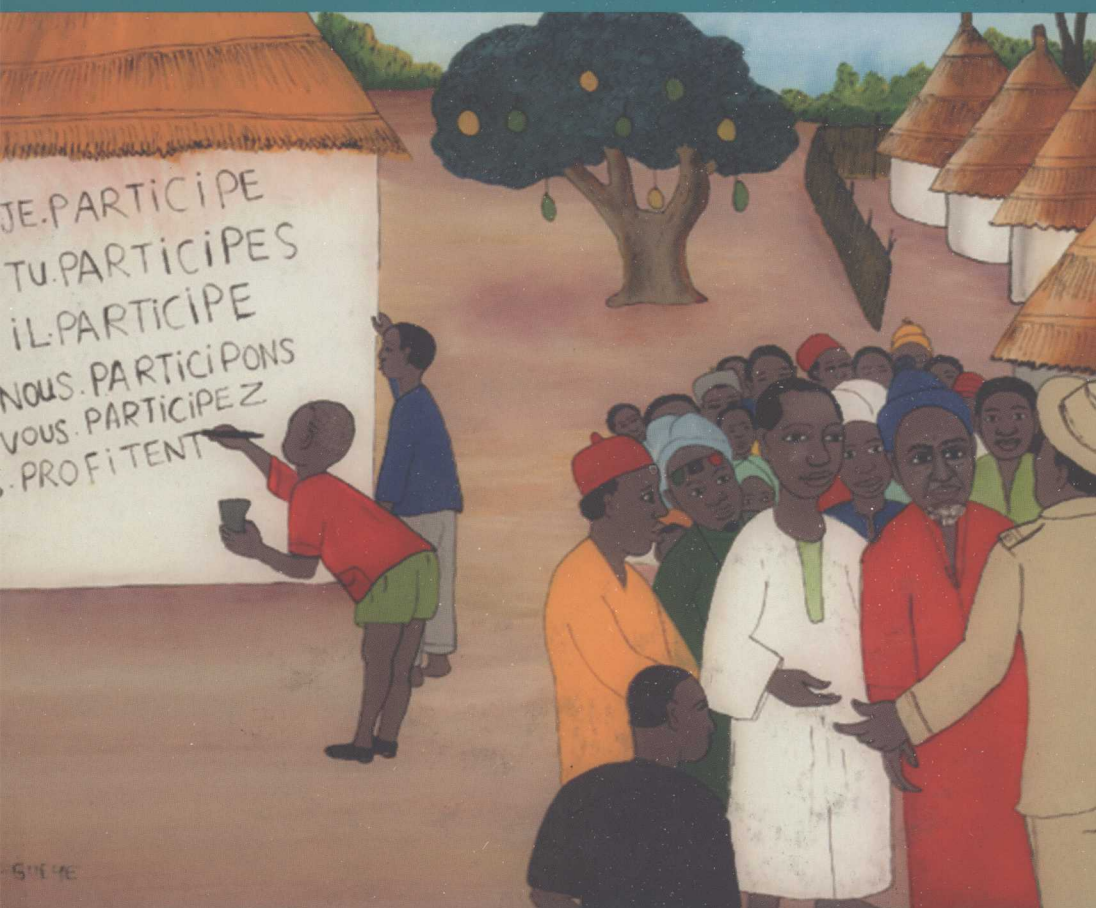


CRITICAL AGRARIAN STUDIES

Critical Perspectives in RURAL DEVELOPMENT STUDIES



Edited by Saturnino M. Borras Jr.

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First published 2010
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
270 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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Typeset in Times by Value Chain, India
Printed and bound in Great Britain by MPG Books Group, UK

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN10: 0-415-55244-3
ISBN13: 978-0-415-55244-8

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Introduction

Saturnino M. Borras Jr.

Agrarian transformations within and across countries have been significantly and dynamically altered during the past few decades compared to previous eras, provoking a variety of reactions from rural poor communities worldwide. The changed and changing agrarian terrain has also influenced recent rethinking in critical inquiry into the nature, scope, pace and direction of agrarian transformations and development. This can be seen in terms of theorising, linking with development policy and politics, and thinking about methodologies. This collection of essays on key perspectives, frameworks and methodologies is an effort to contribute to the larger rethinking. The following paper introduces the collection.

Changed and changing agrarian terrain

Even though there are fewer people now living and working in the rural world than four decades ago, it still matters a great deal for everyone what happens there. The dynamics of social change in developing countries during the past four decades have some features distinct from those that marked the first three quarters of the twentieth century. A brief overview of changes in the global economy and politics in general, and in the agrarian world in particular, during the past four decades partly illustrates this. Henry Bernstein (2008, 247) offers a summary:

While controversy rages, and will continue to do so, concerning the causes, mechanisms and implications, including new contradictions, of changes in the world economy, politics and culture since the 1970s . . . there is little doubt that important shifts with far-reaching ramifications have occurred. . . . A familiar list would include: the deregulation of financial markets; shifts in the production, sourcing and sales strategies and technologies of transnational manufacturing and agribusiness corporations; the massive new possibilities attendant on information technologies, not least for mass communications, and how they are exploited by the corporate capital that controls them; the demise of the Soviet Union and finally of any plausible socialist model of development; and the ideological and political ascendancy of neoliberalism in a highly selective rolling back of the state, including the structural adjustment programmes.

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economic liberalisation, and state reform/good governance agendas imposed on the countries of the South and, more recently, the former Soviet bloc. This is the context, and some of its key markers, that spelled the end of state-led development.

Michael Watts (2008, 276) adds that, 'one of the presumptions of new research focused on transnational processes and agrarian food orders is that the old or classical international division of labour within the agro-food system has been irretrievably altered in the past 25 years'. In examining the world food system, Tony Weis (2007, 5, emphasis added) observes that 'the origins of the contemporary global food economy could be traced back through a series of revolutionary changes, which once took shape over the course of millennia, then over centuries, and *which are now compressed into mere decades*'.

On the politics side of this transformation, the past four decades saw the tail-end of national liberation movements, revolutions and rebellions to which the rural poor had provided important contributions. During most of the recent period this type of peasant politics has been largely absent. Nevertheless, it was during this era when relatively newer types of agrarian movements, networks and coalitions emerged and gained political influence. Meanwhile, the recent convergence of various crises – financial, food, energy and environmental – has put the nexus between 'rural development' and 'development in general' back onto the center stage of theoretical, policy and political agendas in the world today.

Addressing these agendas requires some degree of clarification about critical theoretical perspectives and updated analytical tools. It is in this context that this collection of reflection essays on critical perspectives in agrarian change and peasant studies was put together. This essay introduces the collection. Section 1 provides an overview of persistent rural poverty and increasing inequality, agriculture and rural livelihoods, and rural politics as the context for and the object of the critical perspectives on agrarian change. An overview of the contributions is provided in Section 2. A discussion of common messages and implications of this collection is offered in Section 3, focusing on three key challenges to critical agrarian change and peasant studies: (re)engaging with critical theories, (re)engaging with the real world politics, and utilising rigorous research methodologies. Brief concluding remarks are offered in Section 4.

Agriculture and livelihoods, poverty and inequality

Although decreasing in relative terms, the absolute number of rural dwellers remains very significant. The absolute number of people living in urban centres had, in 2007, overtaken for the first time the number of people living in the countryside. By 2010, the estimate is that there will be 3.3 billion people in the rural world, with another 3.5 billion in urban communities.¹ The dramatic rural–urban demographic changes were quite recent. In 1970, the total world population was 3.7 billion, with 2.4 billion rural and 1.3 billion urban. The change in the agricultural/non-agricultural population was even more dramatic during the same period. In 1970, the agricultural population stood at 2.0 billion people and the non-agricultural population at 1.7 billion.

¹Estimates by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation Statistics (FAOSTAT). Available from: www.faostat.org [Accessed 3 November 2008]. This is the same website and the date of data downloading for all subsequent FAOSTAT sourced data cited in succeeding footnotes, unless otherwise specified.

By 2010, this will be radically reversed, at 2.6 billion agricultural population versus 4.2 billion non-agricultural.²

Yet even as the number of urban dwellers overtakes the number of rural population, the percentage of *poor* people in rural areas continues to be higher than that in the urban areas: three-fourths of the world's poor today live and work in the countryside (World Bank 2007). In 2008 world poverty remained a largely rural phenomenon. Often, poverty is associated with hunger. By 2006, there were 820 million hungry people. This was a marginal reduction from 1990–92's figure of 823 million. Ironically, most of the hungry people live and work in the rural areas where food is produced.³ At the height of the recent food price crisis, the FAO (2008a) announced that in order to meet the growing global food need, food production would need to double by 2050. Much of this needed increase would have to happen in developing countries where the majority of the world's rural poor live and where 95 percent of the estimated population increase during this period is expected to occur. Alarmed, the organisation called for a 'new world agricultural order' and called on governments to 'find 30 billion dollars' of new investment in agriculture and rural development, pointing out 'the amount was modest compared to 365 billion dollars of total support to agriculture in the OECD countries in 2007 and 1,340 billion in world military expenditure the same year by developed and developing countries'.⁴

During the past four decades, amid significant rural/urban and agricultural/non-agricultural demographic changes, agricultural production and trade have witnessed dramatic growth despite marginal increase in the total size of the world's agricultural land. Some key statistics are illustrative. The world's total production of cereals was 1.6 billion tons in 1979–81, jumping to 2.3 billion tons in 2004.⁵ The global production of meat nearly doubled during the same period, at 0.14 billion tons in 1979–81 to 0.26 billion in 2004.⁶ Production of fruits and vegetables doubled during this period, at 0.63 billion tons in 1979–81 to 1.4 billion tons in 2004. In the midst of massive promotion of export-oriented development strategies, agricultural trade increases were most dramatic during the past four decades: the total value of all agricultural exports in 1970 was \$52 billion, it increased by about 12 times in 2005, or up to \$654 billion.⁷ Haroon Akram-Lodhi and Cristóbal Kay (2008a, 318) observe: 'The traits of accumulation have significantly changed ... In particular, the emphasis on the expansion of the home market that previously prevailed during the mid-twentieth century has been largely, but not completely, replaced by an emphasis on the promotion of an agricultural export-led strategy as the principal means of enhancing rural accumulation.' But while there had been dramatic increases in cross-country agricultural trade during the past three to four decades, the impacts in terms of food security, household incomes, and inequality within and between countries have been varied and uneven. Moreover, as Akram-Lodhi and

²FAOSTAT data; see note 1 for the data source information.

³FAOSTAT data; see note 1 for data source information.

⁴FAO 2008a. FAO calls for a new world agricultural order. Available from: <http://www.ipsterraviva.net/europe/article.aspx?id=6769> [Accessed 20 November 2008].

⁵The combined output of China, India and the USA took 45 percent total share during this period.

⁶The combined output of Brazil, China and the USA accounted for half of the total output in 2004.

⁷FAOSTAT data; see note 1 for the data source information.

Kay (2008a, 325) remind us: ‘the impact of rural accumulation on poverty should be examined separately from the impact of rural accumulation on inequality’. Indeed the neoliberal globalisation has resulted in increasing inequality within and between countries in the world (see, e.g., Borras 2007a). Edelman and Haugerud (2005, 9) explain that, ‘Global economic inequality increased dramatically between 1960 and 1990: in 1960, the wealthiest 20 percent of the world’s population received 30 times the income of the poorest 20 percent; in 1997, the richest 20 percent received 74 times as much’. They add: ‘By the late 20th century, the world’s 200 wealthiest individuals had assets equal to more than the combined income of 41 percent of the world’s population; the assets of the three richest people were more than the combined GNP of all least developed countries’ (Edelman and Haugerud 2005, 9).

Although agriculture remains quite important to the livelihoods of more than three billion people, evidence suggests that rural households have increasingly diversified their ways of earning a living, as partly discussed by Ian Scoones (2009, 171–96, this collection; see also Bernstein 2007, De Haan and Zoomers 2005, Ellis 2000, Kay 2008). Labour has become more mobile and in many settings casual. Labour migration has taken multiple directions and character: rural–urban, rural–rural, urban–rural, in-country and international, permanent and cyclical. Many of these migrant jobs are casual and living conditions inhuman, both those based in urban and rural spaces (Davis 2006). Bernstein (2008, 250–51) explains that the fragmentation of the classes of labour

signals the effects of how classes of labour in global capitalism, and especially in the South, pursue their reproduction, through insecure and oppressive – and in many places increasingly scarce – wage employment, often combined with a range of likewise precarious small-scale farming and insecure informal-sector (‘survival’) activity, subject to its own forms of differentiation and oppression along intersecting lines of class, gender, generation, caste and ethnicity ...

He adds that, ‘many pursue their means of reproduction across different sites of the social division of labour: urban and rural, agricultural and non-agricultural, wage employment and self-employment’ (see also, Davis 2006, 250–51). Furthermore, the corridors of labour flows have also brought with them multidimensional socio-cultural changes including those involving information and communication technology, resulting in previously isolated rural communities, or at least some portions of these communities, now having access to dozens of international cable channels, internet access, text messaging and audio-video conferencing free of charge between people separated from each other by thousands of miles.

Agricultural technology has continued to break new ground, some aspects of which are contested and controversial, and not so different from the previous Green Revolution package of technology and agenda (Ross 1998). Much discussion today centres on a new Green Revolution, primarily for Africa, promoted by multilateral agencies and private institutions such as the Gates Foundation. Genetically modified crops have been aggressively promoted amid increasing opposition from some high-profile organised agrarian and environmental movements (Scoones 2008, Newell 2008, Otero 2008). Satellite mapping techniques have been put to wide use, largely to expand and standardise state maps and cadastre records. There are efforts directed at harnessing the potential of information and communications technology in creating and improving rural livelihoods. Nevertheless, the same package of technology remains generally beyond the reach of poor peasants and controlled by a few

transnational companies and their local distributors and retailers (Jansen and Vellema 2004).

Moreover, there are alarming environmental and climate-related problems facing the rural world today. If temperatures rise by more than three degrees, yields of major crops like maize may fall by 20–40 percent in parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America (FAO 2008b). McMichael (2009, 139, this collection) points out that ‘global agriculture is responsible for between a quarter and a third of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions’. There is a similar dilemma in confronting the energy crisis via biofuels: we would need to convert 25 percent of the current global cropland to biofuel production in order to reduce only 14 percent of our current fossil fuel consumption (FAO 2008b, 21). The question is that if global agricultural production needs to double by 2050 to feed the growing population, take nearly one billion people out of hunger, and at the same time fuel the transport and manufacturing sectors, how will this task be carried out without putting further pressure on the already fragile environment, without aggravating climate-related problems, without putting the task under the monopoly control of greedy corporate giants, and without causing massive dispossession of the rural poor?⁸

Rural politics

The dynamic changes in the agrarian world briefly described above have been politically contested by the rural poor both via ‘everyday politics’ and with the emergence of radical agrarian movements in different parts of the world.⁹ This necessarily brings our discussion to the politics of agrarian change, and questions of agency of the rural poor. The ‘rural poor’ is understood here as a highly heterogeneous social category, and they include the peasantry with its various strata, landless rural labourers, migrant workers, forest dwellers, subsistence fishers, indigenous peoples, and pastoralists. This heterogeneity as well as the recent structural and institutional transformation explained above partly influence the character of rural politics. As Edelman (2008, 83), in the context of Central America, explains:

Like the migration to which it is related, the growing ‘pluriactivity’ of rural households and the increasing inter-penetration of city and countryside complicate the question of *campesino* identity in ways that have ramifications for how people view their struggles and their participation in collective efforts for change.

He adds: ‘The first thing to acknowledge is that the *campesino* of today is usually not the *campesino* of even 15 years ago’ (Edelman 2008, 83).

The discussion of rural politics will follow the typology offered by Ben Kerkvliet (2009, 231, this collection): official politics, everyday peasant politics, and advocacy politics. Official politics ‘involves authorities in organisations making,

⁸As of this writing, there are numerous negotiations between countries for land sales, long-term land leases or contract farming for food production: South Koreans in Madagascar, Saudi Arabia in Sudan, China in southeast Asia, Libya in Ukraine, and so on (GRAIN 2008).

⁹See, Le Mons Walker (2008) and O’Brien and Li (2006); and Petras and Veltmeyer (2001, 2003), Veltmeyer (2004), Edelman (1999), Moyo and Yeros (2005), Rosset, Patel and Courville (2006), Wright and Wolford (2003).

implementing, changing, contesting, and evading policies regarding resource allocations ... Authorities in [state and non-state] organisations are the primary actors.' 'Everyday politics occurs', according to Kerkvliet (2009, 232), 'where people live and work and involves people embracing, complying with, adjusting, and contesting norms and rules regarding authority over, production of, or allocation of resources and doing so in quiet, mundane, and subtle expressions and acts that are rarely organised or direct'. Advocacy politics 'involves direct and concerted efforts to support, criticise, oppose authorities, their policies and programs, or the entire way in which resources are produced and distributed within an organisation or a system of organisation'. It also includes actions that openly advocate 'alternative programs, procedures, and political systems'. Kerkvliet explains that 'advocates are straightforwardly, outwardly, and deliberately aiming their actions and views about political matters to authorities and organisations, which can be governments and states but need not be'. Elaboration on each is offered below.

'Official politics' has been evolving in the neoliberal era. Taking politics seriously in critical scholarship requires consistent interrogation of this type of politics. This means confronting the issue of the state (nature, character, role, class composition, and so on) in one's analysis. Nation-states in developing countries have experienced a triple 'squeeze': globalisation, (partial) decentralisation, and the privatisation of some of their functions. Central states remain important in development processes, but have been transformed in terms of the nature, scope, level and direction of their development intervention (Evans 1997a, Ribot and Larson 2005, Keohane and Nye 2000, Gwynne and Kay 2004, Kay 2006). In this context, the recent convergence of various crises, including food, energy, climate and finance, is likely to re-emphasise, not devalue, the role played by nation-states and state authorities in the politics of agrarian transformation. International development and financial institutions continue to play a part in (re)shaping national and local policies for rural development in developing countries, despite the popular lament about the reduction of overseas development assistance for agriculture in developing countries during the past three decades.¹⁰ Multilateral institutions, like the World Bank, continue to be instrumental in promoting neoliberal policies, such as those related to land.¹¹ Some of these institutions have been the target of protests by organised agrarian and environmental movements, ranging from demands for accountability (Fox and Brown 1998) to efforts at delegitimising some of these agencies. Locating one's analysis of the state in multiple levels, i.e., local, national and international, is an important challenge (Kay 2006).

'Everyday peasant politics' is the type of politics that remains almost invisible to researchers, policymakers, and agrarian movement activists, but can be very powerful in transforming national policies, as demonstrated by Kerkvliet in the case of Vietnam's agricultural policy during the past three decades (2009, see also Kerkvliet 2005). Such low-profile actions can lead to high-profile actions depending on changing political opportunities favouring peasants, as explained by Shapan Adnan (2007) in the context of Bangladesh. Some variations of the latter are also

¹⁰The US contribution to [total overseas development assistance] fell sharply – from over 60 percent of the total in the mid-1950s to 17 percent by 1998 ... In 1947 ... US foreign aid as percentage of GDP was nearly 3 percent, while by the late 1990s it was a mere 0.1 percent.' (Edelman and Haugerud 2005, 10).

¹¹See, for example, World Bank (2003), but refer also to Borras (2007b) and Rosset *et al.* (2006).

explained by Kathy Le Mons Walker (2008) in an analysis about 'overt everyday peasant resistance' and by Kevin O'Brien and Lianjiang Li (2006) about 'rightful resistance' in contemporary rural China, where abusive acts by local state officials usually around decisions on land use and control have been met with increasingly defiant and confrontational actions by peasants and villagers. While this type of politics has gained appropriate attention in agrarian studies during the past couple of decades or so, thanks to the compelling works by James Scott and Kerkvliet, among others, there remains a major challenge as to how to systematically integrate this perspective into the studies of 'official' and 'advocacy politics', as well as in development practice and political activist work.¹² We will return to this issue later.

Despite the usual ebb and flow from one setting to another through time, agrarian movements have been among the most vibrant sectors of civil society during the past four decades. Most of these movements are indeed rural workers' and peasants' and farmers' movements in the global south and small and part-time farmers' groups in the north. This period has also witnessed the emergence of other rural-based and rural-oriented social movements, including indigenous peoples' movements,¹³ women's movements,¹⁴ environmental movements and anti-dam movements,¹⁵ anti-GM crop movements,¹⁶ fishers' movements, and rural-urban alliances.¹⁷

The co-existence of threats and opportunities brought about by neoliberal globalisation has prompted many rural social movements to both localise further (partly in response to state decentralisation) and to 'internationalise' their actions (in response to globalisation). The seemingly contradictory social-political pressures (of globalisation and decentralisation) that are having such an impact on the nation-states, are also transforming rural social movements: more horizontal solidarity linkages, the rise of 'polycentric' rural social movement, and the emergence of radical agrarian movements that are, in a variety of ways, linked together transnationally via networks, coalitions or movements.¹⁸

There are distinctly new features in the current generation of agrarian movements that are important to point out as the context for and the subject of critical scholarship: (i) greater direct representation of the rural poor in (sub)national and international official and unofficial policymaking arenas,¹⁹ (ii) more extensive scope

¹²See, for example, the issues raised by Malseed (2008) in the context of everyday peasant politics among the Karen people of Burma.

¹³See, for example, Yashar (2005) and Assies, van der Haar and Hoekema (1998).

¹⁴Refer to Deere and Royce (forthcoming) and Stephen (1997).

¹⁵See, for example, Peluso *et al.* (2008) and Baviskar (2004).

¹⁶Refer to Newell (2008), Scoones (2008) and Otero (2008).

¹⁷See Veltmeyer (2004).

¹⁸For an excellent discussion about the differences and possible connections between networks, coalitions and movements, refer to Fox (forthcoming).

¹⁹Before the existence of Via Campesina in the early 1990s, the only existing transnational agrarian movement (TAM) that had made a significant representation of the world's rural poor was the International Federation of Agricultural Producers or IFAP, which is an organisation of middle and rich farmers mainly based in the north. The politics of IFAP and most of its affiliate organisations tend to be conservative. In contrast, Via Campesina represents the solidarity of poor peasants and small farmers with class interests and politics different from those of IFAP's.

and scale of political work and issues taken up,²⁰ (iii) deployment of information and communication technology in movement building and collective actions to an unprecedented degree,²¹ (iv) more systematic and coherent 'human rights' issue-framing and demand-making perspective and stretching citizenship rights claim-making beyond the conventional national borders,²² (v) more assertion of the movements' autonomy from actual and potential allies.²³ Overall, contemporary radical (trans)national agrarian movements have been important actors in provoking or inspiring research agendas for critical perspectives on rural development in some ways similar to what peasant-based revolutions, national liberation movements and rebellions did during the most part of the twentieth century.

In sum, historically, the agrarian world has witnessed continuity and change in terms of general patterns of accumulation, appropriation and dispossession for capitalist development, as well as socialist construction (and later, 'de-construction') (see, e.g. Wood 2008). What has been emphasised earlier in the discussion, however, is the fact that the past four decades of the era of neoliberal globalisation have witnessed important changes in the nature, scope, pace and direction of agrarian transformations within and between countries. This can be seen in the general patterns of changes in property relations, labour, appropriation and distribution of

²⁰The scale of Via Campesina's transnational movement or network, and the scope of its political work and influence have been unprecedented. This is despite the fact that the organisation remains absent or thin in many regions of the world (Borras, Edelman and Kay 2008, Le Mons Walker 2008, Malseed 2008).

²¹The use by TAMs of the latest information and communications technology (internet, email, electronic conferences, mobile phone, texting) is something new in the agrarian movement world. It has led to faster and relatively cheaper ways to access and exchange information, and to plan for and carry out simultaneous political actions, overcoming important traditional institutional and structural obstacles to movement building and collective actions.

²²Radical TAMs' issue-framing and demand-making perspective is not totally new. Edelman (2005), for example, explains how most TAMs employ arguments drawn from the moral economy perspective (Scott 1976). However, TAMs have also embraced a relatively recent way of framing development discourse, invoking 'human rights' that include political, social, economic and cultural rights (Monsalve *et al.* 2006). In some ways it invokes a notion of 'global citizenship rights' by holding international institutions accountable, something that did not exist in any systematic way in the agrarian movement world before (Borras and Franco 2009, Monsalve *et al.* 2008, Patel 2006). More broadly, Via Campesina and other rural-oriented global agrarian justice movements attempt to reframe the very terms of development discourse by putting forward new (alternative) concepts such as 'food sovereignty' and 'deglobalisation' (see McMichael 2008, Bello 2003) and by developing alternative knowledge-building movements and knowledge networks such as the transnational agroecological movement in Central America (Holt-Gimenez 2006).

²³A partly similar global advocacy on behalf of poor peasants and small farmers had actually existed and been used before. It was not carried out by agrarian movements themselves, but by intermediary NGOs. When Via Campesina was established in the early 1990s, one of the first things it did was to define its 'universal' identity (i.e., 'people of the land') and partly, and perhaps more implicitly, its class composition (i.e., poor peasants and small farmers), clarify its representation claims (i.e., 'non-mediated') and preferred form of actions (i.e., 'direct' combining confrontation and negotiation), and declared that intermediary NGOs should stop representing poor peasants and small farmers. This demand is broadly within the global civil society popular saying, 'not about us without us'. Indeed, these radical TAMs have created a distinct 'citizenship space' at the global level that did not exist before that in turn would alter the 'political opportunity structure' for their affiliate movements at the local, national and international levels (Borras and Franco 2009, see also Tarrow 2005, Borras 2008, Edelman 2003, 2008, Martinez-Torres and Rosset 2008, Desmarais 2007, Biekart and Jelsma 1994).

agrarian income and wealth, and the ways in which agrarian surpluses are disposed and invested, among others.²⁴ As Akram-Lodhi and Kay (2008a, 317) explain, neoliberal globalisation has ‘altered the land-, labour- and capital-intensity of production, reconfiguring the rural production process in ways that may, or may not, affect processes that expand the commodification of labour and alter the purpose of production from production for use to production for exchange.’ This is a highly dynamic, but uneven process from one society to the other. Meanwhile, persistent poverty and increasing inequality are among the outcomes of neoliberal globalisation, and inequality tends to be de-emphasised if not completely ignored in mainstream development discourse largely because, as O’Laughlin (2007, 42) argues, ‘Inequality is difficult to conceptualise within the neoclassical language of prescriptive commodification and individual choice.’ The rural poor have actively engaged such transformations in a variety of ways, ranging from quiescence to resistance. Just as the agrarian transformations themselves are politically contested, so are the interpretations of and the political strategies to influence these transformations. The development policy and academic world do not have consensus about the causes and consequences of such agrarian development processes. This has provoked recent vibrant debates and discussions within and between broad theoretical camps, e.g., materialist political economy,²⁵ sustainable livelihood approaches,²⁶ and mainstream development policy circles.²⁷

Stepping back and taking a longer view, we see two broad positions that are discernible among the various important theoretical perspectives on rural development today, and according to Bernstein (2007), these are ‘residual’ and ‘relational’. The former is based on the belief that the cause of poverty of the rural poor is their being excluded from the market and its benefits; the solution is to bring the market to the rural poor, or the rural poor to the market. The latter is founded on the belief that the cause of poverty is the very terms of poor people’s insertion into particular patterns of social relations; the solutions therefore are transformative policies and political processes that restructure such social relations.²⁸ For *critical* perspectives in agrarian change and peasant studies, it is important to always locate one’s analysis of agrarian transformation within a *relational* perspective. It is this perspective that holds together the contributions to this collection.

Introduction to the collection

The essays in this collection follow the general theme of continuity, change and challenges in critical perspectives in agrarian change and peasant studies. It is not exhaustive in terms of thematic coverage. But as the reader will soon discover, the

²⁴See, for example, Akram-Lodhi and Kay (2008b), Ramachandran and Swaminathan (2003), Bryceson, Kay and Mooij (2000), Rigg (2006), and Spoor (2008).

²⁵See, for example, the excellent volume edited by Akram-Lodhi and Kay (2008b).

²⁶See, for example, De Haan and Zoomers (2005). Scoones (2009) offers an excellent critical reflection in the context of sustainable rural livelihoods approach.

²⁷See, for example, the World Bank’s *World development report 2008* (World Bank 2007) which is more eclectic than a usual neoliberal policy framework on this subject.

²⁸In a similar fashion, Bridget O’Laughlin (2008, 199) argues that, ‘Southern Africa’s agrarian crisis is rooted not in what it does not have – liberal economic and political institutions – but in what it does have: a history of integration into global markets and the class relations of capitalism through violence and colonial domination.’

present collection covers substantial ground in the field. The nine contributions are authored by leading scholars in agrarian studies.

The first contribution provides us with a macro, historical perspective about national agrarian transformation, peasant differentiation and class struggle using a political economy method in the best tradition of great agrarian comparative scholars such as Barrington Moore Jr. (1967). *Terence J. Byres* examines three different paths of capitalist agrarian transition, namely, those that occurred in England, France and Prussia. These three countries represent what Byres calls 'landlord-mediated capitalism from below', 'capitalism delayed', and 'capitalism from above', respectively. He argues that 'the character of the landlord class and of class struggle have determined both the timing of each transition and the nature of the transition'. He explains that the state has always played a critical part in any transition. He also argues that 'the differentiation of the peasantry is central to transformation: it is not an outcome but a determining variable'.²⁹ Differentiation of the peasantry feeds into and interacts with the landlord class and class struggle, these three being critical to the eventual outcome.

After Byres' discussion about broad patterns of agrarian transition to capitalism, highlighting class struggle and peasant differentiation, among others, the collection presents an essay by *Henry Bernstein* on V.I. Lenin and A.V. Chayanov, picking up on some of the issues discussed by Byres, focusing on some aspects of the 'Lenin-Chayanov debate' on differentiation, and reflecting on the legacies of two of the most influential thinkers in agrarian studies. Bernstein outlines the differences (and similarities) between Lenin and Chayanov on a number of issues, including their works on agrarian issues, explanation of agrarian change, ideas about productivity, model of development, and legacies. He explains that these 'are offered in the hope of clarifying and stimulating consideration of patterns of agrarian change today: how they differ from, and might be illuminated by, past experiences and the ideas they generated.' Meanwhile, *Teodor Shanin's* essay focuses briefly on the key ideas of Chayanov before elaborating on what he calls the 'treble death' of Chayanov and his 'resurrection' in post-Soviet social sciences. In doing so, Shanin offers a concise discussion of the specific context of each period ('when Chayanov died'), examining the struggles between Chayanov's ideas on peasant economy and development on the one hand and those who oppose them on the other.

The first three essays deal directly with the classic debates in agrarian political economy involving ideas by Marx, Lenin and Chayanov, among others, and the ways in which these have influenced rural development in theory and practice, past and present. The next contribution, by *Cristóbal Kay*, transitions from this set of classic thought and jumps to the 1970s–80s (now classic) debate around the 'urban bias' thesis that was largely provoked by the 1970s work of Michael Lipton (1977), and criticised by several scholars; see, for example, contributions to Harriss (1982). Kay re-examines the debate between 'agriculture first' versus 'industry first' positions (see also Saith 1990). His essay 'reviews some of the main interpretations in development studies on agriculture's contribution to economic development.' The

²⁹The social differentiation of the peasantry, as elaborately argued and explained by Lenin (Lenin 2004; original 1899), has been one of the most debated topics in agrarian studies. Despite, or perhaps because of this, there is some confusion in many of the studies and debates about this subject that Ben White (1989) has earlier pointed out. He offers a useful analytical framework for carrying out research inquiring into this question.