

## **Class Dynamics of Agrarian Change: Writing a ‘Little Book on a Big Idea’**

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### **A ‘Little Book on a Big Idea’**

This paper reflects on writing a text on *Class Dynamics of Agrarian Change* for a new series of ‘little books on big ideas’, and provides two ‘samples’ or extracts. The series is a typically creative invention of Saturnino M. Borrás Jr (Jun Borrás). Its rationale is to provide ideas and debates in a form that is accessible to activists in social movements and NGOs that deal with land and agrarian issues, as well as to university students. My little book will be the first in the series, published by Fernwood Publishers in Canada and Kumarian Press in the USA.

The prospect of writing the book was both exciting and daunting, maybe two sides of the same coin. It was exciting because it gave the opportunity, and challenge, of writing for a far wider audience than I usually reach. The series will appear in Chinese, Portuguese and Spanish translations, as well as English, with promising possibilities of editions in additional languages. It was daunting for several reasons, concerning both the subject matter - within an extreme discipline of length - and the intended audience.

On subject matter: how to select from and distil more than three decades of working in this area into 40,000 words and in accessible fashion? The question forced me to recognize how much my work was shaped by a series of specific debates within materialist political economy (Marxism), not least at my own institution, the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, and in the pages of the *Journal of Peasant Studies* from 1973-2000 and the *Journal of Agrarian Change* since 2001, both based at SOAS.<sup>1</sup> Key

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<sup>1</sup> It is often observed, and rightly so, that more theoretical and otherwise general ideas advanced by authors are commonly, if sometimes unwittingly, influenced by where they know best and have

themes, contexts and moments of agrarian change - from the 'classic' transition from feudalism to capitalism in Europe, to the impact of colonialism on Latin America, Asia and Africa, to the formation and mutations of a global food economy in the period of industrial capitalism and then globalization – are strongly debated within Marxism, of course, and the second and especially the third theme are also much contested between Marxism and various currents of populism.

Moreover, investigation and public debate of pressing issues of farming and food, agriculture and environment in today's neoliberal globalization, are driven ideologically and politically much more by populism than Marxism, as a current wave of academic, quasi-academic and popular publications on such themes shows. And many of the prospective audience for the book are likely to be attracted by the undoubted oppositional vitality (and often intellectual simplicity?) of current populist positions on agribusiness, ecology, and the like .

On audience: how to write for activists unfamiliar with modes of discourse common in academic exchange, and who have to be *persuaded* of the relevance to their analyses, struggles and practices of the ideas I want to present? At least I had the benefit of an 'apprenticeship' in writing for a wider readership at Britain's excellent Open University, in a course team that produced several widely used textbooks (for example, Crow, Thorpe et al, 1988; Bernstein et al, 1992; Allen and Thomas, 2000) .

In the end, I decided to write a primarily *theoretical* text, because of my belief that its audience is unlikely to know much, or any, materialist political economy and is capable of benefitting from an accessible introduction to it. Readers would then be able to test it for themselves, and to study it further if convinced of its utility. I tried to achieve this in several ways, explained after listing the chapters of the text (following many preliminary drafts):

## 1 Introduction: the Political Economy of Agrarian Change

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studied most. Such extrapolation can do violence to the crucial specificities of time and place - in terms of my interests, those of the development of capitalism. I initially studied agrarian questions in sub-Saharan Africa, confronting very different conditions than those familiar from Latin American and Asian countrysides marked by class relations between landed property and peasant labour of 'feudal' provenance, which loom so large in the literatures and debates of the agrarian question. As a result, I think I was driven to understand the class dynamics of agricultural petty commodity production in capitalism in the absence of large-scale landed property (apart from the European settler zones of Africa), and how they are internalized in the circuits of 'peasant' production and reproduction. The notion that many (most) 'peasants' or 'small-scale farmers' today are members of 'classes of labour' (see below) draws on sources and evidence concerning both Africa and elsewhere.

- 2 Production and Reproduction: Key Concepts
- 3 Capitalism: Origins and Early Development
- 4 Colonialism and Capitalism
- 5 Farming and Agriculture, Local and Global
- 6 Neoliberal Globalization and World Agriculture
- 7 Capitalist Agriculture and Non-capitalist Farmers? Production, Exploitation and Resistance
- 8 Class Formation in the Countryside
- 9 Complexities of Class.

First, it was necessary to introduce some key theoretical concepts (Ch 2, supported by a glossary of terms). Second, I illustrate the applications of these concepts in a historical framework. Ch 3 is on the ‘original’ (English) and subsequent transitions to capitalism (Prussian, American and East Asian ‘paths’), and introduces the concept of primitive accumulation, Ch 4 on colonialism, with brief sub-sections on Latin America, South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, introduces and explains the concept of labour regime. Ch 5 partly deviates from the chronological approach, to emphasize how ‘agriculture’ in modern capitalism becomes distinct from, and subsumes, farming in both economic terms and as an object of politics and policy. This chapter covers the period from the 1870s to the 1970s, encompassing the formation of international divisions of labour and trade in basic food grains, the rise and fall of international food regimes, and the period of ‘developmentalism’ in the South. Ch 6 resumes the chronological narrative by outlining the current period since the 1970s, including revisiting the question of the (final?) demise of the ‘peasantry’.

The last three chapters present and explain further theoretical issues on the back of the historical framework presented in Chs 3-6. Ch 7 concerns the dynamics of capitalist agriculture and notions of ‘non-capitalist’ farming it is said to subsume, including ‘resistance’ to commodification by ‘small-scale’ farmers.

Ch 8 suggests why ‘small-scale’ or ‘peasant’ farming within capitalism should be seen as petty commodity production hence subject to pervasive, if uneven, patterns of class differentiation that caution against current populist notions of a unitary ‘people of the land’.

A particular emphasis here is on labour and what I term ‘classes of labour’, which comprise ‘the growing numbers...who now depend - directly *and indirectly* - on the sale of their labour power for their own daily reproduction’ (Panitch and Leys 2001: ix; my emphasis). They might not be dispossessed of *all* means of reproducing themselves, but nor do they possess *sufficient* means to reproduce themselves, which marks the limits of their viability as petty commodity producers in farming (‘peasants’) or other branches of activity. I prefer the notion of ‘classes of labour’ to the inherited vocabulary of proletarianization/proletariat (and semi-proletarianization/semi-proletariat), as it is less encumbered with problematic assumptions and associations in both political economy (e.g. functionalist readings of Marx’s concept of the reserve army of labour) and political theory and ideology (e.g. constructions of an idealized [Hegelian] collective class subject) - this sentence, by the way, is not in the style of the book! <sup>2</sup>

The final Ch 9 (reproduced below) presents complexities of class, in both its economic sociology and political sociology, by exploring the idea (following Balibar) that class relations are universal but not exclusive determinants of social practices in capitalism.

In effect, I cast the net very wide in order to show the logic of materialist political economy across the times and places of capitalism, with all their variations; to enable readers to recognize and ‘locate’ a materialist approach, the questions it asks, and the kinds of answers it provides. I had to find a method of exposition to do this, including warning about the highly schematic historical observations it entails, while also livening the text with apt examples as much as possible. At several points where it is useful, I explain briefly some of the disagreements within and between Marxism and populism, without attempting to explore them in depth which would use too much of my ration of 40,000 words.

The first draft was read and commented on by five people I approached and who responded in comradely fashion. Two are among the leading (Marxist) agrarian scholars of my generation (give or take a few years); another is a close co-worker who represents the next (‘middle’?) generation; a fourth is a young academic of a more populist bent but a serious scholar with whom I have corresponded and conversed in recent years (though I have yet to

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<sup>2</sup> It is also more easily, and usefully, disassociated from potent images (memories?) of ‘the proletariat’ as the ‘classic’ industrial working class; On the formation and dynamics of classes of labour in other guises than the latter, see the illuminating studies and arguments of Marcel van der Linden (2008).

meet him in person); the fifth is a recent PhD graduate with an excellent thesis on Senegal. Their comments helped me in various ways. Interestingly the fiercest comments, which occasioned the most rewriting, concerned debates within Marxism, with special reference to Chs 3 and 4. In these chapters, then, I tried to expand the scope of the exposition without, however, doing so at length or in ways only comprehensible (and meaningful?) to the *cognoscenti*.

How did these initial readers assess the success of the text for its intended audience? The general view was that it would meet a pressing need for an introductory university text in this area, but there was less certainty that it would speak with similar effect to the movement and NGO activists in its intended audience. Is this in the nature of the case? My view is that the ‘radical’ literature aimed at such activists tends to preach to the converted, and to be absorbed as ammunition to support well-established ideological positions (of a *Via Campesina* kind, say). My ambition was to provide means to think (further) with – not in order to change activist readers’ views but to help them problematize what they think about, and how they think, in order to develop the analyses that inform their practice. In any case, I was grateful to one of the five comrades who said ‘look, you’ve done what you can, stop trying to do any more and send off the manuscript’. He was right; it was time to draw that line and I did.

(Limited) circulation of the final draft has generated further responses before its publication. One person commented on its consistently ‘Leninist’ approach. That is accurate concerning its political economy/economic sociology, but not the stance of its political sociology if ‘Leninism’ is (mis)understood as a tradition of class purist, hence dogmatic, politics which I distance myself from (as indicated on the previous page; also Bernstein 2009a, 2009b). Another colleague is using the pre-publication text as assigned reading for a course at CUNY, and I await student feedback with keen interest.<sup>3</sup>

Next I reproduce two ‘samples’ of the book. One is the final chapter on ‘Complexities of Class’, which I shall not gloss here but leave to speak for itself. The other is the Glossary which I append to illustrate the disciplines of writing this kind of book. The Glossary, I trust, will help readers unfamiliar with the theoretical approach and its distinctive vocabulary to work their way through the text with benefit. I welcome critique of the substantive approach

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<sup>3</sup> I shall be teaching courses centred on the text this summer at the China Agricultural University and Renmin University. Responses to it from students in Beijing will be of great intrinsic interest as well, perhaps, as providing instructive comparisons with those from students in New York City.

to class analysis, and how to do it, laid out in Ch 9, and to any comments/suggestions concerning the Glossary.

## **Complexities of Class (Ch 9)**

### *Economic Sociology and Political Sociology*

The kinds of analytical complexities and concrete variations highlighted in chapter 8 can be considered as aspects of the “economic sociology” of class. These include, on different scales, forms of production and labour regimes, social divisions of labour, labour migration, rural-urban divisions and connections, organizational forms of capital and markets, state policies and practices and their effects. It was suggested that small farmers and classes of labour intersect and are extremely heterogeneous in their composition and characteristics, not least because of the immensely varied ways in which very different types of “self-employment” and wage employment can be combined. To paraphrase Lenin (1964: 33), “infinitely diverse combinations of elements of this or that type of labour are possible.”

Underlying such heterogeneity is the most pervasive aspect of complexity, which has only been implied so far. As the philosopher Etienne Balibar put it: in a capitalist world, class relations are “*one determining structure, covering all social practices, without being the only one*” (quoted by Therborn 2007: 88; emphasis in original). In sum, class relations are *universal but not exclusive* “determinations” of social practices in capitalism. They intersect and combine with other social differences and divisions of which gender is the most widespread, and which can also include oppressive and exclusionary relations of race and ethnicity, religion and caste.

These are not social differences and divisions that necessarily originate in capitalism, nor are they necessarily explicable by “the interests of capital”. There is an important difference between thinking that whatever exists in the world of capitalism does so because it serves the “interests of capital” (what is called a “functionalist” explanation), and exploring how what exists is produced as effects of the contradictory dynamics of capitalist social relations -- including how they reshape practices and beliefs that predate capitalism. The contradictory dynamics of capitalist social relations also include the unintended consequences of, on one hand, particular paths of accumulation and strategies of political rule by classes of capital,

and, on the other hand, the pursuit of reproduction by classes of labour and the challenges of “counter-movements” to the rule of capital.

To move from the economic sociology of class relations and dynamics to themes of class identities and consciousness, and from there to the analysis of collective political practice, involves a series of further factors and determinations that affect political agency.

First, it is important to emphasize that the economic and social power of capital, rooted in a system of property and commodity relations, has to be secured through its political and ideological rule, exercised -- also universally but not exclusively -- through the state. We should not assume that the rule of capital works through any simple unity and instrumentality of purpose, nor that it is necessarily coherent in how it seeks to justify itself ideologically as a moral order or in its political strategies and practices. There are no guarantees of unity, coherence and effectiveness in how classes of capital perceive, anticipate, assess, confront and try to contain the social contradictions of capitalism in order both to pursue profit and accumulation and to secure legitimacy for, or at least acquiescence in, how they do so.

Second, a key issue in the political sociology of (fragmented) classes of labour is indicated by Mahmood Mamdani’s observation that the “translation” of “social facts” into “political facts” is always contingent and unpredictable (1996: 219). This is especially so because of “the many ways in which power fragment[s] the *circumstances* and *experiences* of the oppressed” (ibid: 272; emphasis added). The great variation in *circumstances* was emphasized by the discussion in chapter 8 of patterns of commodification and class formation in the countryside, and of the heterogeneity of classes of labour: complexities of the economic sociology of class. For the political sociology of class, a crucial next step is how those circumstances are *experienced*, as Mamdani suggests. Existentially, they are not experienced (self-)evidently and exclusively as class exploitation and oppression *in general* but in terms of specific identities like “urban/rural dwellers, industrial workers/agricultural labourers, urban craftsmen and women peasants, men/women, mental/manual labour, young/old, black/white, regional, national and ethnic differences, and so on”, in the list of examples given by Peter Gibbon and Michael Neocosmos (1985: 190). Moreover, it is common for particular capitals to seize on relational differences/divisions -- of gender, of generation, of place (town and countryside), and indeed of ethnicity and nationality -- in how they recruit labour and organize it in production, and in how they deal with resistance from classes of labour.

Barbara Harris-White and Nandini Gooptu (2000: 89) restate a central issue of the political sociology of class thus: that “struggle over class” precedes and is a condition of “struggle between classes”. In “mapping India’s world of unorganized labour”, they explore how struggles “over class” by the working poor are inflected, and restricted, by gender, caste, religious and other social differences and divisions noted above. They conclude that the overwhelming majority of Indian classes of labour “is still engaged in the first struggle” over class, while Indian classes of capital are engaged in the second struggle through their offensives against labour - an argument that can be applied and tested elsewhere, of course.

### *Class Struggles in the Countryside*

There is no doubt that the countrysides of the South are permeated by struggles that manifest the political agency and confrontations of various actors, from agribusiness to national and local classes of landed property and agrarian capital, to different classes of “small(er)” farmers and fragmented classes of labour. All such struggles are shaped universally but not exclusively by class dynamics, which combine in complex ways with structural sources and experiences of other social contradictions. This applies to both different scales and shapes of agency, as it were, and which I now illustrate briefly.

In terms of “scale”, chapter 7 noted the idea of “everyday forms of resistance” in local settings like that of the village. Ben Kerkvliet (2008: 233) emphasizes the continuing relevance of James Scott’s approach that “daily life is rife with class struggle that only occasionally bursts into the open”. However, such everyday “class struggle” is typically combined with, and experienced as, oppression rooted in other forms of hierarchy as well; for example, one of the criticisms of Scott’s book *Weapons of the Weak* is that it was “gender-blind”, ignoring the dynamics and effects of unequal gender relations and the agency of women farmers and farm workers (Hart 1991).

As well as “everyday forms of resistance”, more overt and intense struggles, sometimes on a larger regional scale, are a feature of widespread conflicts over land in sub-Saharan Africa. The anthropologist Pauline Peters summarizes their class and non-class dynamics, at the same time suggesting how the latter connect with the former:

...competition over land for different purposes intensifies due to growing populations and movements of people looking for better/more land or fleeing civil disturbances; rural groups seek to intensify commodity production and food production while

retrenched members of a downsized salariat look for land to improve food and income options; states demarcate forestry and other reserves, and identify areas worthy of conservation (often under pressure from donors and international lobbying groups); representatives of the state and political elites appropriate land through means ranging from the questionable to the illegal; and valuable resources both on and under the land (timber, oil, gold, other minerals) attract intensifying exploitation by agents from the most local (unemployed youth or erstwhile farmers seeking ways to obtain cash) to transnational networks (of multinational corporations, foreign governments and representatives of African states) ...[There is] not only intensifying competition over land but deepening social differentiation and, though this differentiation takes many forms - including youth against elders, men against women, ethnic and religious confrontations - these also reveal new social divisions that, in sum, can be seen as class formation ... The proliferating tensions and struggles between generations and genders, or between groups labelled by region, ethnicity or religion, are intimately tied up with the dynamics of division and exclusion, alliance and inclusion that constitute class formation. (Peters 2004: 279, 291, 305)

It is striking that the most vicious wars in contemporary sub-Saharan Africa -- typically portrayed in the international media as instances of some intrinsic African “tribalism” and “barbarism” -- have long histories of pressure on, and conflicts over, land. These conflicts are inflected by the legacies of colonial political and land administration, shaped by patterns of commodification, and intensified variously by the the exploitation of natural resources, climate change, and selective intervention by international political actors; for example, in Rwanda and the eastern Congo (Pottier 2002), Sierra Leone and Côte d’Ivoire (Chauveau and Richards 2008), and Darfur (Mamdani 2009). They are struggles “between groups labelled by region, ethnicity or religion” (Peters, above), but *also* struggles with their own class dynamics, if in “invisible and unarticulated ways” (Peters 1994: 210).

Other instances of usually localized struggles have a more evident class “shape”, as it were, especially when the recruitment, control and payment of wage labour are concerned. One kind of example is struggles between workers on capitalist plantations and estates and their employers. Another instance is provided by areas of vibrant “peasant capitalism” in India, marked by overt conflict between rich and medium farmers, on one hand, and their workers, on the other hand, who are often subject to systematic violence (Banaji, 1990). Both kinds of rural class struggle can be especially fierce when their class dynamics are combined with, and

compounded by, other social differences -- divisions of caste and gender in the Indian countryside, and of ethnicity in labour recruitment, often a deliberate strategy in plantation labour regimes.

To conclude, I turn to some issues of organized agrarian movements today -- on regional, national and even transnational scales -- with particular reference to their “shape” in class and other terms.

*“The People of the Land”*

Are organized agrarian movements today the descendants of the great peasant movements of the past (chapter 7), at least in terms of their scale and significance if not their circumstances and methods, nor perhaps their goals? Eric Wolf’s “peasant wars of the twentieth century” were directed against *anciens régimes* (“old regimes”) of “feudal” provenance, as in Russia and China, or colonial provenance, as in Mexico, Vietnam, Algeria and Cuba -- all of which were subject to pervasive if uneven change as they were incorporated in a capitalist world economy (chapter 4). Such peasant movements mobilized around issues of land, of rent and tax, of pauperization, and of extreme oppression and social injustice, often in conditions of generalized social upheaval and war. They were usually part of wider movements of national liberation and social revolution, and were all pursued through guerrilla and other warfare. They too had their own marked historical and local specificities, and could be heterogeneous in their class composition; for example, a distinctive, and much debated, element of Wolf’s interpretation was his emphasis on the strategic role of “middle peasants” in such movements.

In today’s world of neoliberal globalization there are new types of agrarian movements that, according to those who champion them, aspire to encompass all “small” farmers -- or all “small and *medium-scale farmers*” (Desmarais 2007: 6; my emphasis) -- in the South and sometimes “family” farmers in the North as well, as an inclusive “the people of the land”. The political project advocated for this constituency

- opposes “the corporatization of agriculture... (that) has been globally synchronized to the detriment of farming populations *everywhere*” (McMichael 2006: 473; my emphasis), and
- proposes to “revaloriz(e) rural cultural-ecology as a global good” by mobilising a “global agrarian resistance”, an “agrarian counter-movement” that strives to preserve or reclaim “the peasant way” -- the name of one of the best-known of these movements, *La Via Campesina*, (ibid: 472, 474, 480).

Whether a global “agrarian counter-movement” actually exists, in what sense, what its impact is, and so on, can not be pursued here.<sup>4</sup> I limit myself to noting the ambition, expressed by Philip McMichael, to forge a unity of all “the people of the land” as, in effect, a single class exploited by corporate capital. This ambition refashions and expands the vision of a long tradition of agrarian populism in current conditions of neoliberal globalization. Any unity of “the people of the land” can not assumed, however, but would have to be constructed from heterogeneous local, regional and national “farmers’ movements”, with all their variations of specific processes of agrarian change and the circumstances of different rural classes (economic sociology), and of specific histories, experiences and cultures of struggle (political sociology). Here are some brief examples.

In Brazil, with its expansive areas of uncultivated private landholdings and which never had a major redistributive agrarian reform, “the land question” has achieved national political significance through the actions of the MST. The MST “invades” and occupies unused lands and establishes farming settlements on them, with an explicitly anti-capitalist ideology of establishing land as common property for those who work it (chapters 1, 3 and 4), while also working closely with state agencies to supply funding for infrastructure and new farming enterprises. The political origins, trajectories and culture of the MST include the memory of earlier “peasant leagues” suppressed by military dictatorship in the 1960s, a tradition of radical “social” Catholicism among some priests and church activists, and local alliances with the Workers’ Party (currently the party of national government in Brazil). The MST draws on a discourse of class intended to unite all its members, who come from different social locations in the countryside of Brazil, for example, former plantation workers in the sugar zones of the northeast and small farmers in the south. The experiences they bring with them shape their different expectations and affect the relationship between the organization of community and individual livelihoods, including petty commodity production, in MST settlements, which often diverge from the collective ideal promoted by leaders and admirers of the movement (Wolford, 2003).

If the case of the MST as a national movement illustrates differences among, and between, specific groups of workers and small farmers, class divisions are more evident in some of the state-wide “new farmers’ movements” in India. The KRRS - *Karnataka Rajya Ryota Sangha* (Karnataka State Farmers’ Association) - has gained wide international recognition

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<sup>4</sup> Edelman (2003) provides a useful survey of such movements.

for its opposition to genetically modified Bt cotton seed and is a member organization of the international network of *La Via Campesina*. However, it is run by and for rich and medium farmers who continue to exploit and oppress rural labour and who campaign for subsidies on chemical fertilizers. In short, the social and ecological credentials of the KRRS as an exemplar of “global agrarian resistance”, in McMichael’s term (above) are hardly as straightforward as it, and others, claim.

Interestingly the ideology of “new farmers’ movements” in India explicitly points to “people of the city” as the antithesis of “the people of the land”, at least in the sense that there is a strong populist tradition that attributes the problems of farmers to “urban bias”. This refers to policies held to favour urban industry -- and urban populations more generally, for example, through the supply of “cheap food” -- at the expense of farmers. The demands of these movements thus tend to focus on issues of the terms of trade between agricultural and industrial goods (chapters 5 and 7, above). In this respect -- their preoccupation with the prices and subsidies farmers receive -- they are just like farmers’ organizations and lobbies in the EU and USA, and their critics see them as movements dominated by the interests of richer farmers.

### *Some Final Questions*

I conclude with some final questions, that I adapt from the introductory essay in an important collection on *Transnational Agrarian Movements Confronting Globalization* (Borras et al 2008) and which apply to all “counter-movements” engaged in agrarian struggles.

- (i) What are the characteristics of the agrarian structures from which movements emerge, or do not emerge?
- (ii) What is the social basis of agrarian movements? What social classes and groups do they claim to represent? How can the plausibility of such claims be assessed?
- (iii) What issues or demands are put forward by movements? Where do those demands come from and which social and political forces advance or constrain them?
- (iv) What issues unite and divide agrarian movements, and why?

- (v) How effective are the actions of those movements in changing the agrarian structures they challenge, and to whose benefit? Why are some movements more effective than others?

To these questions I must add another concerning the ‘big picture’ with which this book started: how plausible are the claims of agrarian “counter-movements”, and their champions, that a return to “low-input” small-scale family farming (“re-peasantization”) can feed a world population so many times larger, and so much more urban, than the time when “peasants” were the principal producers of the world’s food?

### *Conclusion*

The analytical complexities of analyzing class dynamics in processes of agrarian change, presented in this short book, represent an attempt to grapple with some of the complexities of the real world of capitalism today. That world extends from the futures exchanges of Chicago and the headquarters of corporate agribusiness through the class differentiation of zones of dynamic “peasant capitalism” to the struggles of some of the poor farmers and workers pictured in chapter 1.

The challenges of complexity are confronted above all in practice by those activists engaged in trying to build and sustain a progressive politics of agrarian change on its various scales from the most local to the global. To this end, some attractive slogans and a list of heroes and villains, “good guys” and “bad guys”, are hardly sufficient. Activist movements need an effective analysis of the complex and contradictory social realities they seek to transform. In a capitalist world, understanding class dynamics should always be a point of departure and a central element of such analysis.

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## Appendix: GLOSSARY

Note: cross-references to terms in this glossary are in italics.

**accumulation** in capitalism: accumulation of profit to invest in production (or trade, or finance) in order to make more profit; see also *expanded reproduction*

**agrarian capital** capital invested in farming in order to realize profits

**agribusiness** corporations on various scales, including global, that invest in agriculture; see also *agri-input and agro-food corporations*

**agriculture/agricultural sector** in modern *capitalism* farming together with all those economic interests, and their specialized institutions and activities, *upstream* and *downstream* of farming that affect the activities and *reproduction* of farmers

**agri-input corporations** *agribusiness* corporations that invest in agriculture *upstream* of farming

**agro-food corporations** *agribusiness* corporations that invest in agriculture *downstream* of farming

**biopiracy** name given by critics to *agri-input corporations* that try to patent private “intellectual property rights” in genetic plant material

**capitalism** distinctive socioeconomic system, established on a world scale, that is based in the *class* relation between capital and labour

**ceremonial fund** part of the *surplus product* used for collective activities in rural communities to mark, e.g., harvests, religious events, or “rites of passage” like marriages and deaths

**class** the social relation of production between classes of producers (labour) and non-producers; see also *exploitation*

**commodification** process through which the elements of production and *reproduction* are produced for, and obtained from, market exchange and subjected to its disciplines and compulsions; *capitalism* is distinctive as a system of generalized commodity production

**commodification of subsistence** process through which key elements of the *subsistence*, hence *reproduction*, of previously “independent” small farmers become subject to the dynamics of market exchange and their compulsions (*commodification*)

**commodity chains** all the activities that connect the production of commodities with their final consumption; in the case of agricultural commodities the journeys from farmer’s field to consumer’s plate, and the actors and institutions, relations and practices, that structure those journeys

**common property rights** rights to land and other resources, e.g. sources of water, grazing and woodland, that are held in common by recognized groups whose members share *usufruct* rights to those resources

**consumption fund** that part of the product or income required to satisfy the food and other basic needs of producers and their families, including those of *generational reproduction*

**depeasantization** process by which *peasant* farmers lose access to the means to reproduce themselves as farmers; see also *primitive accumulation*, *proletarianization*, *simple reproduction* ‘squeeze’

**differentiation** in class terms the tendency of *petty commodity producers* to divide into classes of capital and labour; also strongly shaped by *gender* relations and their dynamics

**domestic labour** the activities of cooking, caring for children, and so on, essential to household and social *reproduction* and typically structured by relations of *gender*

“**downstream**” all those activities concerning agricultural commodities when they leave the farm, such as marketing, processing, wholesale and retail sale, and so on

**ecological footprint** amount of biologically productive land and sea area, and energy, used by given types of technology to (i) regenerate the resources a human population consumes and (ii) absorb and render harmless the corresponding waste

**enclosure** process of privatization of land and other resources held as *common property rights*, whether that process happens *de facto* (in practice) or *de jure* (with legal status); see also “*vernacular*” *markets*

**energy productivity** the units of energy (calories) used up to produce a quantity of crops of a given energy or calorific value

**entry costs** the kinds and scale of costs incurred to establish a commodity enterprise, including “*small-scale farming*”

**expanded reproduction** another name for the *accumulation* of capital, and its investment in expanding the scale of production in order to make more profit; contrasts with *simple reproduction*

**exploitation** the appropriation of the *surplus product* of classes of producers by (dominant) classes of non-producers

**family farmer** most robustly applied to farms that use family labour only; sometimes applied to farms that are family owned and/or family managed but not worked with family labour

**feudalism** “mode of production” in which classes of feudal *landed property* appropriate *surplus produce* from *peasant* producers in the form of rent; see *fund of rent*

**financialization** process through which finance or money capital becomes dominant over other forms of capital (industrial, mercantile, etc); considered by some as the characteristic tendency of contemporary *globalization*, and manifested in the financial crisis from 2008

**fund of rent** that part of *surplus product* which “*peasants*” or “*small farmers*” have to pay to others, e.g. landlords, moneylenders, merchants

**gender** relations between men and women; divisions of property, labour and income are typically structured by unequal gender relations, if in different ways; see also *domestic labour*, *generational reproduction*, *social division of labour*

**generational reproduction** the activities of producing and rearing the next generation; typically structured by *gender* relations

**globalization** considered, and much debated, as the current phase of world capitalism, especially from the 1970s; marked by largely unregulated international capital markets and *financialization* and by the political project of *neoliberalism*

**imperialism** conventionally a system of rule of the territories and peoples of other societies/countries by an imperial state; for Lenin the “latest stage” of capitalism, dominated by the most developed capitalist countries and not requiring direct colonial rule

**international food regime** systems of relations, rules and practices structuring international divisions of labour and trade in agriculture in world capitalism from the 1870s

**labour power** the capacity to work that workers own as their principal or only commodity and sell for wages in order to buy their means of *reproduction*; uniquely central to the capitalist mode of production

**labour process** the organization and activities of labour in particular processes of production; see also *technical conditions of production*, *social conditions of production*

**labour productivity** the amount of a good (or service) someone can produce with a given expenditure of effort, typically measured or averaged out in terms of time spent working or labour time

**labour regime** different modes of recruiting/mobilizing labour and organizing it in production

**land productivity** see *yield*

**landed property** the class based in effective control of land, whether in precapitalist conditions like *feudalism* or in capitalism with private property rights in land which has been *commodified*

**marginal farmers** farmers who do not provide the major part of their *reproduction* needs from “own account” farming; an important component of classes of labour; see also *semi-proletarianization*

**mercantilism** a system of political regulation of trade; the adjective “mercantile” can refer to such a system and, more generically, to the activities of trade and commerce and those who specialize in them (mercantile capital)

**monoculture** cultivation of extensive areas with a single crop, versus diversified cropping systems

**neoliberalism** a political and ideological programme to “roll back the state” in the interests of the market and its major capitalist actors

**overproduction** an intrinsic tendency of capitalist competition and *accumulation* in which more is produced than can be sold to realize the average rate of profit, thereby resulting in “devalorization” of capital invested in production

**peasant** widely, and often loosely, used to describe “*subsistence*”-oriented “*small*” *farmers* or “*family*” *farmers* in different historical conditions and periods, from precapitalist agrarian civilizations to capitalism today, especially in the South

**petty commodity production/producers** “small-scale” commodity production in capitalism, combining the class places of capital and labour, whether in a household or an individual; subject to class *differentiation*

**primitive accumulation** for Marx the historical processes by which the key classes of capitalism are established; for others, processes that continue within established capitalism and rely on often coercive “extra-economic” mechanisms, not least in relation to the *enclosure* of land, forest, water sources etc

**production** process in which labour is applied in changing nature to satisfy the conditions of human life

**productive forces** technology and technical culture, including people’s capacities to organize themselves to make decisions about production, to carry them out, and to innovate, all of which are shaped by the *social conditions of production*

**productivity** how much can be produced with a given use of resources; see *energy accounting, labour productivity, yield*

**proletarianization** process by which classes of labour are formed from previously “independent” farmers, artisans, etc; see also *commodification of subsistence, labour power, primitive accumulation*

**repeasantization** the process whereby former *marginal farmers, semi-proletarians* or *proletarians* take up farming as a major component of their *reproduction*

**reproduction** securing the conditions of life and of future production from what is produced or earned now

**semi-proletarianization** a process of formation of classes of labour who are not completely dispossessed of land and/or other means of *reproduction*, for example, in many rurally based migrant labour systems

**sharecropping** a practice whereby landowners lease land, and sometimes provide instruments of labour, in return for a share of the crop grown

**simple reproduction** reproduction at the same level of production and consumption; in effect, *reproduction* without *accumulation*

**simple reproduction ‘squeeze’** process of pressure on the *reproduction* of *petty commodity producers* as either or both capital and labour, associated with the *commodification of subsistence* and often leading to *depeasantization*

**small farmer** typically refers to farmers whose farm size is determined by the availability of family labour, and sometimes assumed to be oriented to *subsistence* or *simple reproduction*; within this definition farm size varies greatly with type of farming

**social conditions of production** all those social relations, institutions and practices that shape activities of *production* and *reproduction*, including the *technical conditions of production* and *productive forces*

**social division of labour** (i) social relations between producers relatively specialized in producing different kinds of goods and services, whose activities are complementary; (ii) activities of different categories of people according to the positions they occupy in particular structures of social relations, notably the *class* relations of capital and labour and *gender* relations

**subsistence** commonly used to denote satisfying the conditions of *simple reproduction*, in the case of *peasants*, *family farmers* or *small farmers* usually with special reference to their production of food for their own consumption; see *commodification of subsistence*

**surplus product** what is produced beyond the *simple reproduction* needs of producers, hence representing the product of their “surplus labour”; when appropriated by other classes, the basis of *exploitation*

**surplus value** the particular form of surplus labour in capitalism; see *surplus product*

**technical conditions of production** particular sets of *productive forces* organized in *labour processes*, including their *technical division of labour*

**technical division of labour** the combination of different tasks or *labour processes* performed by workers in a single unit of production, like a factory or a farm

**“upstream”** all those activities necessary to secure the conditions of farming before it can take place, such as access to land, labour, instruments of labour, and with commodification usually credit as well

**usufruct rights** the rights of farmers to access to land for cultivation and grazing, forest, water sources, and so on, that are held as *common property*

**“vernacular” markets** markets in goods and services that are commodities in practice (*de facto*), notably land, in conditions where legally established (*de jure*) private property rights are absent, weak, ambiguous and/or contested

**yield (land)** measure of the productivity of land: the amount of a crop harvested from a given area of land