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Forum: Fifty years of debate on peasantries, 1966–2016

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Introduction

Ben White

The idea for this discussion originated in a wooden cabin in the Dutch polders in the late summer of 2015. Harriet Friedmann responded enthusiastically to my observation that the International Rural Sociology Association (IRSA)'s 2016 conference in Toronto would coincide with the 50th anniversary of the publication of two landmark books which had defined new poles of debate in peasant studies: *Peasants* (Wolf 1966) by Eric Wolf (1922–2009), and *The theory of peasant economy* (Chayanov 1966), the first English translation of parts of the work of the Russian 'social agronomist' Alexander Chayanov (1888–1937). Both of these books had great influence on us, and on many others, at the time; and the debate between the two traditions which they represent, and their implications for agrarian policies and agrarian movements, continues to the present. We therefore proposed a panel discussion to mark this anniversary and to consider what has stayed the same, and what has changed, in the last 50 years of agrarian thought and agrarian politics. The organisers enthusiastically picked up the idea, elevating it from 'panel' to plenary and inviting us to organise the first plenary session of the conference, with the title *50 years of debate on peasantries, 1966–2016*.¹ The present panel, minus Jun Borrás, matches our original wish list.

The five members of the panel were born at various times between 1930 and 1950, but – having differing early life-course trajectories – we all developed our interest in peasant societies, as undergraduate or graduate students, at some point during the 1960s; we thus came under the influence of these books at roughly the same time. Eric Wolf, then teaching at the University of Michigan, was a formative influence on his student Harriet Friedmann; Teodor Shanin became aware of Chayanov almost by accident when he was asked to assist his PhD supervisor R.E.F. Smith with the translation of Chayanov's work.

As graduate students or young lecturers, we also read Teodor's edited book *Peasants and peasant societies* (1971) which was widely used in teaching. In the second edition (1987) two emerging agrarian scholars, Harriet Friedmann and Henry Bernstein, contributed original chapters. Harriet wrote on 'The family farm and the international food regimes' (Friedmann 1987), a theme on which she had already published two landmark papers

CONTACT Ben White  white@iss.nl

¹We would like to express our appreciation to IRSA and to our hosts at Ryerson, in particular Professor Mustafa Koc, for entrusting the organisation of the plenary to us, and for supporting the travel and other costs of some of the panelists.

(1978, 1980), and which became a red thread in her subsequent work; Henry's short chapter 'Of virtuous peasants?' (Bernstein 1987) questioned the view of virtuous and embattled peasants, victims of the brutalities of commodity production and vicious developmental states, also a theme on which he has continued to elaborate until today.

The two traditions of class-based and Chayanovian analysis of peasants and peasant societies have been the subject of continuing debates which can be traced, among others, in the pages of the *Journal of Peasant Studies*, founded in 1973 (with Teodor Shanin and later Henry Bernstein among its editors), as well as in the *Journal of Agrarian Change* which Henry Bernstein and Terry Byres founded in 2001. More recently these traditions have found their expression in two books by their foremost exponents: Henry's *Class dynamics of agrarian change* (2010) and Jan Douwe's *Peasants and the art of farming: a Chayanovian manifesto* (2013). Still more recently the debate continues with Julio Boltvinik and the late Susan Archer Mann's *Peasant poverty and persistence in the twenty-first century* (Boltvinik and Mann 2016); an added frisson in these debates is the growing understanding that Marx's own views on peasants were changing in his last years (Stedman Jones 2016, 570–85; Anderson 2016).

In the plenary panel debate the panelists were given free rein, and asked only to reflect on what has changed and what has stayed the same in the past half-century of debates in peasant studies and agrarian change. A follow-up session, chaired by Haroon Akram-Lodhi from Trent University, was held the following day to allow comments and questions from the audience, and responses from the five panelists. In this well-attended session participants raised a number of questions or topics for discussion, including: defining peasants (and smallholders, and family farms); processes of de-peasantisation/proletarianisation/re-peasantisation; links between peasant theory and praxis, peasantry as political subjects, and the role of states in supporting or hindering the reproduction of peasant farming forms; the importance of commons for peasantries; the great and growing importance of activities outside the farm itself (non-farm employment, migration and remittances) in reproduction of smallholder farm households; and the kinds of spaces available for future generations of (would-be) peasants. In the summaries of their contributions which follow, the panelists have incorporated some of their responses to these questions. Teodor Shanin chose to re-frame his remarks in the form of an interview, with questions posed by Harriet Friedmann.

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Teodor Shanin²

HF: Why did the tradition of detailed, field-based peasant studies develop where and when it did in Russia?

TS: The answer is that one of the peculiarities of Russia was its combination of a massive peasantry and a fairly sophisticated university system. Western Europe and the US had fairly well developed universities but no massive peasantry anymore, while ‘developing societies’ had massive peasantries but limited universities. This partly explains why peasant studies flourished in the Russian Empire and the 1920s.

HF: How did ‘peasant economy’ become widened to peasant studies? What was its relation to the founding of the journal?

TS: Firstly, in Russia, where from the beginning some scholars used a Russian word, *krestyanoviedeniye*, which means ‘peasant studies’. I naturally developed my own work within this tradition. Not only in Russia but also in the whole of Eastern Europe, it was never ‘peasant economics’ only (even when so referred to).

There was a parallel US tradition of anthropology, in which ‘peasants’ were a key concept. The main figure there was Redfield, for whom ‘peasants’ were a fundamental problem.

HF: How did disciplines come together, or not, in the Journal of Peasant Studies?

There were three people involved: Charles Curwen was a historian of China, T.J. (Terry) Byres was a historical political economist, and I was the third – I was at that time a doctoral candidate in sociology. It was based in the first place on my supervisor Robert Smith, who was a student of Russian history.

HF: Was Daniel Thorner one of the people at the School of Oriental and African Studies?

TS: No. Thorner had to leave America because of McCarthy and came to Birmingham. My supervisors accepted warmly the idea to have a study of Russian peasantry as the focus of my PhD. I accepted, and this is where Thorner came in. He was a specialist in India studies and in India he had learned of the existence of Chayanov. While working in India, Thorner discovered that many of them quoted Chayanov, and he brought this to Birmingham. It took a time to discover a copy of Chayanov’s *Theory of peasant economy*, and Bob Smith, who was my supervisor, took it upon himself to translate. This was the first major translation of Chayanov into English. I was looking over the shoulder of Bob Smith.

HF: What were the main themes of The awkward class, and of The Journal of Peasant Studies, of which you were one of the founders?

²After the panel discussion Teodor Shanin recast his remarks in the form of responses to questions posed by Harriet Friedmann.

TS: The main theme for leftists of those days was the Vietnam War. This defined to a considerable degree the topics and also the sentiments. There was a general lineup of left-wing social scientists in England and America against what we considered the attempt of American imperialists to impose themselves on Vietnam (it led to the creation of the *Journal of Contemporary Asia*). Increasingly the gist of the experience of the war was that the peasantry was the main factor that stopped the Americans from winning the war. We all looked then more closely at peasants as a political and military force. My first published article, still as a student, was 'Peasantry as a political force' (*Sociological Review*, 1971).

HF: *How did themes evolve since 1973 when JPS was founded?*

TS: As the Vietnam War led to a rapid increase in interest in the subject of peasants, some took a step back to the Chinese Revolution and the conclusion that the social force which decided results of the war in China were peasants. The topic of my undergraduate dissertation was a comparison between the place of peasants in the Russian and Chinese revolutions.

HF: *What was the role of the Lenin–Chayanov debate?*

TS: The Lenin–Chayanov debate was not yet very important at that time. In the first two issues of *JPS* my article concerning theory of peasant economy was published, introducing the Chayanovian approach to those problems.

HF: *How does the theme of 'developing countries' fit with the idea of peasant studies? How did you come to write the book *Russia as a developing society*, and how do you understand its impact?*

TS: I had a stipend in Birmingham for two years. To proceed with the PhD I answered an advertisement at the University of Sheffield for a position called 'Sociology of Developing Societies'. In the interview, I was asked to define what are the 'developing societies'. I answered with half a joke: 'societies which do not develop'. Jokes aside, my answer was, 'societies of our times with massive peasantries'. The committee liked it and I was hired. I began with the work of Gunnar Myrdal on developing societies and I taught this course for three years. I worked in parallel on my PhD dissertation that was named *Russia as a developing society*.

HF: *How do you see its impact?*

TS: Its main impact was on people who studied peasants, but not on the general disciplines of sociology or economics, which were dominated by the 'theory of progress'. In such a framework peasants belonged to the past only – to be studied by archaeology.

HF: *Thank you.*

Jan Douwe Van Der Ploeg

Thinking back 50 years from now is a somewhat inconvenient enterprise for me. In 1966 I was only 15 years old. I knew peasant life, at least as manifest in the province of Fryslân in the north of the Netherlands. Yet I was totally unaware that there were academics engaged in something called 'peasant studies'. And if someone had tried to explain to

me what peasant studies entailed I doubt whether I would have been able to grasp their explanation.

The years that followed were turbulent times. On 23 March 1971 more than 100,000 peasant farmers from all over Europe demonstrated against the so-called modernization of farming proposed by the European Commission. The Mansholt Plan set out a fundamentally coercive and non-inclusive agenda to accelerate the (already evident but still partial) transition from peasant to entrepreneurial farming. The demonstration was a massive and violent explosion of anger and was followed, three years later, by roadblocks across the Netherlands and other countries, that deeply divided the conservative farmers' unions. In these same years, a group of engaged students, farmer activists and radical staff members from Wageningen University created the 'Peasant Foundation', an association that became deeply involved in these struggles. Similar associations emerged in France, Belgium, Italy and Germany. The farmers engaged in these protests mostly viewed, and organized, themselves as an integral part of the radical left. Yet at the same time they wanted to move further. This was particularly the case in France where *Paysans en Lutte* and *Paysans Travailleurs* organized milk-strikes, and in Italy where the *Alleanza Nazionale dei Contadini* was, from the 1950s onwards, the first large peasant federation in Europe that operated within the framework of the Communist party.

The newly created associations built on a rich intellectual tradition shaped by Antonio Gramsci, Emilio Sereni, Henri Mendras, Marcel Jollivet, Egbert de Vries and many others. Later, this tradition was further developed by a younger generation of outstanding intellectuals that included Onno Poppinga, Ton Regtien, Bernard Lambert, Bruno Benvenuti, Enrico Pugliese, Joan Martinez Alier and Eduardo Sevilla Guzman.

This loose network of newly formed associations built upon, and rejuvenated, the type of peasant studies that had long dominated the European continent but which differed greatly from the 'Anglo-Saxon' school of peasant studies. The latter was strongly premised on the idea of an inevitably disappearing peasantry, but the network of new associations that emerged in the early 1970s reflected the sturdiness of existing peasantries in Europe who were taking to the streets and actively looking for solutions, at whatever level, to defend their position and their livelihoods. The theoretical approach that emerged had a strong focus on self-employment and autonomy. This was in stark contrast to the deterministic modernization script that the agrarian sciences had been developing. Thus, conflicting narratives set new ideological 'battle lines', which continue to characterize the world of agrarian sciences.

Most people who joined the new associations were well versed in the Marxist and Leninist classics. At the same time, though, they were convinced that these classics were of little help in understanding peasant agriculture as manifest in the 1970s in Western Europe. We recognized that the world of agriculture, including peasant agriculture, was changing and this brought about a need to define and defend new positions. But, just as the peasant movements of that time did not yet have fully articulated and well-balanced programmes, we did not have coherent theories. This led us onto a journey of discovery in order to understand and document the changing role and self-perceptions of peasantries in a rapidly changing world.

In the following years, many of us became familiar with the agricultural systems and the peasantries of the Global South. The need to take a broader view that extended beyond the borders of one's own country was self-evident and fitted very well with the strong anti-

imperialistic mood of that time. I spent a year in Piura, a northern department of Peru, where I became familiar with massive peasant struggles that aimed for new and alternative ways of farming, that differed radically from types of farming that had existed prior to the land reform and the new modes it sought to impose. These peasants were looking for alternatives that would render far more production, employment, income and possibilities for self-government than the state and capital could ever generate. I, and many others, marvelled when we saw that they were succeeding in effectively putting these alternatives into practice and making them function satisfactorily. This model of labour-driven intensification (as I later came to understand, in more technical terms, the particular development trajectory entailed in these peasant struggles) was at odds with everything I had learned – so far – in my agricultural university. It was not only at odds with the then-dominant paradigms; what these peasants wanted and did was seen as simply impossible. Nonetheless, they wrought convincing new realities. But there was little or no theoretical representation of these realities and practices at the time, just as there was no adequate theoretical representation of the strong drive of European peasants.

If I make a giant step from then to today, there evidently are two overarching questions that come to the fore: What has changed? And, what has remained the same? I am convinced that one crucial feature has remained the same and even become considerably stronger. That is that peasant studies represent a journey of discovery. Teodor Shanin once wrote that peasantries exist as a process. They are in a constant flux, with contradictory, but often combined, flows through time (such as depeasantization and repeasantization). There are learning processes that often lead to the design and subsequent construction of alternatives. There is an overwhelming heterogeneity. The context in which the peasantries operate is subject to structural changes. At the same time a new mode of farming has emerged alongside peasant and capitalist agriculture: entrepreneurial agriculture. Its emergence has led to a further elaboration of the concepts of peasants, peasantries and peasant agriculture. All this clearly implies that peasant studies is *not* about the past and the ‘truth’ that is supposedly anchored in it. It is, instead, about understanding a constantly moving process. Peasant studies is, more than ever, a journey of discovery.

What has changed? Let me briefly discuss five features. First, peasant studies used to strongly carry the imprint of *locus*, i.e. the place where it was practised. In this vein, French peasant studies strongly reflected France’s specific historical trajectory and that of its *paysans*. English peasant studies in its turn reflected the history of massive and involuntary clearances, the political dominance of the industrial bourgeoisie and reliance on the colonies for cheap food imports. The work of José Carlos Mariátegui convincingly reflected the *latifundio–minifundio* dualism and the strong presence of indigenous communities that were characteristic of Peru. One could find many more examples. These different place-specific histories produced theoretical differences that were either neglected or became the subject of polemical debate. Today, I believe that peasant studies has gone well beyond such ‘intellectual provincialism’. Comparative approaches allow us to elaborate general and specific aspects, commonalities and differences, far more clearly. I suspect that this change has been greatly facilitated by the fact that many of today’s peasant studies practitioners now have experience of working in locations that are both familiar and unfamiliar to them.

Second, peasant studies has had historically different *foci*, i.e. different approaches. The Leninist and Chayanovian ‘lenses’ are the most well known (and probably the most tragic)

examples of this. The view from continental Europe represents another example. Chinese peasant studies and Latin American views (including recent ones) further complicate the panorama. In the past this triggered heated, and sometimes bitter, struggles for hegemony. Today, academics engaged in peasant studies are, instead, looking more for the integrative moment(s). The building of multi-level, multi-actor and multi-dimensional theories that embrace longer time periods is an important tool in this respect.

Third, the peasant way of *farming* was basically taken for granted by previous schools of peasant studies. Considerable attention is now paid to how production, marketing, growth and development are materially patterned. It has been increasingly shown that peasant agriculture is distinctively different: it produces differently, it reproduces resources differently, it links to the markets in different ways and it generates levels of employment that differ starkly from those of entrepreneurial and capitalist agriculture. This insight highlights the enormous importance of Chayanov's contribution, which remains relevant today almost 100 years later. Chayanov showed convincingly that the economy can be structured in different, mutually contrasting ways. This applies to the micro level (i.e. for units of production and consumption), but also to the meso and macro levels. He also argued that the material processes of production can be structured in contrasting ways, which explains – by the way – why 'peasant agriculture is cultivating two spikes wherever there is just one spike now' (Chayanov 1988, 115). Increased attention for pressing themes such as food sovereignty and agro-ecology has strongly driven this turn to the material aspects of peasant agriculture – just as they are partly shaped by it. Peasant movements fighting for alternatives to be put into practice (as in the North of Peru in the 1970s) have been another main driver for putting the 'materiality' of peasant agriculture (and especially its potentials) on the agenda. An important result of this change is that in contemporary debates, peasant agriculture features as a promise for the future (instead of as mainly or just a remnant from the past).

Fourth, depeasantization and repeasantization are now thought of, and conceptualized, as dialectical unity, sometime dominated by one side and sometimes by the other. Theoretically both are possible and both can even occur within one and the same location in time and space. Empirically it has been shown that the two mostly co-exist and occur largely as expressions of socio-political struggles. Where peasant agriculture is perceived and accepted as holding a promise for the future, these struggles can also involve important, non-rural segments of the population. Another important aspect is that repeasantization implies a revival of values – autonomy, self-provisioning, local links and citizenship – which often have a strong capacity to mobilize large sections of today's societies.

Fifth, far more attention is now given to agency. Peasants are understood as knowledgeable and capable social actors who excel in their capacity to network; to combine the social and the material; and to engage, when needed, in collective action and in important transformative processes. This clearly reflects changes *within* the peasantry (the state of 'being a peasant' has evolved from a destiny to a choice), as well as the important changes that have been wrought *by* the peasantries.

These new features, which are the outcome of many intense debates, have allowed peasant studies to resolve many former problems. They show that the peasantry is, above all, a multi-dimensional phenomenon that can be defined in different, and essentially *complementary*, ways. Peasants can be defined and analysed as a class (especially

when they represent collective agency – specified above as the fifth feature). But they might also be defined as people involved in peasant *agriculture*. Peasant agriculture concretely and distinctively employs practices that differ from other modes of farming: it produces outputs for the market (on the output side) but does not depend strongly on the markets for inputs. That is to say, peasant agriculture is mainly built on internal resources (living nature that embraces fields, animals, crops, seeds and water; skilled labour; knowledge; savings; networks and more) and develops these resources as patrimony. Machinery, buildings and other ‘capital goods’ are part of this patrimony. These capital goods do not represent capital in the Marxist sense, but are the result of previous labour and help to further improve the process of production. At the same time, there is a range of actual and potential contradictions between peasant farming and capital. Capital can penetrate directly into agriculture, through creating indebtedness (a concept that today we refer to as ‘financialization’), contract farming, the imposition of regulatory schemes, etc. One effect of these mechanisms is that agriculture is torn in two opposing directions: one more entrepreneurial (aligning farming to the needs and logic of capital), and the other more peasant-like (resisting the subordination to capital). Thus, there is specificity to peasant *agriculture*. And this specificity might help to demarcate peasants’ role as *actors* from that of other actors: they *farm* differently. This difference might also help to further specify the notion of *class*, discussed above.

Together, the five new features (all fruits of the last 50 years of peasant studies), and the newly created understanding of the peasantry as a multi-dimensional reality, imply that nowadays peasant studies is far better equipped to take responsibility and play a significant role than was the case in the past.

At the same time, we have to be very clear that it is not just peasant studies that has evolved; the last 50 years also saw major historical changes in agrarian landscapes themselves (historical changes that are undoubtedly reflected in the changes in peasant studies discussed above). Almost 50 years ago we witnessed the defeat of the USA military machine by a peasant army in Vietnam. Harriet Friedmann refers to this historical event in her contribution to this Forum as a watershed (and an *ex-post* exclamation mark for Erik Wolf’s ‘Peasant Wars’). Then, in 1979, there was the Anhui uprising in China (which eventually extended much further) which gave rise to a process of re-peasantization that has resulted in the creation of 200 million new peasant farming units. Brazil was the location for yet another watershed: through land occupations and subsequent *campamentos* the MST (*Movimento dos Sem Terra*) has been able to generate 400,000 new peasant units of production that between them cover an area which equals the total agricultural area of Switzerland, Portugal, Belgium, Denmark and the Netherlands taken together.

Europe, in its turn, has witnessed, alongside a partial transition towards entrepreneurial farming, the development of multi-functionality, the emergence of low-external-input farming and the creation of new markets. These new mechanisms have all emerged as responses to the squeeze exerted by food empires upon agriculture and simultaneously translated as re-peasantization: that is to say, agriculture is once again becoming more peasant-like and is also attracting new entrants, especially young people, who enlarge the ranks and file of the peasantries. Finally there is the construction and development of *La Via Campesina*, the proud, sturdy and strong global peasant movement that combines considerable intellectual power and imagination with an impressive amount of agency.

These main historical changes are tied together, I think, by one main thread: the desire of many millions of producers to be independent and self-employed and to build their own material and economic foundations in order to emancipate themselves and contribute to society as a whole. These changes should be understood, I believe, as main pointers that will guide the development of the next generation of peasant studies.

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Harriet Friedmann

The main part of these comments is based on my presentation at the International Rural Sociology Association, describing the intellectual trajectory of Eric Wolf, my first teacher about peasants and politics. Wolf's influence is too little acknowledged in most histories of agrarian studies. Both the substance and methods he developed since his book *Peasants* reshaped ethnography as political economy and helped to define political ecology. They remain deeply insightful. The second part offers some of my own reflections on themes I consider important on this anniversary of peasant studies. The choice of themes is inspired by my co-panelists as well as some questions raised in the extra session.

What follows is the briefest possible overview of Eric Wolf's trajectory, legacy and openings to future thought. In the small book simply titled *Peasants* (1966), Wolf took peasants out of the anthropological gaze of the exotic other, and interpreted them as modern social actors in relations of power and property. He inquired into their anti-colonial and revolutionary struggles in his comparative study of revolutionary movements called *Peasant wars of the twentieth century* (1969). These were part of Wolf's evolving approach to world history centred on the ways that capital grew out confrontations and connections between colonial power and indigenous lifeways, culminating in his magisterial *Europe and the people without history* (1982). The last was a pioneering and explicit departure from Eurocentric thought. It remains in my view an unparalleled work of theory and history.

Peasants was a conceptual work built on examples from Wolf's own field work in Mexico and the field work of other anthropologists. Yet Wolf moved away from the anthropological approach of the time, which focused on what was exotic – that is, not part of the modern world. From today's perspective, *Peasants* was prescient in its focus on power, ecology and materialism. Wolf saw himself as at once rooted in an anthropological tradition of sustained observation, and at the same time radically changing it to include what he later called political economy and what many of us now call political ecology.

In preparing these remarks, I realize how deeply I followed his approach to peasants, politics and world history. Even as my writings on simple commodity production and family farms were shaped by the Lenin–Chayanov debates, I always followed Wolf in trying to integrate Chayanov and Marx. This Marx was, as Henry writes, a different reading from Lenin's, since it had to grapple with what was then called the 'persistence' of the peasantry, not as a 'sack of potatoes', but as a force in the restructuring of capitalism

and possibly, in some cases, even anticipating a post-capitalist future based on (in today's language) distributed rather than centralized institutions (Friedmann 2016, 681–86).

Wolf used Chayanov to define the paradox of peasant households – that they participate in markets but not in the way economic theory expects. This is amazing in light of the fact that Wolf's book was published in the same year as the major English translation of Chayanov's *Theory of peasant economy*. Indeed, the longest single quotation in this little book is an excerpt from Chayanov on the distinct logic of peasant households, despite the fact that in contrast to the pursuit of profit by capitalist enterprises, peasants adjust consumption and labour to assure their reproduction (as Henry rightly reminds us, *simple reproduction* is analytically much stronger than *subsistence*). In following Wolf's footnote to a source book on rural sociology published in 1931 (Sorokim, Zimmerman, and Galpin 1931), I realized that at least a small part of Chayanov's work had been known to American rural sociologists and anthropologists before the Stalinist regime suppressed the work and killed the scholar. This was the first part of Wolf's definition of peasants.

The second part of Wolf's definition was to locate peasantries within a larger context of appropriating classes and states. Wolf continued his materialist approach, now drawing on Marx, by distinguishing between paleotechnic and neotechnic 'ecotypes'. Writing in 1966, before major ecological critiques of industrial, fossil-intensive agriculture were common, Wolf saw an evolutionary pressure to replace the peasant or paleotechnic ecotype (based on mixed farming using hand tools, and human and animal energy) with a then-emerging neotechnic ecotype (based on specialized crops and fossil energy). Since, like Henry Bernstein, he assumed the neotechnic ecotype to be more 'efficient' in market competition, and to produce more food and support larger populations, his problem was to account for the economic, cultural and social relations of peasants which allowed them to endure in so many regions of the capitalist world. The 'persistence of the peasantry' became a major theme in debates of the 1970s and 1980s.

Wolf's second longest quotation in *Peasants* is from Marx, appearing like a bookend with the quotation from Chayanov near the beginning. It is the famous quotation from *The eighteenth Brumaire*, comparing peasants to potatoes in a sack – peasants are a class in that they share characteristics, but they cannot act as a class because they are isolated one from the other. They can act collectively only under special circumstances, including an outside leadership they are willing to trust. This was to lead into his inquiry into peasant revolutions.

Peasant wars of the twentieth century was published three years later, in 1969. Where *Peasants* was analytical, using examples to illustrate general arguments, *Peasant wars of the twentieth century* was a work of comparative history using detailed secondary sources on the Mexican, Russian, Chinese, Vietnamese, Algerian and Cuban revolutions. Anthropology's insistence on the specificity of cultures, peoples and places was retained in a study of the role of peasants in national, and therefore in world, politics. Wolf's history of each peasant revolution attended to the context of each peasant movement, which included struggles against both national elites and colonial powers. In this book, he analysed the class diversity of peasants as well, concluding that the 'middle peasantry' was the most common source of political leadership. As Banaji's review (1972, 33) put it, the cases

present the picture of a relatively stable world of rural communities in disintegration under the double pressure of expanding *latifundia* and the penetration of the world market; of the

massive social and economic distortions engendered by the predominance of a single industry geared to the world market – Cuban sugar, Algerian wine, Vietnamese rubber – and controlled by foreign interests; and the emergence of new classes and new political parties linked to them. In ... the expansion of capitalism on a world scale, it was the 'middle' peasantry which suffered most from the encroachment of the market and the disruption of established pattern [s] of landownership and power, and they and the 'free' peasants in areas remote from central control constituted the 'pivotal groupings for peasant uprisings'.

The Vietnam War was Wolf's express motivation for studying peasant wars – to understand how all of the major uprisings of the twentieth century had been made by peasants, and how imperial powers could be repeatedly defeated by what US military people called 'raggedy little bastards in black pajamas'.

Politics inspired questions for this comparative analysis. In his preface, Wolf mentions his involvement in initiating the 'teach-in' movement at the University of Michigan in 1965. That was the year I arrived to begin my studies and wound up being part of the organizing groups for later teach-ins about the Vietnam War – which Vietnamese call the American War. I see in retrospect how deeply my own political and intellectual journey was influenced by Eric Wolf. Like him, I wanted to understand the Vietnam War, and by extension all revolutions and counter-revolutions – indeed, all power and political struggles in history.

I am grateful to Ben White for helping me (and perhaps all of us still engaged in the debates initiated in the *Journal of Peasant Studies*) to consider how Wolf's work adds a missing piece. We can build on the work of the journal's founder, Teodor Shanin, and its later co-editor Henry Bernstein, the updating of Chayanov by Jan Douwe van der Ploeg, and the next generation of scholars contributing to the two complementary journals – *Journal of Agrarian Change*, which was the original *Journal of Peasant Studies*, and the *JPS* that continued and later underwent renewal under the editorship of Jun Borrás.

Still missing in *Peasant wars of the twentieth century* was the possibility of *emergence* and of *re-emergence* of peasantries, the subject of Jan Douwe's research. But the idea was implicit here, I think, and appeared more explicitly in Wolf's next and most ambitious work.

Europe and the People Without History is an extraordinary synthesis of history, anthropology and other social sciences into a theoretically sophisticated approach to the diverse, interconnected unfolding of world history. Wolf's use of Marx became more explicit, but he revised and simplified the category of modes of production once again but this time in a more nuanced way. In place of the dyad based on technology presented in *Peasants*, Wolf defined three modes of production, this time based not on technology but on class and power: kin-based, tributary and capitalist. Wolf changed the idea of modes of production; instead of a sequence characterizing unconnected cultures or societies, he insisted on changing the Eurocentric (and capital-centric) perception of kin-based and tributary modes. His method was to identify how mutual inter-penetration in a colonial and capitalist world formed and reformed specific social and cultural formations – capitalist no less than kin-based and tributary modes.

Wolf had long prepared for this magisterial synthesis. He was part of a group of historians, anthropologists and members of other disciplines at University of Michigan who edited the journal *Comparative Studies in Society and History*. Raymond Grew, editor from 1973 to 1997, wrote a memoir on the journal's 50th anniversary in 2008, which

suggests a lineage worthy of attention by those who appreciate *JPS* (Grew 2008). Grew described its aim as 'contributing to scholarship by rejecting the trite and the dull, embracing the venturesome, encouraging the young, and facilitating efforts to nudge issues beyond their usual boundaries'. The scholars in this intellectual community opened my mind to the dialogue to a wider world of intellectual engagement. Somehow as a naive undergraduate I absorbed by osmosis from these amazing teachers, most of all from Wolf as my supervisor, a sense that history has to be theoretical and that theory has to be historical, and an enduring fascination with what I might now call agrarian studies. I was and remain thrilled that my first paper (Friedmann 1978), 'World market, state and family farm', was published in that journal. There were not many places for such papers in the 1970s.

In 1972, only three years after *Peasant wars of the twentieth century* and a full decade before *Europe and the People Without History*, and well ahead of almost everyone, Wolf used the term 'political ecology'. It was an extension of the materialist and ecological themes of the 1966 book *Peasants*. His paper 'Ownership and political ecology' linked human ecology directly with political economy of capitalism. Wolf argued that local rules of ownership and inheritance 'mediate between the pressures emanating from the larger society and the exigencies of the local ecosystem' (1972, 202). This anticipated the extraordinary work of theoretical history and historical theory that would appear a full decade later, in 1982.

Europe and the people without history is an unorthodox account of the emergence and unfolding of capitalism, which must therefore begin with what existed before capitalism. Each of the old and new worlds was interconnected in ways that became disorganized and reorganized by later centuries of conquest, accumulation and rule by capitalist classes and formation of imperial, colonial and national states. Wolf begins, therefore, with interconnections among places and cultures of all kinds linked by empires (or trade) in the 'old world' of Europe, Asia and Africa and similarly in the 'new world' of the Americas. Then he shows how Europe, and all other places, changed in mutual inter-relation after 1500. The so-called industrial revolution in his account did not take place in northwest England, but encompassed the slave-based cotton plantations in the United States, and the cotton export zones of Asia and Africa mostly characterized by peasant tenant farmers – all tributary modes. Most important for the debates about peasantry, Wolf corrected the self-congratulatory history that Europe-centred capitalism writes about itself. Capitalism consists of all local histories and all local histories are shaped by the whole. European history is no less local than any other.

The seemingly odd title 'People without history' refers to the false, indeed ridiculous, attribution of timeless qualities to whatever European social scientists or colonists or traders encountered – what Europeans (and in their wake, Americans) have variously called *primitive*, *traditional*, *underdeveloped* and the like. Wolf created a framework to open all the places and peoples of the world to an interconnected history, full of diversity precisely because of their interconnections. Thus, the fur trade, trade in enslaved humans, plunder for silver, and other colonial practices changed all the places connected by these activities – imperial centres and colonies alike. Reorganization of indigenous cultures in South America was intimately tied in social terms to inflation in Spain, despite their great geographical distance. Peoples encountered one another, unequally but nonetheless with real effects on the structure of the larger world, whose movements of people

and goods and whose ways of organizing landscapes reshaped specific places and cultures.

England, for example, was just one region in the early history of world-changing capitalism. The industrial revolution cannot be understood by looking at Northern England in isolation. The displacement of handloom weavers by textile factories using wage labour was part of the same process that displaced local wool and flax by imported cotton, the raw material in those very factories. The cotton came from enslaved plantation workers in the Americas, and from what Wolf called 'tributary' modes of production in Asia and Africa. All of these places were part of the industrial revolution, even though distances made it appear to have arisen in only one place; each place was transformed by it; each changing place shaped the emergence and unfolding of capitalism itself, including where wage labour prevailed; the whole and parts again transformed when textiles gave way to other leading industries of capital. Thus, Wolf showed that capital had emerged from the outset on a world scale and ever after transformed every place it reached, which it either incorporated or made marginal. I have returned to this insight in trying to understand global cities. Manchester became the first industrial city by merging small villages and building on longstanding imperial relations centred in the financial centre of London and the port of Liverpool; industry was not only a displacement of artisanal handloom weavers in England and India, but also a change from local wool and flax to imperial cotton based in tributary modes, including slavery in the US' expanding cotton frontier – and expulsion of yet more indigenous people (Friedmann [forthcoming](#)).

Now we can see how evolution can be something more complex than a linear sequence of separate 'cases' moving along a track, or stuck somewhere along the way. In society as in nature, indeed in the mutual constitution of social and natural features shaping our earthly habitat, and indeed shaping ourselves, evolution moves in complex cycles. Something Wolf could not have seen in 1966 is that the 'neotechnic ecotype' may have run its course. Yet the method of theoretical history he achieved in *Europe and the people without history* shows how a new pattern like 're-peasantization' can be one of the complex evolutionary possibilities emerging from slow, dangerous disintegration of capitalist agriculture.

In this second part, I turn to some themes inspired by comments and questions about changes in agrarian studies in the past 50 years.

First, two deep cultural revaluations are of historic importance: the revaluation of *peasant* as part of a wider revaluation of farming as part of social and ecological sustainability; and the revaluation and rebalancing of different kinds of knowledge. *Peasant* is being reframed as a positive identity. Of course, when Teodor points out that *peasant* was a negative term in Russia, this was also true elsewhere; its counterpart was to romanticize peasant villages and households, but rarely to treat them as serious agents of political economy or social change. Indeed, a major contribution of Teodor's work on Chayanov, and his original writing on peasants in the Russian social formation of pre-revolutionary Russia, was to point to peasant society as a process. Jan Douwe spoke to this, especially the dialectical tension between depeasantization and repeasantization. Now this revaluation of the identity of *campesino* (and something different but equally important, *farmer*) occurs not only in regions where farming and village life remain, however altered and

threatened by capital, but also in the so-called North and also in cities. The revaluation is part of a larger, incipient shift in awareness of the importance of land and labour in providing society's food and in stewarding humanity's earthly habitat (IAASTD 2009; Mason and Lang 2017).

This cultural shift involves profound changes in what knowledge is valued. In growing food ecologically, knowledge has to be both formal (e.g. soils, hydrology, etc.) and place-based and practical. The latter is often called indigenous, vernacular, local or just plain 'farmer' knowledge. The two have to be integrated as a process of continuous learning. Now that the ecological and social consequences of monocultures and the agronomies supporting them are becoming visible, the challenge is to discover ways of integrating formal science with ways of working with the land and landscapes to provide food, fuel, fibre and fodder, and at the same time support those who work directly with the land to adapt to changing conditions for humans and other species (Altieri and Nicholls 2017; González de Molina and Guzmán 2017; Perfecto, Vandermeer, and Wright 2009). This is in a way a return to farming, in the sense which Henry (Bernstein 2010) distinguishes from specialized agriculture. I have tried to argue elsewhere in this journal (Friedmann 2016) that it is also a move towards something that might be considered a happy post-capitalist future, if only the lock-ins holding land and labour in their present relations could be overcome.

Second, I will comment on three interlinked issues raised by Henry about changes in the agrarian question in the past half-century: the apparently permanent shedding of labour in late capitalism, the appreciation of gender relations, and attention to ecology. Labour looks different if we widen the perspective to look at generations, which are crucial to both demography and household reproduction/disintegration. In the context of deepening labour displacement by capital, Ben and Jan Douwe in different ways see that new forms of farming and rural society are part of a search by many people, including youth, for meaningful work. In this historical moment, the revaluation of farming is part of a wider cultural shift in ecological awareness. It includes an emerging revaluation of the ecological and social dimensions of working with, on, and in the land, and of making markets serve rather than displace meaningfully integrated lifeways which must be centred on food, work and land.

With regard to gender and age, household reproduction includes family relations as well as production relations on 'family farms'. My own forays into the subject in the 1980s (Friedmann 1986a, 1986b) integrated changes in *families* – that is, gender and age relations – with changes in political economy (e.g. property and markets). Agricultural families were not turned into capitalists and workers, as the differentiation debate insisted, but into fully integrated commodity-producing households. At the same time, women were claiming rights, divorce became a possibility (affected like other family businesses by division – or not – of productive property), and on-farm work came to be affected by the gender roles of urban society – a gender division of labour facilitated by mechanization. Even more important, perhaps, were generational changes. Children were no longer expected to work on the farm; school and farm work became more difficult to combine; and children of farm households often chose other occupations, leading to a problem of 'succession'. But the problem of aging farmers is the legacy partly of outdated ideas and laws, especially about property. As Ben points out, 'small farming' or 'ecological farming' should now be understood in the full complexity of changing families and

households, and the obstacles of land as private property. In the context of late capitalism, labour displacement in all sectors paradoxically opens to the possibility of farming to shift, in Jan Douwe's lovely phrase, 'from destiny to choice'. There is no reason why children of farmers (men or women) should be expected to farm, and there is no reason why the young people learning to farm ecologically and intensively, no matter what their backgrounds, should not be allowed – indeed, supported – to work appropriate farmland.

Most important is the emerging appreciation of how food systems depend on and affect ecological systems. Here I simply point once again to the need to change the misleading attachment to linear tendencies towards 'commoditization', 'urbanization', or any of the other '-ation' words. Instead, we need to complicate them by tensions of the kind stated by Jan Douwe: between 'de-peasantization' and 'repeasantization', and, I argue, even to include cyclical and other patterns. As Ben points out, Teodor Shanin's analysis of rural Russia before and after the Revolution showed complex dynamics of combined opposing tendencies, making the study of peasants methodologically challenging. Jan Douwe updates this insight as a way to re-embed food production in wider economic, social and ecological relations. For those of us convinced of the importance and validity of critiques of industrial agriculture, it means changing from flow-through systems (which bring inputs from outside and send commodities and waste outside the enterprise) by closing loops socially and ecologically. Specialized agricultural systems are intrinsically depleting and polluting because they source inputs externally and send waste as well as commodities outside the firm; they have to pay neither cost. To move in the direction of complex, diverse, sustainable farming systems means to close cycles broken by industrial agriculture and capitalist markets. In Jan Douwe's words (above), 'peasant agriculture is mainly built on internal resources (living nature that embraces fields, animals, crops, seeds and water; skilled labour; knowledge; savings; networks and more)'. It means participating in the kinds of markets that have existed for as long as human records exist and still exist at the margins of capital, which van der Ploeg, Ye, and Schneider (2012) call *nested markets*. It is worth repeating more of Jan Douwe's comment (above): 'peasant agriculture is distinctively different: it produces differently, it reproduces resources differently, it links to the markets in different ways and it generates levels of employment that differ starkly from those of entrepreneurial and capitalist agriculture'.

Finally, it is most important to find ways to rethink property in land, which now has to be understood in the wider context of human relations to our natural habitats. Jan Douwe's revival of the word *patrimony* is an intriguing way to describe a way of organizing land that supports humans and all other beings, and of defining *wealth* ecologically and socially. I propose that we consider the idea of *commons*. The main historical use of the word has been, as far as I know, to describe enclosures which have been and continue to be how customary ways of living in the land are turned into private property and most inhabitants expelled. The most widespread use of the term 'commons' today is for intellectual property and the internet, sometimes even dismissing attention to land and farming as belonging only to the past. I have tried to argue that there is much to learn from these new forms of intellectual property such as creative commons, and that we need to update our understanding to work with the kind of land laws to support resilient food systems by cooperating small-holding farmers and artisans and consumers, whether under the rubric of commons, customary tenure, or

something else (Friedmann 2015). This might converge with the writers and activists who continue to focus on commons in land (Ostrom 2012; Netting 1993), but rarely, as far as I know, including some of the institutional innovations of emerging social economy, such as creative commons. Even more important, at least in Canada, is the revival of indigenous claims to land, knowledge and governance. New language and new ways of working for change may lie in collaboration between the many scholars, activists and artists who meld ancient wisdom with formal professional and intellectual practices. The question of land, now as long ago, is much bigger than the question of farming.

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Ben White

In the politically turbulent 1960s, peasants were an important factor as the majority population in regions in which the Cold War was being played out directly or by proxy: in Indochina and other Asian regions, in Latin America, and in various countries of northern and sub-Saharan Africa. In the West, the study of these peasant societies was positivistic and functionalist, and its main theoretical underpinning was modernization theory (Rostow 1960).

Many scholars and rural development practitioners believed in the need for change in peasant mentalities, rather than in the material structures and relationships which kept them poor. George Foster argued that we must study Mexican peasants' 'cognitive models' to understand their 'image of limited good' (Foster 1965; see also McClelland 1961, 1963 on peasants' lack of 'achievement motivation'). In Burma, Manning Nash told us, it was not agrarian reforms that were needed, but an entrepreneurial spirit to transform 'get along' farmers into 'get going' farmers (Nash 1965). Art Mosher's³ book *Getting agriculture moving*, distributed free of charge and in many languages all over non-communist Asia, argued for the need to teach peasants 'to want more for themselves', and for 'educational programmes ... to create more demand for store-bought goods which would ... drive them to work harder' (Cleaver 1972, 179; Mosher 1966, 108–09; White 2013).

But the 1960s were also a time for questioning of these frameworks, and for experimentation with alternative modes of thought and practice (Wolf 2001c, 58). In Chile, Andre Gunder Frank took on the modernization theorists with his booklet *Sociology of development and underdevelopment of sociology* (1967). In parallel, as a graduate student at Columbia University in the late 1940s, Eric Wolf had joined Sidney Mintz, Morton Fried and others in a critical discussion group whose members 'had in common that we were all [World War II] veterans, we also shared sympathies on the political left and interests in expanding materialist approaches in anthropology' (Wolf 2001a, 4). In the 1950s and early 1960s, Wolf studied peasantries in Puerto Rico, Mexico and the Italian Alps, and in his little book *Peasants* (1966) defined peasants not by their deficient mentalities but by their material and political relationships with non-peasants as classes within modern national economies.

At about the same time, many of us who were interested in materialist approaches in peasant studies also read Lenin's classic work on *The development of capitalism in Russia* (1960 [1908]), and particularly the chapter on the 'differentiation of the peasantry', an account supported by available district-level statistics of the in-built processes of internal

³Mosher (1910–1992) was President of the Agricultural Development Council, a foundation established by John D. Rockefeller III.

differentiation and emerging classes of capitalist farmers, middle peasants, small/marginal peasants and landless, and the corresponding emergence of wage relations between the upper and lower peasant classes. These two books were probably the two most important influences on the emerging tradition of class analysis of peasant societies and of agrarian change.

The same year, 1966, saw the English translation of parts of the Russian 'social agronomist' Alexander Chayanov's work, which had previously been available in German – various Dutch dissertations on Indonesian peasants in the 1930s made use of Chayanov – but was largely inaccessible to English readers.⁴ Chayanov, the brilliant central figure of the Academy of Agricultural Sciences in Moscow (Shanin, 2009, 85), used partly the same kind of regional *zemstvo* statistics that Lenin had used, but also much more detailed peasant budget studies from the years just before and after the First World War, to 'carefully study present-day peasant farming *as it is*' (1966, 50, emphasis in the original). He defined peasant farming as a specific non-capitalist form of economy whose organization was driven not by a 'peasant mentality' but by a specific logic, different both from capitalist class relations and from neo-classical economists' models. Although he has become known for his theories of the internal organization of peasant family farms, and particularly the changing labour–consumer balance in the course of peasant household life cycles, he also understood, like Wolf, that 'every small peasant undertaking becomes an organic part of the world economy'. 'Where', he asked, 'are the social threads that bind Sidor Karpov's farm, lost in the Perm' forests, to the London banks and oblige him to feel the effects of changes in the pulse rate of the London stock exchange?' (Chayanov 1966 [1925], 257). In searching for these social threads he was a pioneer in agro-commodity chain analysis, with detailed studies of the hay, meat and flax commodity chains in which Russian farmers were involved as capitalism made headway in agriculture. Among the many authors inspired by Chayanov's ideas worldwide, Jan Douwe van der Ploeg (2013, 21) includes Teodor Shanin, Juan Martinez-Alier, James Scott, Esther Boserup and Harriet Friedmann.

From this point onwards we can say, more or less, that alongside the dominant modernization theory and studies of peasant mentalities, there emerged two parallel traditions: one of class-based analysis, and another which its proponents would call Chayanovian and others would call neo-populist. Teodor Shanin made an important early contribution to these debates with his book *The awkward class* (1972), a detailed analysis of rural Russia in the period 1910–1925 which showed that the process of agrarian differentiation was more complex than either the simple class-based model or the Chayanovian model would suggest: agrarian society embodied co-existing dynamics of centrifugal and centripetal processes, which may each be conceptually clear but are empirically difficult to disentangle.

In recent years both Henry and Teodor have reflected on the continuing debate between the two traditions, and their implications for agrarian policies and agrarian movements (Bernstein 2009; Shanin 2009). Some may feel that the opposition between two traditions – while undoubtedly helping to focus research and debate – is often set up in an artificial, too-stereotyped way, while their intellectual fathers were more

⁴One small exception is the translated excerpt from Chayanov in Sorokim et al.'s sourcebook in rural sociology, already mentioned by Harriet Friedmann above (Chayanov 1931 [1918]).

nuanced.⁵ For Wolf, peasants are defined in class terms but they 'are never macroclasses at the level of the total system, always microclasses at the level of locality and region' (Wolf 2001b, 255). Lenin focused on the relationships between the emerging peasant bourgeoisie and the landless and near-landless who were engaged in wage labour on their farms (1960, 177), but never denied the persistence and the importance, alongside the emerging wage-labour farms, of the middle layer of family farms. Chayanov focused on this middle layer, but recognized class-like differentiation processes in Russian agriculture, noting that about 10 percent of all farms were using wage labour and that a parallel 'proletarianization of the countryside and ... a certain development of capitalist production forms undoubtedly take place' (Chayanov 1966, 255–57); but he focused in his analytical work exclusively on the model of the 'family labour farm', those who remained in the middle and who he thought could be the backbone of a modern, vertically integrated agriculture under capitalism or socialism. It was not Lenin but Stalin who had Chayanov dismissed, arrested and finally shot in 1937, for his opposition to collectivization (Shanin 2009).

Turning now to current debates on peasants: underlying much of the debate, I think, is the question of how we stand, for example, on the slogan of *La Via Campesina*, that 'small farmers can feed the world', providing us not only with food but also with (bio)fuel, fibres, fragrances, pharmaceuticals, etc. And what do those who believe in that slogan actually mean by 'small farmers'? My view on this is probably too simplistic. It starts, basically, with the observation that there is no major crop in the world that cannot be grown efficiently and effectively by smallholders. 'Smallholder' is not so much about the size of the farm unit, as about the manner and the scale of its operation. The owners (or the tenants) manage and work on the farm themselves, often with the help of family members, but there's no analytical reason that it should be a family; it could be a couple of friends farming together. This does not rule out the occasional or seasonal use of hired workers, but it is not a 'wage-labour farm' where the owner/farmer manages, and others do the work. So it can encompass a one- or two-hectare farm in an Asian, African or Latin American country and a 200-acre farm in Canada or Holland, depending on the manner in which it's owned, managed and worked.⁶

An example of these issues is oil palm in Indonesia, where you have smallholders being pushed off the land by agribusiness corporations who develop huge expanses of monocrop oil palm plantations and a giant processing factory to produce the crude palm oil. Critics often tend to blame the crop, but in fact oil palm can be successfully grown in small units, if groups of smallholders who together hold about 500 hectares of land can get together to build a shared processing factory. This can happen, to my mind, within capitalism, within socialism, or within something in between, because following Chayanov and Jan Douwe, what smallholders need is to integrate themselves vertically into larger units which can take care of the economies of scale upstream and downstream from the farm unit. They're likely to be in trouble if these are capitalist units (as in contract farming for large corporations), because they will get squeezed, and they'll be in trouble if they are corrupt co-operative units, as has often happened around the world.

⁵I tried to expand on this point in White (1989).

⁶My colleague Jan Douwe van der Ploeg (2013) has much more to say about the distinction between 'size' and 'scale' of farming.

But they will not be in trouble if these are well-run co-operative units, owned and democratically organized and managed by their members.

In relation to the question of reproduction or disappearance of peasantries and peasant farming, another dimension in the current context is the looming problem of chronic mass unemployment, and particularly mass youth unemployment in the world, as every investment that is made, whether in agriculture or in other sectors, is a cost-cutting investment aiming to increase enterprise profitability while shedding labour. We should be concerned at the prospects of the world's peasants disappearing, because a successful, vibrant, small-holder agriculture can continue in future to be the world's biggest single source of employment and livelihoods (as it still is today) and if given the necessary support by states can provide decent labour incomes when things are organized properly.

Who then might be the new peasantry? There are, I would say, three types. First, the 'continuers': young men and women who grow up on the parental farm and help with the farm, and then take it over. Then there is another kind of 'continuer': men and women who grow up on the parental farm, but don't want to hang around, helping their parents and waiting until they are 40 or 50 until they can take over the farm; so they go off to do something else, and later when land becomes available, or their parents become too old, they will come back. And the third is the 'real' new entrants, those who have no farming background. In the coming years in many parts of the world, the second and third types will become more important; actually, type number two has always been important, but people have not studied this.

A second important point is that the reproduction of these smallholder farms will not be dependent on the farm only. This is one of those dynamics that we often think are new, but are actually not new. In rural Java where I do research, non-farm activities and seasonal or part-lifetime out-migration have been a key feature of rural economy and peasant survival at least since the mid-nineteenth century (Alexander, Boomgaard, and White 1991).

In most of the world, state policies supporting smallholder farming are absent, very feeble or contradictory (with some minor programmes for family farms, and simultaneous state support for corporate farming); the United Nations' 'International Year of the Family Farm' (2014) passed almost without notice. In many countries, peasants have little or no political power, although this varies; in some countries you have strong political parties linked to peasants and promoting peasant interests (or claiming to). This means that peasants have no say so in how states are going to solve the dilemma which all states have to confront: how do you provide food and other agricultural products to your growing urban populations at prices which will not make them go out on the streets and bring down your government, and how do you get those products from rural producers under conditions and prices that will not make them revolt or go on strike? This is the classic dilemma of states. But somehow or other, peasants are rarely able to make their voices heard on the second part of the dilemma.

The last point I'd like to raise, because it hasn't had much attention in the discussion so far, is that the most important barrier to the survival and reproduction of relatively sustainable, relatively egalitarian communities of smallholder farmers is the persistence of private property in land. Private property in land is linked to the production of agrarian inequalities in at least two ways: first, because it makes possible the chronic tendency to internal class differentiation through the 'cumulation of advantages and disadvantages' inherent in

smallholder commodity production, and second because it opens the way to speculation by non-producers in land. So when the MST (*Movimento dos Sem Terra*) or other peasant movements push for 'communal ownership, individual use rights' this has to be taken seriously, however difficult it may appear (and however unwelcome to peasants with insecure tenure, and the landless, who may dream of getting an ownership title). There are successful examples of peasant landholdings organized on the principle of communal ownership and secure, individual use rights, allocated on the basis of need and periodically redistributed.

These, in my view, are the kinds of questions that come up as we try to think of the future of agriculture and farming in the world. And they lead to another question: if the kinds of debates we have discussed here, taking off from the two traditions reflected in Wolf's and Chayanov's work, are still relevant to these issues, are they still being taught in rural sociology classes around the world – and if not, why not?

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Henry Bernstein

I sat down to think, perhaps in a straightforward or literal way, about what has changed in the last 50 years. One thing that has changed is there are no more great peasant revolutions. The upheavals surveyed in Eric Wolf's (1969) *Peasant wars of the twentieth century*, including, of course, Russia and China, no longer exist. Those revolutions, culminating in the Vietnamese struggle for national liberation which inspired Wolf to write his book, were a key part of the context, of the recent historical past and present, in which some of us were drawn into wanting to learn more about the peasants of the South. Almost simultaneously in the 1960s and 1970s, and subsequently – and I suspect somewhat connected, if not directly – was the end of state socialist experiments in agriculture. This is massively important. Teodor can tell you about Russia; Jan Douwe and I could tell you about China although we have somewhat different interpretations about agrarian change in China today. While models of state socialism have gone by the wayside, one must also acknowledge, as Jan Douwe pointed out, that there are different kinds of agrarian movements, rural social movements and so on, of which today *La Via Campesina* is perhaps the best known, and the most emblematic. Even if such 'new farmers' movements', to use a term from India, are driven by the same or similar impulses to earlier peasant revolutions – a very big 'if' in my view – then they act in very changed historical circumstances. Those circumstances include the dynamics and effects of globalization, and the changed relations between agriculture and industry they incorporate or generate.

Let me move on with indecent haste to what has changed in the world of ideas. Some important indications were given by my friends and colleagues here. One that is enormously important and hasn't been mentioned yet is the impact of feminism on thinking about social relations, and not least in household models of peasantry, in the past 50 years. In much of Chayanov's work – not all of it, but in the more formal parts, as Teodor said – the logic of peasant economy was located first of all at the level of households. But there was no central analysis of gender relations in Chayanov – not least 'inside' households – any more than there was in the work of Lenin or most other contemporary Marxists. So I think that's one enormous difference between now and then.

Second is the impact of ecological thinking that mostly appeared and then intensified during the last 50 years. Chayanov knew a lot about farming, which was one of his great strengths, as it is of his devoted champion Jan Douwe van der Ploeg. But ecology in the sense that we tend to think of it today, especially if you're coming from a political economy perspective, wasn't really there either in those earlier classic works.

A third key change in the world of ideas is the impact of world economy and world system approaches, notably food regime analysis which was pioneered by Harriet and Philip McMichael in a seminal paper of 1989, although Harriet had already anticipated it. It was there in Eric Wolf, certainly, but it is carried much further today in more systematic analyses of capitalism on its various scales, and, one would have to say, in all its diversity of forms. I happen to consider – though it's not necessarily a popular view on this panel – that so-called middle peasant farms today are a particular form of capitalism, or constituted within capitalism. For me they exemplify capitalist petty commodity production, which is a different form from big capitalist farms, let alone agribusiness corporations.

What has not changed in the last 50 years is that we still live in a capitalist world economy, and a capitalist world economy that seems to be ever more rampant and unfettered than it was in the 1960s, certainly, and in the decades that followed. And here I take my lead from Marx and Lenin. This is by no means to write them a blank cheque, and in would be silly, especially sitting next to Teodor Shanin. His three magnificent monographs on Russia and its peasantry between about 1900 and the late 1920s show a number of mistakes that Lenin made in his concrete analysis of Russia at that time, and also show how Lenin changed his views, something that's overlooked in more 'orthodox' or formulaic uses of Lenin and Marx. But I think confronting farmers – different kinds of farmers operating on different scales within contemporary capitalism (and that is the sort of approach that I take) – means looking at processes of commodification, how they intensify and how they deepen, as well as how they take various forms. And in doing so, I try to use what I think is the important theoretical dynamic that is found in Lenin, which is still valid even if he got certain things wrong about Russia at the time that he wrote in the 1890s and thereafter.

Commodification is a fundamental dynamic which I explore and argue in the little book that Ben kindly waved around, and in all the work I've done. With commodification goes differentiation of farmers. This is not a prediction that this happens overnight, that it happens universally, that it happens in the same ways. But I think one must look at differentiation. And I've been reminded about this by Eric Wolf's work. Wolf took from Chayanov the latter's innovative formulations of peasantry as an economy of simple reproduction (an analytically more sound term than so-called 'subsistence'), but also aimed to incorporate the materialist attention to peasant differentiation. There are several aspects of differentiation which I'll try to cover in my remaining time.

To take differentiation seriously is not to argue that peasants, smaller farmers, family farmers – whatever we call them – automatically or quickly decompose into other classes of capital and labour. However, if they have to reproduce themselves through commodity production, which is to say, that the contradictory dynamics of capitalism become internalized within farming households, that means that farming households will differ, for both systematic and incidental reasons, in how successfully they reproduce themselves as both a stock of capital to be used in farming and as labour. If one grasps this argument properly, one can see many things that otherwise tend to remain invisible, to pick up

that idea of Teodor's, which is that many people leave farming, if not necessarily rural areas, in the world today, as we know. Very frequently, this includes being pushed out of farming by the current predations of neoliberal capitalism. So when researchers do (often quite local) rural studies, they can easily miss out on people who have left; they just look at the people who farm (they are not looking for non-farmers, former farmers and so on). And I think that the many rural people who are 'too poor to farm', and/or who reproduce themselves mostly through selling their labour power for wages, represent one widespread and crucial expression of the effect of differentiation.

Another aspect which for me is very important is that hardly any rural people in the world today reproduce themselves exclusively through farming. And so, new and different kinds of urban–rural connections, how they work, what the effects are for farming, are crucial. In some instances, the earnings may help farmers to reproduce their enterprises, something that Jan Douwe has looked at in China and elsewhere a great deal, but it may also have other effects.

Another factor which I want to mention – because it rarely gets mentioned, and Harriet knows this frustrates me – is demography. Population growth, and the effects of demographic growth in certain kinds of countrysides, and the ecologies that they occupy – again something which was a concern of Eric Wolf's – is so often overlooked. And Joan Martinez Alier, a very important political economist of ecological change, is also very unusual because he takes demography seriously. He says that for those who are radical and progressive, the challenge is to wrest demography and population growth away from the Malthusians. There's an old problem on the left that if you mention population growth as an issue, you're assumed to be a Malthusian, hence reactionary. Well, Joan Martinez Alier has grasped the nettle of population growth. Often in looking at very local studies of changing agrarian relations in some parts of Asia or Central America, or parts of Africa, it's clear that demographic change can have, and does have, a major impact on the ability of some or many farming families both to reproduce themselves and to feed the growing numbers of those who do not farm, urban *and* rural.

[In response to questions in the follow-up session] The questions we've had are really good and I think back to yesterday, when several people in the audience said to me afterwards: perhaps there was too much apparent agreement between us on the panel, which would be somewhat disappointing. So, first of all, on theory and practice. It is clear in Jan Douwe's work – and one finds the same with Philip McMichael – that they have a political project. They say explicitly that the peasantry, peasant farming, peasant agroecological farming, all these accompanying terms, are political constructs: they signal a political project committed to 'the peasant way'. The problem for me, then, is: What is the relation between such 'political' concepts and analytical concepts that we use to investigate and understand capitalism and all its constituent forms and dynamics?

Now, it happens that I'm well distanced from the kind of political project that Erik Olin Wright was talking about yesterday – real alternatives, real 'utopias' – for various reasons, but not from lack of sympathy with multiple forms of suffering and oppression, and the resistances they generate, that are clearly taking place in capitalism. Rather, the issue is that political concepts of peasantry, and agrarian change more broadly, and their analytical foundations and coherence fail to add up. Making peasant 'virtue' a central and intrinsic part of defining peasants, hence also functioning as a litmus test of 'praxis', is my

problem if you like, and comrades on this panel would say, yes, that's *my* problem, not theirs.

I regard farmers today in all their various shapes and sizes as commodity producers within capitalism, as Jan Douwe also seemed to acknowledge. Where we part company is on his notion that peasant farmers are – in effect by definition and theoretical claim – necessarily committed to autonomy and associated qualities which are central to the peasant project. I don't have any problem with the empirical likelihood that some farmers strive for relatively more autonomy in how they reproduce themselves. However, that is not all that different – and some may find this shocking – from small businesses of all kinds in contemporary capitalism, that strive to get the best deal for themselves in extremely difficult circumstances, where they're dealing with big companies, big suppliers and so on. I'm very struck along the way with Ben's pointing out the virtuous model, if you like, of relatively small-scale farming, with economies of scale on either side, upstream and downstream – because this is absolutely Chayanov, isn't it, Chayanov on cooperatives and so on?

But coming to proletarianization and re-peasantization: it seems to me that proletarianization has two key moments, which when confused get us into problems. One, as Marx (1976) wrote in the last part of *Capital*, Volume I, is dispossession. Dispossession means – and Ben alluded to this – you're dispossessed of the means of reproducing yourself through your own labour, this ideal of self-employment. The other moment is that dispossession doesn't necessarily mean that you're going to get regular, stable or adequately paid wage employment. And that is such a central issue today, it's something that Tania Li has written about, also James Ferguson in his fascinating but contentious recent book *Give a man a fish*, which argues for universal basic income grants, which again Erik Wright mentioned yesterday. In short, the worlds of contemporary capitalism are not going to absorb all the potential labour power that's available. Thus, the fate of the fully dispossessed, but also many small farmers and other small commodity producers, who face – not all but many of them – a terminal struggle to reproduce themselves through their own enterprises. That, I think, is the issue.

I am very skeptical of re-peasantization. I understand why it's an appealing term, in terms of the project that Jan Douwe has committed himself to, and has articulated so brilliantly over the years, as well as others. I don't think it's helpful to call it re-peasantization. It's re-peasantization in the sense of the political project. If there are people – different kinds of people – who commit themselves to those forms of enterprise, those forms of relative autonomy, maximizing the spaces, within which they can operate in the middle of commodity economies and so on, then, that is the logic of the term. But whether they are doing it for that reason, how successfully and with what effects, one can only try to find out empirically and comparatively.

If I can just very briefly conclude here. Ben raised toward the end of his comments something that actually runs through a lot of these very stretching, challenging debates today, and that is whether we measure agricultural output by yield or by labour productivity. Now there is a well-known criticism – articulated by Harriet, amongst others – that one of the great ideological achievements of capitalist agriculture, is elevation of labour productivity above all other considerations, including yields. My issue, which Haroon knows well, is that I think labour productivity is so important because it provides a kind of indirect measure of how many non-farming people a farmer can feed. That's the

real logical kernel of the historical importance of labour productivity. And I think it's fair to say, on Jan Douwe's behalf – he'll correct me if I'm wrong – is that his notion of peasant farming would indeed look to find ways of increasing labour productivity, and hence labour income, as he said, but not at the expense of yields, and not at the cost of ecological destruction of the very materials that go into farming. But I think that problem has to be confronted, and that's why I – perhaps the only one on this panel – remain somewhat skeptical that small-scale farming in general, itself a problematic notion, can feed the world's population today, both because of its absolute size and because the majority are no longer engaged in farming as an activity. And we must not forget that one of the expressions of the cruel contradictions of capitalism today is that so many rural people are net food buyers. Therefore, the cost, the consumer price, of rice or any other major grain, is a major political issue in the countryside, not just the producer price, albeit agricultural policies and agribusiness operations are often criticized for depressing the price that farmers get for their produce. That the consumer price of basic food staples is also a big political issue in the countryside, where, very often, many people have to buy their food staples, again reflects these complex contradictions, dynamics of capitalism, that Jan Douwe refers to.

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Notes on contributors

Henry Bernstein is Adjunct Professor at the College of Humanities and Development Studies, China Agricultural University, Beijing and Professor Emeritus at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

Harriet Friedmann is Professor Emerita at the University of Toronto.

Jan Douwe van der Ploeg is Adjunct Professor of Rural Sociology at the College of Humanities and Development Studies of China Agricultural University, Beijing. He was formerly Professor of Transition Studies at Wageningen University, the Netherlands.

Teodor Shanin is Professor Emeritus at the University of Manchester, Fellow of the Academy of Agricultural Sciences of the Russian Federation, and President of the Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences.

Ben White is Professor Emeritus at the International Institute of Social Studies, The Hague.