



AGRARIAN TRANSFORMATION AND SURPLUS POPULATION IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH: REVISITING AGRARIAN QUESTIONS OF LABOUR

ICAS – LDPI Colloquium

International Institute of Social Studies (ISS), the Hague

3 May 2011

9:30 to 18:30

The workshop complements recent debates about the politics of land, from the perspective of the “agrarian question of labour” (Bernstein, 2004): the truncated transition that expels people from agriculture without absorbing their labour elsewhere in the economy, and linking this to recent work on the biopolitics of “surplus populations” of the dispossessed (Li 2009, 2010; Araghi 2009).

Although the World Development Report on Agriculture (2008) assumes that the agrarian transition of Europe in the nineteenth century will be repeated throughout the global south as populations move from country to city, agriculture to industry, and subsistence production to wage labour, the reality is highly uneven (Li 2009, 2010). Within the countryside, some farmers navigate successful entry into the world of profitable agriculture, while others are displaced from access to rural livelihoods by high input costs, or lose their land to corporate agri-businesses, infrastructure projects, industrial parks and enclosures designed for conservation. The transition narrative argues that these people will find somewhere else to go, and something else to do, but the availability of an exit option cannot be assumed. In many contexts, the closing of land frontiers rules out the re-establishment of rural livelihoods, while paid work on or off farm - even on adverse terms - is very difficult to find.

In fact, the classic transition trajectories, as exemplified by (parts of) some European countries and some East Asian countries, probably represent a minority of experiences of agrarian transition, compared to the many regions of both North and South where agrarian capitalism and dispossession in the 19th, 20th and early 21st centuries have not been accompanied by the incorporation of surplus agrarian populations in labour-intensive industrial or other urban sectors. Some national development trajectories have offered effective pathways out of agriculture for a significant portion of their formerly agrarian population (Thailand and Vietnam are examples), while in other cases, no manufacturing sector has emerged, service sector work is limited even for young people with education, and the informal sector is saturated. In still others, there is high GDP growth, but the growth in both rural and urban sectors is virtually jobless. De-facto proletarians who have only their labour to sell find themselves stranded between agrarian livelihoods they cannot sustain, and a wage sector that does not need their labour. In recent decades in most countries, each new generation of both rural and urban young men and women has grown up better educated than their parents. This however has not been matched with expansion of employment opportunities for these relatively educated youth, and open unemployment rates for youth are typically twice those for adults.

These problems of transition reflect a crisis of social reproduction, as the global ascendancy of neoliberal norms, policies and practices brings with it massive public underinvestment – in many cases disinvestment, even where economies are growing (Katz 2001: 709). The work of social reproduction is thus thrown back on individuals, families and social groups, while making available fewer resources to support that work, weakening the capacity of communities or whole societies to maintain functioning social relations and to provide for dependents. In such situations both young and old may be forced to improvise their own survival strategies, including both more and less legal avenues of “self-employment”. It is not surprising, then to see the increasing emphasis on promotion of “entrepreneurial” skills in national policies, World Bank and ILO policy discourse. Actually, there is little if any evidence that these policies increase employment prospects or earnings.

Responses to insecurity of livelihoods and precarity of jobs include intensified efforts to secure individual and family survival through distress migration, land occupations, illegal activity, and the search for patrons and allies. Collectively, some mobilize through political parties, ethnic or religious movements, or engage in xenophobic attempts to secure land or jobs at the expense of people labelled outsiders. Some press for the realization of the right to a means of livelihood, a right enshrined in the United Nations Covenant on Economic and Social Rights (1966) and in many national constitutions. Responses from ruling regimes include the abandonment of some sectors of the population, the extension of patronage to others, and sometimes, the development a new forms of social protection to replace the reliance on families and "communities," clearly unable to perform the safety net functions they are too often ascribed. In both China and India, there are hesitant movements towards increased welfare provisions for the (post) rural poor; in South Africa there is debate on the need for a Basic Income Grant. Whether these are defensive moves to quell emerging "dangerous classes" or indications that "modern" regimes are embarrassed by destitution, they merit the attention of critical scholars concerned about the fate of the rural populations currently being dispossessed.

In this colloquium presenters/speakers are asked to focus on one or more of the following:

- 1) The processes operating in different corners of the global south to displace rural people and render their labour surplus to capital's requirements;
- 2) The implications of these truncated transitions for agrarian debates today;
- 3) Emergent forms of social action and protection, as well as the discursive and practical arrangements that legitimate abandonment of excluded populations by kin, communities, patrons or governments.

Programme: 3 May (Small Aula, ISS)

9:00 – 9:30, registration, coffee/tea

9:30 – 9.45, Opening, Ben White (colloquium chair)

 Welcome remarks, Leo de Haan, ISS Rector

Morning session chair: Jan Douwe van der Ploeg, Wageningen University

9.45 – 10.15, Tania Li, University of Toronto, Post Agrarian Futures: Emergent Politics of Work and Welfare in the Global South

10.15 – 10.45, Teodor Shanin, Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences and University of Manchester, 'note: title to be finalized later'

10:45 – 11.15, Q&A

10:15 – 11:45 – tea/coffee break

11:45 - 12:15 -- Henry Bernstein, SOAS, University of London, 'Is there an agrarian question of labour? A perspective from South Africa'

12:15 – 12:45 – Q&A

12:45-13:30 – Lunch break

Afternoon session chair: Paul Hebinck, Wageningen University

13:30-14:00 -- Marc Wuyts, ISS, 'Agrarian constraints on employment and social provisioning: lessons from Tanzania and Mozambique'

14:00 – 14.30 Farshad Araghi, Florida Atlantic University, The Agrarian Question and the City: The 'Food Question' and 'Food Revolutions' of Our Times

14:30—15:00, Ben White, ISS, 'Rural youth transitions: dispossession, unemployment and the future of agriculture'.

15:00 – 15:30, Ashwani Saith, ISS, Transitions, Turning Points, Poverty Traps: Processes of Accumulation and Atrophy in Rural India (and China).

15:30 – 16.00, coffee/tea break

16:00 – 16:45, plenary debate/discussion

16:45– 17:00, break

17:00 – 18:30 (Big Aula), Special seminar by ISS and the Society for International Development (SID), as part of the 2011 seminar series on 'agriculture, rural employment and inclusive growth'.

Andries du Toit, PLAAS, University of the Western Cape, South Africa, 'The Government of Poverty and the Art of Survival: Jobless de-agrarianization, Livelihoods and Policy in South Africa'

18:30, Reception

Format:

It will be a **day-long open colloquium** (9:30 to 18:30), and registered participants will be coming from scholars and activists in the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, UK, Italy, and Indonesia. We will aim for a meaningful, serious but also a fun colloquium, with short presentations and plenty of time for questions and contributions from the floor.

From 17:00-18:30, the programme will feature Andries du Toit, as part of the joint Society for International Development (SID) and ISS 2011 seminar series on 'agriculture, rural employment, and food security'.

The Colloquium is organized by:

Initiatives in Critical Agrarian Studies, ICAS, hosted by the Resources, Livelihoods and Environment (RELIVE) Research Cluster at ISS – <http://www.iss.nl/icas> and the Land Deal Politics Initiative, LDPI – <http://www.iss.nl/ldpi>

in collaboration with the *Journal of Peasant Studies*, JPS



and the Inter-Church Organization for Development Cooperation (ICCO)



About the speakers and chairs

Farshad Araghi is Chair of the Department of Sociology and Director of the Graduate Program at Florida Atlantic University. He is a co-editor of *International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food*. His most recent work include: “Accumulation by Displacement: Food, Ecology, and the Crisis of Reproduction,” *Review: A Journal of Fernand Braudel Center* (2010), “The End of 'Cheap Ecology' and the Crisis of 'Long Keynesianism'” *Economic & Political Weekly* (2010).

Henry Bernstein, Professor of Development Studies, SOAS, University of London, Adjunct Professor of COHD in China Agricultural University, Beijing. Having studied history and sociology at the Universities of Cambridge and London (LSE), he has been a teacher and researcher in Turkey, Tanzania, South Africa and the USA, and at a number of British universities. He has a long standing interest in the political economy of agrarian change, as well as social theory, and more recently in globalization and labour. He was co-editor with Terence J. Byres of *The Journal of Peasant Studies* from 1985 to 2000, and was a founding editor, again with Terence J. Byres, of the *Journal of Agrarian Change* in 2001, of which he became Emeritus Editor in 2008.

Andries du Toit is the Director of the Institute for Policy, Land and Agrarian Studies. Graduated from the University of Stellenbosch before proceeding to complete his doctoral thesis with Ernesto Laclau at the University of Essex in 1996. His key research interests include the social relations of labour in commercial agriculture, the dynamics of inequality and chronic poverty, and the analysis of discourse and ideology in policy research and knowledge creation. He has done extensive research on the implementation of land and tenure reform and on the politics and sociology of poverty and equitable change on commercial farmlands, particularly in the Western Cape, focussing on the social relations of labour, and of the transformative potential of fair trade, supermarket codes and BEE. His current research focuses on the dynamics of chronic poverty and vulnerability in urban-rural linkages, and on the conceptual and methodological issues involved in the measurement and analysis of structural poverty and vulnerability.

Paul Hebinck, Wageningen University, Rural Development Sociologist specialized in agrarian transformation processes in Africa with an emphasis on land reform, small scale farming, technology development and social change, endogenous development and rural livelihoods. Over the years, he has done substantive fieldwork on socio-technical dimensions of maize and soil fertility (re)production in Kenya and land reform in South Africa. Theoretically he combines actor perspectives with broader questions related to political economy. He supervises a substantial number of MSc and PhD research projects and is external examiner and reviewer of journals. He is also member of the Netherlands Committee of the South African Netherlands Research Programme on Alternatives in Development (SANPAD). In 2006 he is appointed adjunct Professor at the University of Fort Hare, Alice, South Africa. He is co-editor of *Reforming Land and Resource Use in South Africa: Impact on Livelihoods* (Routledge, 2011).

Tania Murray Li is Professor of Anthropology and Canada Research Chair at the University of Toronto. She has published widely on agrarian issues in Indonesia. Her most recent book is *The will to improve: governmentality, development and the practice of politics* (Duke University Press 2007). Her latest article is 'Centering labour in the land grab debate' in the *Journal of Peasant Studies* Forum on Global Land Grabbing (*JPS* vol. 38, no. 2), March 2011.

Ashwani Saith is Professor of Rural Economics at the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) and Professor of Development Studies, London School of Economics (LSE). He is an editor of *Development and Change*.

Teodor Shanin OBE: PhD, Professor Emeritus, University of Manchester; Fellow of the Academy of Agricultural Sciences of RF; President of Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences. His books include: *Peasants and Peasant Societies* (1971), *Informal Economies: Russia and the World* (1999), *Fathers and Sons: Generational History* (2005). He was among the first editors of *The Journal of Peasant Studies*.

Jan Douwe van der Ploeg is currently holding the Chair of Transition Processes at Wageningen University. Previously he held the Chair for Rural Sociology. He has been member, for eight years, of the Council for the Rural Areas. His first work experience was in Peru (where he was involved in the land reform process), Colombia (formation of rural cooperatives) and in Guinea Bissau (construction of rural water supply services). He developed with his colleagues a new theoretical approach that made it possible to understand the impressive and multi-dimensional heterogeneity of European agriculture - conceptualized in terms of farming styles. The attention for heterogeneity and endogenous development patterns translated, in the early 1990's in an increased interest in new forms and patterns of rural development. It was shown, in a range of publications (*Renewing the Countryside*, 1997, and *Living Countrysides: Rural development Processes in Europe - the State of Art*, 2002; both published by Elsevier) that rural development practices are wide spread and promising phenomena that entail considerable potential for revitalizing the rural economy. Recently, he published 'The Virtual Farmer' (2003; Royal van Gorcum). In this study it is argued that knowledge on agriculture as produced and accumulated by expert systems such as universities and ministries of agriculture, is increasingly at odds with reality.

Ben White (PhD, Anthropology, Columbia University) is Professor of Rural Sociology at the International Institute of Social Studies, The Hague. His research interests focus on processes of change in rural societies and the anthropology and history of childhood and youth. He has been engaged in research on these issues in Indonesia since the early 1970s.

Marc Wuyts is Professor of Quantitative Applied Economics at ISS. His present research interests – with a regional focus on Tanzania and Mozambique – concern the macroeconomics of development and, more specifically, the role social protection and development finance can play in fostering innovation and broad-based productivity growth, particularly within rural economies and societies. Marc Wuyts has a long-standing collaboration in research with the economics and development studies departments of The Open University (Milton Keynes, U.K.) Most recently, jointly with Maureen Mackintosh (Economics, OU) and Joanna Chataway (Technology and Development, OU), he co-edited a special issue for the *European Journal of Development Research* on the linkage between innovation and poverty reduction in developing countries context, for which he also undertook field research in Mozambique jointly with Roberto Simonetti (OU).

For further information, please contact the organizers through: icas@iss.nl attn: Jun Borras