

# The Third Class: Artisans of the world, unite?

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*Abstract:* This dissertation proposes a class theory of non-capitalism, aiming to connect a variety of labor formations and (re-)productive processes that have so far remained epistemically scattered and disenfranchised. In contemporary diverse economies (Gibson-Graham 2008), autonomous and semi-autonomous labor abounds, yet the concepts developed to underline its merits and potentials rarely travel across economic sectors. Here lies a significant advantage for capital in its attempts to organize and capture socio-political imaginaries. While political economists and economic anthropologists can rely on a veritable analytical arsenal to help them render particular exploitative practices intelligible in general, integrative terms, non-exploitative practices often languish – both epistemically and politically – in the particularities of their sectoral, organizational, bioregional and/or cultural expression. The integrative terms offered by class theories of capitalism, in other words, are lacking for non-capitalism, imposing unnecessary boundaries for the rich empirical insights, organizational recipes and political tactics developed by non-exploitative labor formations everywhere.

To remedy this epistemic inequality, this thesis assembles a common analytical language of non-exploitative labor. At the core lies an analysis of the *artisanat* as a general class of labor, at the level of proletariat and capital. As an antonym to the proletarian condition, and to dependency relations more generally, we analyze the *artisan condition* as the unfolding of labor processes in relative autonomy, providing *livelihoods* rather than jobs. Artisans aim at *subsistence* rather than profit or wage, and conceive of the means of production as *patrimony* rather than capital or assets. They form agglomerations (rather than accumulations) of property and rights, and rely on commons (rather than incorporation) to facilitate economies of scale. Shifts in class dynamics and degrees of exploitation are defined by accumulation and *equilibration*, respectively. Where artisan livelihoods have proven resilient, we can speak of *dynamic equilibration* in non-capitalist markets.

In employing these concepts on a variety of sectoral and national contexts, non-capitalist experiences in both central and peripheral spaces of the world economy are connected, often bridging the boundaries of ‘development’ studies. At the same time, recent advances in the field – in particular the life-work of Jan Douwe van der Ploeg, James Scott and other scholars of the peasantry – are transposed into broader, ongoing

discussions held around the concepts of degrowth, postcoloniality, distributive justice and deliberative politics.