recognizing their land rights is through a process of certification (Bezabih *et al.* 2011). This is relevant in like Ethiopia as there is land fragmentation and the land rights of farmers are not secured through a legal and an institutional basis (Crewett

& Kurf, 2008). In the end, the Derg's land policy that was founded on the need to nationalize rural land and the development of collective farms led into the erosion of traditional land rights and management systems that are founded on the lives of the people. Taking this into consideration, there is a need to introduce a more inclusive approach that is able to learn from customary land management systems.

The development of a land policy will continue to occupy a special place in the emergence of an emancipatory discourse in Ethiopia since the issue is not just a matter of an economic possession but the attempt to address historical injustices and develop a new society that is founded on the principles of justice and equity. For such a practice to be realized there is a need to develop an approach that is inclusive and participatory in its nature. Furthermore, the approach needs to be founded on the beliefs, knowledge and also the practices of the people. The development of such a land policy could serve as a foundation of social progress and modernization.

### *Conclusion*

The Derg's land to the tiller policy was introduced out of the need to modernize the nation through a broader policy of nationalization, central planning and the introduction of a command economy. This land policy was dictated by the ideological aspirations of the Derg regime like the need to realize a classless society out of the relations of antagonisms that are found between landlords and tenants. The policy failed to materialize since as a form of modernization that was imposed from the above, it was not grounded on the lives of the farmers. The policy was run by cadres and military officers and there was the lack of a properly trained manpower that is needed to effectively implement the policy. It thus led into the erosion of the social fabric as it did not take into consideration the existing land tenure systems. Learning from this there is a need to introduce an alternative approach that is able to integrate local knowledge in the land management efforts.

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