

Review Essay

Rural Social Movements in Latin America: In the Eye of the Storm

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Rural Social Movements in Latin America. Organizing for Sustainable Livelihoods, edited by Carmen Diana Deere and Frederick S. Royce. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2009. Pp. xx+357. US\$ 75.00 (hb). ISBN 978-0-8130-3332-7

¿Cambio de rumbo en las políticas agrarias latinoamericanas? Estado, movimientos sociales campesinos y soberanía alimentaria, edited by Jordi Gascón and Xavier Montagut. Barcelona: Icaria Editorial, 2010. Pp. 264. €17 (pb). ISBN 978-84-9888-228-5

Campesinato e agronegócio na América Latina: a questão agrária atual, edited by Bernardo Mançano Fernandes. São Paulo: Conselho Latino-americano de Ciências Sociais and Expressão Popular, 2008. Pp. vii+424. US\$ 11.00 (pb) ISBN 85-7743-0857

Autonomías y emancipaciones. América Latina en movimiento, by Raúl Zibechi. Lima: Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, 2007. Pp. 314. US\$ 11.60 (pb). ISBN 978-9972-834-25-7

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INTRODUCTION

These are very exciting times for anyone studying or supporting peasant movements in Latin America. Over the past two decades, rural social movements have been the lifeline of the Latin American Left and have thus been in the eye of the political storm that has shaken certain countries of the continent. They have been at the forefront of social mobilization against neoliberalism; brought down governments; provided support to left-wing nationalist/populist governments; and have been deeply involved in the global struggle against transnational agribusiness through *Vía Campesina* or the *Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Organizaciones del Campo* (Latin American Coordinator of Rural Organizations, CLOC). In several countries in the region, peasant and indigenous movements have reached unprecedented levels of unity and cohesion. The catalyst for their unity has been their opposition to neoliberalism, which they see as the source of their current predicament of impoverishment and marginalization of peasant families. Through their cooperation and dialogue, an alternative peasant model of development that revolves around the concept of food sovereignty is slowly emerging. Their strategies may have differed – for instance, in the way they relate to the power of the state and alliances with political parties – but their forms of mobilization – including national

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marches, the organization of activists' meetings and encounters, land and public building occupations, and legal challenges to government decisions to grant concessions to large private corporations – are very similar.

However, these observations should not be seen as a regional trend. National trajectories of rural movements have been extremely diverse. They range from situations in which rural movements are currently fragmented and weak, such as in Mexico (de Grammont and MacKinlay 2009), Central America (Edelman 2008), Peru, Chile and the Southern Cone more generally, to situations, such as in Bolivia, Ecuador and Brazil, in which movements have been far more dynamic and have forced some degree of pro-peasant policies. Thus for researchers and activists, many questions arise out of these different trajectories and results. What have been the real achievements of these movements? What kind of alternative agricultural policies do they propose? How have their demands been met or ignored by national government and why?

This review essay explores four recent publications on agrarian social movements in Latin America in order to succinctly identify the major trends in terms of achievements and dilemmas of current agrarian social movements, as well as the themes, methodologies and theoretical frameworks that scholars have used to study them. I will begin by providing a brief overview of the content, objective and originality of each book, and will follow with a discussion of the main themes that stand out from the literature, as well as the readings of the current political conjuncture that different authors provide. In reviewing these works, I will identify some limitations and gaps within the scholarship and I will end this essay with a commentary on the current state of the scholarship on the topic.

Rural Social Movements in Latin America. Organizing for Sustainable Livelihoods, edited by Carmen Diana Deere and Frederick S. Royce, is a valuable book because it presents a very complete overview of the struggles, achievements and proposals of rural social movements throughout Latin America. The book is divided into four sections that cover all the major topics of contemporary rural development – land, indigenous autonomy, women's participation, hydroelectric dams, mining, environmental protection, tourism, access to new technologies, migration, trans-border activism and fair trade – through specific case studies. The first section provides the reader with an introduction to some of the most central characteristics and battles that define the current peasant movement in Latin America. The second section examines the new struggles for agrarian reform and territorial autonomy. The third section focuses on the search for sustainable livelihoods through the mobilization against extractive industries and infrastructure projects. The book ends with a few examples of how peasants organize across borders, link up with different actors and use transnational networks to affect change in various locations. The editors have made an excellent choice of case studies, and have struck a very good balance between articles from rural scholars and leaders of social movements. The book is thus a *must read* for anyone interested in rural social movements in Latin America, particularly students looking for detailed accounts of particular movements or struggles, as well as those seeking to learn about the key features of what is quickly becoming a shared alternative peasant model of development. Even if the analyses are excessively positive and sometimes uncritical, they can serve as an excellent starting point for research. However, since the chapters are rather short, most contributions are thin in terms of theoretical discussion or comparative perspective. Readers can, however, still draw some conclusions by contrasting different chapters.

¿Cambio de rumbo en las políticas agrarias latinoamericanas? Estado, movimientos sociales campesinos y soberanía alimentaria, edited by Jordi Gascón and Xavier Montagut, which showcases the work of several well-known rural scholars such as Miguel Altieri, Victor Bretón and Peter

Rosset, among others, provides some responses to several questions raised by Deere and Royce's edited book. Its objective is clearly to attempt to understand and explain why and how certain rural movements were successful in at least reorientating agricultural state policies towards *Via Campesina's* principle of food sovereignty in Bolivia, Ecuador, Cuba and Venezuela. The book is organized in order to address these issues from three focal points: first by looking at the inherent "advantages" of small-scale peasant agriculture in contrast to industrial large-scale agriculture; second by analysing the achievements, contradictions and challenges of the strategy of peasant movements in regards to the state; and finally by adopting an historical approach that seeks to identify the peculiarity of the current conjuncture in comparison to the period of distributive land reforms during the era of Import Substitution Industrialization. Apart from engaging in critical rural sociology, the authors neither share a particular theoretical approach nor tackle a specific theoretical debate. The extensive knowledge of their case studies, however, produces very sophisticated analysis and critical assessment of the current state policies of progressive governments and their relationship with peasant movements. Positions on these governments and the way in which rural movements have related to them range from optimistic (Fernando Mayorga and Miguel Urioste) to critical yet enthusiastic (Juan Pablo Muñoz, Peter Rosset and Jordi Gascón) and outright critical (Victor Bretón). The main conclusion of the book is that Latin American peasant movements have achieved a great deal of their goals of defending their way of life through mobilization and/or by contributing to elect left-wing governments. However, it is still too early to conclude that this can be the real basis for the protection of peasant agriculture and the emergence of a different (non-developmental) model of development.

Campesinato e agronegócio na América Latina: a questão agrária atual, edited by Brazilian geographer Bernardo Mançano Fernandes, is the result of a research seminar sponsored by the Latin American Council of Social Sciences (CLACSO) that brings together established rural scholars and younger researchers from across the region. The book is written in Spanish and Portuguese and is a quite faithful representation of the diversity of perspectives within Latin American rural studies. The book includes chapters seeking to tackle a theoretical issue; chapters analysing the form of control exercised by agribusiness in a specific sector such as the production of oranges, biofuels or water; chapters analysing specific policies in a particular Latin American country; and, finally, chapters examining the forms of resistance and alternatives put forward by peasant movements. In comparison to the two previously mentioned books, the contributors of *Campesinato e agronegócio na América Latina* share an eclectic political economy approach, partly drawing on Marxist theory, and deploy theoretical concepts more explicitly in their analysis. They also subject the dominant neoliberal pro-agribusiness policy discourse to serious scrutiny by contrasting it with the real situation of increasing marginalization of peasant producers. In addition, in order to explain the nature of the current struggle between peasants and agribusiness, most of the authors highlight the importance of the social specificity of peasant families of being food producers relying mainly on free family labour, and embedded in specific communities and territories. This book will thus be more satisfying for theoretically inclined readers.

Autonomías y emancipaciones. América Latina en movimiento brings together several of Raúl Zibechi's articles on some of the most important Latin American social movements of the past two decades. In a somewhat impressionistic but original manner, the book analyses the indigenous movements in Bolivia and Ecuador, the Landless movement in Brazil, the Zapatista movement in Chiapas, the Piquetero movement and the occupied factories in Argentina, the Mapuche people in Chile, the Colombian armed conflict, the urban dwellers movement in Uruguay and the rise of progressive governments in the region. Zibechi's

criterion for success, however, is not impact on policy but, rather, the ability of movements to remain autonomous and organize an alternative from below. Zibechi sees three trajectories in the relationship between movements and governments (p. 297): (1) situations in which movements remain strong because they are confronting right-wing neoliberal governments (Chiapas, Chile and Colombia); (2) situations in which movements are becoming increasingly fragmented because they are facing left-wing governments applying lighter versions of neoliberalism (Brazil and Ecuador); and (3) situations in which movements have been able to influence left-wing governments because of their organic relationship to the ruling political party (Bolivia). Because he draws freely from a diversity of theorists such as Marx, Scott, Guha and Foucault, as well as well-known Latin American scholars working from the perspective of the 'coloniality of power', such as Anibal Quijano, Edgardo Lander and Silvia Rivera, Zibechi's analysis is extremely interesting and insightful, but somewhat problematic because methodologically his ideas and concepts, though very original and incisive, are often not sufficiently developed and theorized. His ideas remain at the level of interpretation more than demonstration. Zibechi's book should still be taken seriously, however, because it is representative of the best of the 'autonomous turn'¹ in social movement analysis in Latin America.

'PEASANTNESS': LAND, SMALL-SCALE FAMILY AGRICULTURE, AGRIBUSINESS AND TERRITORY

The first major trend that stands out from the research on rural social movements in Latin America is that the great majority of scholars see peasants as a class that, regardless of its heterogeneity, has reached a significant level of political consciousness by claiming its distinctiveness on the basis of its peculiar relationship to land, agriculture and territory. Annette Desmarais, for instance, in her piece on *Via Campesina* in *Rural Social Movements in Latin America*, highlights – through the use of testimonies collected during fieldwork – the growing transnational unity facilitated by the emergence of a kind of peasant ideology revolving around the relationship to land, place and territory, the principle of food sovereignty, and the exchange of farming experiences and struggles among small farmers. Her chapter suggests that beyond the important differences between family producers of the South and the North, peasants find common grounds in their politicized 'place-bound identity'. Because of this, they consider themselves as having the right to remain on the land and the right and obligation to produce food (pp. 46–7). Following a similar vein, Bernardo Mançano Fernandes and Cliff Welch, in their chapter on the control of orange production by agribusiness in the USA and Brazil in *Campesinato e agronegócio na América Latina*, trace how in both countries at different moments in time small-scale producers were gradually displaced by processing companies. Fernandes and Welch and other contributions in the book, such as chapters by Pilar Lizárraga and Carlos Vicafloros, also recognize the distinctiveness of peasant production as a

¹ The term 'autonomy' within peasant movements and rural scholarship in Latin America dates back to the 1980s and refers to the demand and struggle for political independence from the state and political parties. The concept also encompasses the different strategies of peasant movements aimed at gaining more control over the different stages of agricultural production. The current 'autonomous turn' has a different origin, but converges on some elements. It refers as much to a type of interpretation of the nature of social movements in Latin America as it does to a political strategy reframing the dilemma between reform and revolution through the rejection of state power as the main mechanism for radical social change. Autonomists have called for replacing this state-centrism with a focus on the transformation of power relations within civil society and in the everyday lives of the members of social movements (see Alvarez and Escobar 1992; Zibechi 1999; Holloway 2002).

way of life, by emphasizing the importance of self-consumption, unpaid family labour, non-capitalist relations and communitarian outlook. Ironically, Fernandes and Welch show how this 'peasantness' was also instrumentalized in the case of orange juice production in Florida. Here, agribusiness used features of peasant production to present orange juice as a product made by small conscientious family producers in its publicity campaigns (p. 57). However, if peasant or family farmers may have had a place in the publicity campaigns of agribusiness, they can only integrate the agribusiness food chains in a subordinate position.

The analysis of how agribusiness controls agriculture has thus become one of the focal points of some of the best research on rural movements, and movements themselves have contributed to turning the attention of scholars and activists on agribusiness. In chapter five of *Rural Social Movements in Latin America*, the representatives of Brazil's MST, Daniel Corrêa and Andréia Borges Ferreira, point to five important battles in the peasant struggle against agribusiness. The first one is the battle over the control of nature at large, where the agenda of peasant organizations should be the protection of resources and the promotion of the right to healthy food. The second concerns the access to land for small family farmers in order to support life and society's interest at large, instead of profit. The third focal point revolves around the principle of food sovereignty, which underscores the right of people and nations to define their own food policy and the right of small farmers to sell products at fair prices, as well as that of consumers to decide what to eat. The fourth battle is the one around seeds. It opposes the right and obligation of peasants to produce their own seeds to the control and imposition of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) by multinational corporations. The final battle is for production and marketing networks that would be controlled by small family farmers, in which the profit motive would be replaced by people's needs and cultural distinctiveness (pp. 119–20).

Among the books surveyed for this review, it is *Campesinato e agronegócio na América Latina* that tackles the growing power of agribusiness more directly. Horacio Mackinlay's chapter on Mexico in that book expresses vividly how multifaceted the grasp of agribusiness on agriculture has become in Latin America. After tracing how the national agricultural private sector reorganized itself and established links with US agribusiness corporations to influence the process of negotiations of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Mackinlay maps out the state of market control by large family-owned companies and multinational corporations in several crops (maize, barley, fruits and vegetables, tobacco etc.) and comes to the conclusion that agribusiness has not adopted a single strategy. Although it has been able to clearly modify the institutional environment (notably property rights and trade regulations) in its favour, agribusiness has not taken full control of land and production. Depending on the requirements of each crop, agribusiness will decide the kind of arrangements that it will establish with small producers, ranging from renting land for direct production to contract farming, from facilitating credit to small producer for production to simply buying production on the open market. The general tendency, though, is for agribusiness to establish the rules and for peasants to accept these with very little room to manoeuvre. Reasons for this situation are multiple, but the answers proposed by the different authors can be grouped into three: the distinctive nature of agricultural production within neoliberalism in Latin America; the types and role of state policies in promoting agribusiness; and the dominant discourse on agricultural efficiency, which is adverse to small-scale producers.

Norma Giarracca and Miguel Teubal's chapter on Argentinian agriculture in *Campesinato e agronegócio na América Latina* also presents an excellent overview of the role that agriculture and family producers played in the ISI model of development and describe how these have fundamentally changed under neoliberalism. They show that the military dictatorship was key

in this transition because it destroyed the social foundations of the ISI model, crushing at the same time the bargaining power of wage-workers' and of family agricultural producers (pp. 148–50). They also argue that an intra-class conflict at the top, which culminated in the 1990s during Carlos Menem's presidency, also modified the conditions of agricultural production and forced traditional landlords to subordinate themselves to agribusiness and the financial sector. According to Giarracca and Teubal, agribusiness has now expanded its control over Argentinian agriculture by adopting a series of strategies, such as the provision of inputs and technological packages, land purchases, contract farming, and the control of commercialization and processing. However, unlike what seems to be occurring in Mexico, and much more like the way in which the process has evolved in Brazil, the multiple forms of subordinating peasant families adopted by agribusiness seem to be falling under a broad tendency, exemplified by soy bean production, in which large agricultural companies integrate the financial sector and specialize in the production of 'commodities' for exports and adopt strategies that privilege economies of scale that eliminate or marginalize small family producers (pp. 154–5).

The adoption of neoliberalism by Latin American states since the 1980s and the rise of agribusiness have led many scholars to find ways to attempt to move away from a romantic defence of peasants and make the case for small-scale peasant model of development. In the books surveyed, the chapter by Peter Rosset in *Rural Social Movements in Latin America* takes on this task by relying on research that has demonstrated that small-scale family farming can be more productive and have more impact on local socio-economic development than large-scale industrial farming, while protecting the environment. Similarly, Miguel Altieri's chapter in *¿Cambio de rumbo en las políticas agrarias latinoamericanas?* displays a great deal of evidence, mainly related to environmental sustainability and bio-ecological diversity, in order to convince the reader of the many advantages of small-scale agro-ecological farming. Although the debate between small-scale and large-scale agriculture is far from concluded, scholars tend to accept that the promotion of small-scale agriculture can, at least, have relatively positive effects on rural poverty alleviation, provided that the state commits the appropriate support and funds. The more contentious issue relates to whether small-scale agriculture is productive and competitive enough, under the current global food regime dominated by agribusiness, to be the basis for modern agriculture. Considering the scale of subsidies and protection that large-scale farming receives, the latter discussion still raises the issue of the role of the state. The most important question then becomes why states have decided not to support peasant production. A short, if rather simplistic, answer would be that the pressure on developing countries from international financial institutions to expand the production of export crops is too great, and that the capacity of agribusiness to help them meet this goal far superior.

Activists and scholars that observe this heightened control of agribusiness over agriculture in spite of important advantages of small-scale family production has naturally turned to the role of state decisions and policies. The great majority of scholars in the four books surveyed identify the impact of the deregulation and liberalization of agriculture of the 1980s and 1990s as a crucial moment. There is also a clear consensus on the negative consequences of these policies on peasant families and small-scale family producers. There is a difference, however, between Marxist-influenced scholars and social movement representatives on the one hand and scholars with other theoretical influences on the other. In *Campesinato e agronegócio na América Latina* and in *¿Cambio de rumbo en las políticas agrarias latinoamericanas?*, authors present the shifts in state policies as deliberate policy decisions determined by the specific groups that controlled their respective state in order to further their class interests. In *Rural Social Movements in Latin America*, most scholars do not question the reasons for the shift

in the agricultural policy model and seem to take it as given. This difference in perspective and explanation is nowhere more striking than in the book *Rural Social Movements in Latin America* itself, between the chapters written by the representatives of social movements, who present their struggles, demands and proposals clearly in class terms, and the chapters written by academics, who often limit themselves to reporting on the struggles and who draw limited class-related conclusions.

Regardless of whether they see the state in class terms or not, many scholars propose alternative policies, either state-centred or civil society-centred, that would benefit small-scale producers. The policy proposals put forward by peasant movements are rather straightforward: reverse neoliberal reforms, block the further expansion of agribusiness and multinational corporations, and develop a new agricultural model based on state support to and promotion of small family producers (see the chapter by Rosset, Tiney and Saisari in *Rural Social Movements in Latin America*). Other less grand proposals, surfing on the good governance agenda of the post-Washington consensus, simply argue in favour of the participation of rural communities in the elaboration, implementation and monitoring of specific policies. This is obviously not without its contradictions. Mary Allegretti and Marianne Schmink's chapter in *Rural Social Movement in Latin America* on the role of the rubber tappers' movement from the Brazilian Amazon in the development of a national state programme of land-use planning and environmental services, called *Proambiente*, is excellent in showing the contradictions behind the adoption of a social movement's policy proposal by the state. The authors show how the specific struggle of the rubber tappers and their choice of discourse and allies led to the emergence of a proposal to create a sustainable extractive reserve fund that combined participatory planning of land use, preservation and development of agro-ecological techniques and financial compensation to peasants for environmental services by the state. They also examine the contradictions that emerged once the context-specific proposal was turned into state policy thanks to the political strength of the social movement. As other research comparing several experiences of community-based natural resource management across the developing world has shown (Dressler et al. 2010), Allegretti and Schmink's conclusion is that adoption by the state of an alternative policy emanating from a localized social movement and its subsequent 'transplanting' to different regions and contexts can lead to a more or less empty top-down policy. This attempt at scaling up and expanding the rubber tappers' initiative did not generate the political dynamism that the movement triggered in the first place and that would have been needed elsewhere for the reserve policy to really meet its aims. Considering the fact that social movements in Brazil do not have the power and influence over the Workers Party and the government that other rural movements have over their allied party and government in places such as Bolivia, for instance, the whole issue revolves around the power of different actors and the choices made by left-wing politicians. In common with most of the contributors to *Rural Social Movements in Latin America*, the issue of class power and its role on party politics surfaces here, but the authors do not address this sufficiently.

Increasingly, influenced by the growing importance that discourse analysis has acquired in the social sciences, in order to tackle the contradictory (and often inappropriate) nature of state policies, many rural scholars are turning their attention to the way in which these policies have been presented and justified. Several contributors to *Campesinato e agronegócio na América Latina* examine state discourse and challenge the assumptions upon which dominant agricultural policies and rural programmes are based. Pilar Lizárraga and Carlos Vicaflores, in their chapter on competing visions of rural development in Tarija, Bolivia, analyse the content of the state discourse behind a local programme to stimulate rural enterprises.

Using Gramsci's concepts of hegemony and common sense, Lizárraga and Vicaflores argue that the crisis of the state at the national level facilitated a rupture in the neoliberal hegemony that allowed peasant organizations to question the dominant, racist and colonial ideas of rural development that celebrate the modern (white) entrepreneur and discredit (indigenous) peasants as backward and inefficient (pp. 228–9). In Tarija, however, the ruling bloc was not displaced and neo-colonial neoliberal views of rural development remained the foundations of programmes that profess to generate economic development. The authors argue, however, that the programme represents a clear class project because it is cast in individualistic and atomistic terms, which contrasts with the peasant way of conceiving and appropriating the territory. Space in the state programme is conceived as an 'empty space' and the projection of the local is towards the global; hence the encouragement of extensive cattle ranching. In contrast, peasant organizations conceive the local space in terms of direct access to resources (land, water and biodiversity) for subsistence purposes and privilege the community and the local market (pp. 236–7). In the same book, the chapter by Jorge Montenegro Gómez on the vision of rural development promoted by inter-American international organization arrives at a similar diagnostic. Through an examination of how these institutions have incorporated the concept of social capital and the idea of participation into the neoliberal model of development, Montenegro Gómez argues that these institutions reproduce a 'flat' conception of space, which conceptualizes it fundamentally as harmonious, without antagonistic actors and conflicts of interests (pp. 266–7). The discourse of participation represents, according to Montenegro Gómez, a new form of social control geared at demobilizing and disintegrating social movements, because this participation submits movements to the times and rules of the state bureaucracy and the financial imperatives of state funding (p. 265).

The most promising research on peasant agriculture and peasant movements takes space and territory seriously. Apart from the work of Brazilian geographer Bernardo Mançano Fernandes (2005), within the Latin American scholarship on social movements, Raúl Zibechi is one of the authors who has consistently underlined the importance of territorial control for the emergence and consolidation of an alternative to neoliberalism. According to him, there are seven features that characterize the most radical anti-neoliberal social movements in Latin America and make them uniquely alternative (pp. 21–7)². The first and most important one is that movements have managed to territorialize themselves on a specific physical space, and organize around communities that become spaces of self-government. Second, movements' autonomy from political parties and state is based on their ability to secure resources for the material subsistence of their members. Third, the revalorization of culture and identity has been central to the mobilization capacity of movements. Fourth, movements have developed the ability to form their own organic intellectuals. Fifth, the new role of women has been transforming traditional gender roles within communities and movements. The sixth characteristic is that movements have been particularly preoccupied with the organization of work (seeking unalienated forms of labour and trying out collective labour of different kinds) and their relationship with nature. Lastly, the forms of mobilization have been marked by 'self-affirmation', according to Zibechi, a kind of subjectivity based on experience rather than traditional doctrinarian categories dominant on the Left. According to Zibechi, the creation by movements of a 'new territoriality' is the most important characteristic, because it is where movements' members take control of their daily lives and upon which all the other

² These are the Zapatista movement in Chiapas, the Landless movement in Brazil, the Piquetero movement and the occupied factories in Argentina, and the peasant indigenous movements in Bolivia and Ecuador.

characteristics materialize. This is also possible because the forms of political organization that movements have adopted are based on a reconfiguration of the extended family unit that ‘creates a new domestic space that is neither private nor public but something new that encompasses them both’ (p. 47). Zibechi observes that movements are beginning to convert these spaces into alternatives to the dominant system, because they are at the same time spaces of subsistence and political action, and also because they build non-capitalist relationships on them (p. 48).

My own research, on alternative experiences of development emerging from the struggle for land of the Zapatista movement in Chiapas and the MST in Brazil (Vergara-Camus 2009, 2011), points to very similar conclusions to those of Zibechi. From the perspective of authors who emphasize the non-capitalist nature of *some aspects* of peasant production, at least two issues need to be researched and not assumed: the nature of social relations of production and the potential *and* limitations of non-capitalist relations of production as a stepping stone to build an alternative to neoliberalism. Certain authors, like several contributors to the book *Campesinato e agronegócio na América Latina*, argue that the non-capitalist elements of peasant production, regardless of its integration into capitalist relations, is a source of resistance to capitalism and, depending on the actions of peasant movements themselves, *can be* (but are not necessarily) the basis for an alternative model of development. Most of them would also recognize that the non-capitalist nature of peasant production is *not absolute* and that many contradictions arise, especially when attempting to build alternative relations of production or distribution within the capitalist market. In this context, questions of resistance strategies and alternative commercialization networks are thus not that easily answered and there is no magic bullet in this respect. The books surveyed study several options such as the creation of corporatist pressure groups (Fernandes and Welch in *Campesinato e agronegócio na América Latina*), fair-trade networks (Conroy in *Rural Social Movements in Latin America*), local farmers’ markets (García Guerreiro in *Campesinato e agronegócio na América Latina*), ecotourism (Solís Librado in *Rural Social Movements in Latin America*) and the provision of environmental services (Allegretti and Schminck in *Rural Social Movements in Latin America*), among others. However, considering the distinctiveness of peasant production and the importance of land in peasant mobilization and political identity, agrarian reform and the protection of peasant access to land are once again central to the discussion on alternative models of rural development in Latin America.

AGRARIAN REFORM, PROPERTY, THE STATE AND ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT

In addition to the previously mentioned chapter by Peter Rosset in *Rural Social Movements in Latin America*, several scholars contributing to the surveyed books take on the task of evaluating the current agrarian reforms in Latin America by focusing on the theoretical models that have inspired them. The general conclusion is that, with the possible exception of Bolivia and Venezuela, no agrarian reform law in the region can act as the foundation of an alternative model of rural development because most rural policies continue to be guided by a pro-market neoliberal conceptual bias (see chapters by Milfred López, Jorge Montenegro Gómez, and Sergio Pereira Leite and Rodrigo Vieira de Avila in *Campesinato e agronegócio na América Latina*). In the case of Bolivia, Miguel Urioste’s chapter in *¿Cambio de rumbo en las políticas agrarias latinoamericanas?* highlights that Evo Morales’ agrarian reform law represents a mix of historical achievements and setbacks (pp. 140–1). The state has recovered some capacity to reclaim land through audits that can determine whether a property fulfils its socio-economic

function. The law also stipulates that the land should be destined to landless peasants. However, other parts of the law indicate that in cases of expropriation, landowners will be compensated at market prices, and more importantly that the legal limit to landownership is now set at 5,000 hectares. An additional important concession to large landlords is that properties larger than 5,000 hectares registered *before* the law are not subjected to this limit (Cunha and Gonçalves 2010, 188). This, combined with the fact that audits have proven to be an inefficient way of recuperating land in the past, indicate that real agrarian reform will be difficult to carry out in Bolivia.

According to the government, 23.46 million hectares would have been distributed to approximately 100,000 families (Cunha and Gonçalves 2010, 188). However, another contradiction is evident when we consider the type of land that has been distributed. As in many other Latin American countries in the past, the Bolivian state has used public land to distribute close to half of this land (9 million hectares) to indigenous communities in the Amazonian lowlands. This, however, conflicts with the expectations of indigenous migrants from the Andean highlands, who now see little chance of having access to land. The only possible option for indigenous peasants from the West lies in the process of scrutinizing the legality of the property titles of large landowners, which has been the area in which the Morales government has made less progress (p. 146). Some would say that the political conditions were not ripe for a more radical agrarian reform.

Interestingly, in most of the research on agrarian reform, whether the chapters are written by rural movement representatives or academics, constitutional clauses that attribute a social function to property stand out as particularly important mechanisms for the possible emergence of an alternative to neoliberalism. Surprisingly, however, not many researchers make these constitutional clauses their main object of study. The social function of property was, for instance, instrumental to the success of targeted mobilization and distribution of land in Brazil, or became the final achievement and way to institutionalize the peasant demand for land in countries such as Bolivia and Ecuador. Several authors also mention that the social function of property, in combination with other principles such as food sovereignty or *sumak kawsay* (*buen vivir* in Spanish, or 'living well' in English), if enshrined in national constitutions, could be the instrument for enabling social change and possibly forming the basis of post-neoliberal policies. The new Constitution of Bolivia incorporates the principle of food sovereignty for matters of agricultural policies and that of the social function of property for issues related to access to resources. In Ecuador under President Correa, the constitution also incorporates notions of food sovereignty and that of *sumak kawsay* (*buen vivir*) for socio-economic matters in general as guiding principles of the development model and state intervention (see the chapter by Juan Pablo Muñoz in *¿Cambio de rumbo en las políticas agrarias latinoamericanas?*, pp. 158–64).³ According to Muñoz, this incorporation in principle suggests the beginning of a post-neoliberal era, since the idea of *buen vivir* implies 'equitable and sustainable development' based on 'solidarity instead of competition, equality instead of social disparity, and protection instead of destruction of the environment' (pp. 160–1). In terms of agricultural policies, the adoption of the food sovereignty approach in the constitution suggests an improvement compared to the concept of food security, because it proclaims to seek food self-sufficiency by privileging small-scale sustainable producers. Muñoz remains sceptical,

³ Since it is very recent, the adoption of *sumak kawsay* or *buen vivir* as one of the guiding principle of their development model by certain Latin American governments has not yet been analysed academically and its application is yet to be seen. For very preliminary but interesting discussions, see Esteva (2010), Walsh (2010), Becker (2011), Gudyas (2011), Thomson (2011), Arsel (2012) and Arsel and Avila Angel (2012).

however, because the constitutional principles are not accompanied by any strong commitment to guaranteeing rights and access to land, water and protection of biodiversity, which are fundamental for the consolidation of an alternative model of development. Even though he seems to be suspending his judgement on Correa's government, Muñoz sees these recent developments as indicative of a clear decision to partially redistribute wealth by repositioning the state and establishing authoritarian and clientelist links to social movements that are gradually weakening movements (pp. 156–7). Jordi Gascón's concluding chapter in *¿Cambio de rumbo en las políticas agrarias latinoamericanas?* also points out several contradictions in Ecuador's current policies, such as Correa's inclusion of certain amendments that allow for the import of GMOs, the legalization of the occupation of mangroves by shrimp companies, and the possibility of producing biofuels from food crops (p. 242).

Ecuador is not the only case where rural social movements have made progress on one front – for instance, constitutional recognition of certain principles and rights – but have failed in forcing governments to significantly transform agricultural policies. Jeffery Webber has dismissed the process of the Constituent Assembly and the constitutional reforms in Bolivia, because the actual policies of the government of Evo Morales represent a shift towards a reconstituted neoliberalism (2012, 169). It is true that Morales' policies have not tried to change the focus of Bolivian agriculture away from the large-scale commercial production of commodities towards goals of food self-sufficiency based on small-scale farming. With the exception of Cuba, due to highly extraordinary circumstances, this has actually not been the case in any Latin American country yet. Does that mean that left-wing governments are not moving away from neoliberalism or that the current limited achievements cannot become stepping stones for rural social movements to push for the abandonment of neoliberalism?

Marc Becker (2011) has shown how dynamic and complex the battle to include indigenous conceptions and rights into the constitution was in Ecuador. He has argued that we should not, however, underestimate the significance of this. Even though key laws, such as the mining law, have maintained their neoliberal character, the ability for the state to intervene has increased. Authors analysing the creation of the Yasuní–ITT initiative of the Correa government, which proposes to leave oil reserves unexploited in exchange for financial compensations from the international community, and combines a deployment of the indigenous notion of *Pacha Mama* (Mother Earth) with neoliberal commodification, have also raise concerns about the contradictory character of Correa's policies, and also its statism (Arsel 2012, 154; Arsel and Avila Angel 2012, 220–3). It is clear that constitutional recognition of the principle of food sovereignty or *buen vivir* is not in itself sufficient. But as the recent history of rural social movements attests, laws and constitutional clauses have been successfully used by rural movements to force policy changes. Future advances will depend on the ability of rural movements to affect the balance of class forces within society and the state.

PEASANTS, POLITICS, THE STATE, SOCIAL CHANGE AND AUTONOMY

In his classic book *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, Barrington Moore (1966) concluded that peasant revolts were rarely favourable to peasants. He stated: 'peasants have provided the dynamite to bring down the old building. To the subsequent work of reconstruction they have brought nothing; instead they have been – even in France – its first victims' (Moore 1966, 480). Could we say the same today of Latin American peasant movements? The literature surveyed for this review is not unanimous, but most authors would disagree with Barrington Moore, as many movements across Latin America have moved from

protest to proposal. The question of whether they are having a real impact on policies and whether these policies end up being beneficial for them finds, however, as many responses as there are authors. On the one hand, surprisingly, social movement activists are far from complacent towards the progressive governments that they have helped to elect. Most of them recognize the importance of reaching a higher degree of unity within the movement in order to be able to mobilize successfully and force governments into taking certain decisions or adopting certain policies. Chapters written by leaders of social movements in *Rural Social Movements in Latin America* show the degree of autonomy from political parties and the state that rural movements have been able to achieve, but also how they have been able to form coalitions with political parties to confront or access state power.

The chapter written by George Ann Potter and Leonida Zurita, the former executive secretary of the Coordinator of Peasant Women of the Tropic (COCAMTROP) of Bolivia and currently alternate senator for the Movement Toward Socialism (MAS), exemplifies how even movements that have been incorporated into the governing party and the state have not given them a blank cheque. Potter and Zurita proudly underline, for example, that the increase in the number of women candidates for the MAS was the result of pressure by women and women's movements inside the party. Women achieving 35 per cent of the elected delegates to the Constituent Assembly of 2007 and forming 48 per cent of the elected MAS delegates, as well as the nomination of several indigenous peasant women to important ministerial positions, are seen as victories that still need to be transformed into platforms for the organization of women on 'women's issues' (p. 242). Similarly, according to Silvestre Saisari, the national coordinator of the Indigenous, Peasant and Landless Workers Movement of Bolivia (MST-Bolivia), Evo Morales' agrarian reform law, though not perfect, is important because it is broadening 'the provisions for land to revert to the state if the land is not being used for a socio-economic function', and because it allows rural social movements to initiate and participate in the auditing process of properties (p. 134). Peter Rosset's analysis of the limits of Evo Morales' agrarian reform echoes that of social movements by reminding us that the Bolivian state has traditionally been very weak in confronting large landowners. In addition, Morales is placed in a difficult position as an important part of the Bolivian *latifundios* are held by Brazilian capital and are thus ironically defended by the Brazilian state (interview in *¿Cambio de rumbo en las políticas agrarias latinoamericanas?*, p. 202). According to him, even if the Bolivian peasant and indigenous movements have been capable of mobilizing large numbers of people, they do not have the capacity to occupy land, as in the case of the MST in Brazil. Under these circumstances, and in order to avoid regional secessions or a *coup d'état*, Morales needs to be very cautious. Rural movements throughout the region understand that policies, even those of allied governments, are the result of the balance of power at a particular point in time, and have thus been mobilizing to not only show their support but also pressure their respective governments into carrying out agrarian reform or implementing favourable agricultural policies. This has also been a long-standing strategy of the MST in Brazil, even in places where the allied Worker's Party (PT) governed a particular state or held the federal government. As Miguel Carter's chapter on the MST in Brazil in *Rural Social Movements in Latin America* correctly highlights, one of the most important factors explaining the success of the organization has been its ability to rely on mass mobilization and combine it with a strategic creativity – which includes long-distance marches, sit-ins, street demonstrations and protest camps – that moves from confrontation to negotiation. The MST, for instance, continued to use the occupation of public buildings as one of its key tactics to attract public attention on the lack of support for smallholders even in a state like Rio Grande do Sul, which was governed by the PT throughout the early 2000s. Similarly, during

Lula's presidency (2003–11), the movement also organized several marches to Brasilia to pressure the president into accelerating the agrarian reform and targeting funding to peasant family producers.

What becomes clear from the surveyed literature – although no specific text argues it directly, except for the concluding chapter of Jordi Gascón in *¿Cambios de Rumbo en las Políticas Agrarias Latinoamericanas?* – is that national specificities matter in the ability of rural movements to successfully pressure their politicians. The degree of autonomy (or lack of autonomy) that politicians have in respect to agribusiness is also a determining factor in understanding state policies and actions of even 'progressive governments' – as the case of Lula's presidency, to the detriment of rural movements, attests. The core of the matter revolves around the nature of state power and the different strategies that rural movements have adopted towards it.

The tricky issue of the relationship between social movements and political parties and left-wing or progressive governments has been the subject of heated debate within the Latin American Left for several decades. The Zapatistas, with their innovative political strategy of not 'taking' state power but developing experiences of self-government, gave this debate a new dimension. The pragmatic experience of the MST in Brazil, the incorporation of social movement activists into the management of state policies in Ecuador and the integration of social movement leaders into the government in Bolivia under Morales have all raised numerous practical and theoretical issues. For Fernando Mayorga in *¿Cambios de Rumbo en las Políticas Agrarias Latinoamericanas?*, the relationship between social movements and the current state in Bolivia cannot be understood using the concepts of autonomy or co-optation. What we have in front of us is an 'unstable coalition' because certain movements, such as the *cocaleros*, are the organic and permanent support base of the MAS. Others, like certain labour unions and cooperatives, have circumstantially allied themselves with government, while other groups, particularly the *Central Obrera Boliviana*, have subscribed to the agenda of the MAS but have remained independent and have not entered the inner circles of power. Finally certain organizations such as the *Consejo Nacional de Ayllus y Markas del Qollasuyu* (CONAMAQ) have acted alternatively as allies or interest groups during the Constituent Assembly. Mayorga, however, points to an incipient process of institutionalization of the relationship between movements and the state that began in 2007 and 2008, in the context of the Constituent Assembly, with the signing of the Unity Pact by most peasant and indigenous movements and the creation of the *Coordinadora Nacional por el Cambio* (National Coordinator for Change, CONALCAM). The CONALCAM was crucial for the mobilizing of popular sectors against the opposition of the regional oligarchies to Morales's government during the first year of his mandate. However, the relationship between social movements and the state is not one without contradictions, because even though there is a dynamic exchange between them, President Morales seems to be cultivating a direct relationship with the movements that does not necessarily pass through the government or the CONALCAM (pp. 94–5). The spectre of clientelism surfaces here, but according to the literature, nowhere has it been more acute and devastating for social movements than in Ecuador.

One of the rural movements' experiences that caught the attention of scholars was indeed the experience of the *Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador* (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador, CONAIE), because it played a crucial (though controversial) role in the struggle against neoliberalism and the fall of right-wing governments. Ecuadorian scholar Victor Bretón, in *¿Cambio de rumbo en las políticas agrarias latinoamericanas?*, traces the political alliance of the CONAIE with the government of Lucio

Gutiérrez (2003–5) and sees this as the culmination of a long process of neutralization of the rebellious potential of the indigenous peasant movement. Using his extensive knowledge of the Ecuadorian countryside, Bretón argues that the agrarian reform of the 1960s and 1970s, which was in reality a process of colonization of new land, ironically demobilized the peasant movement and facilitated the rise of a new Indigenous elite. With the implementation of neoliberalism, this indigenous elite began to emphasize indigenous ethnicity as a mobilizing tool for the creation of a new pan-indigenous movement. Later, a faction of this elite played the role of mediator between the state and the rural population, through the creation of a plethora of NGOs linked to externally funded development programmes. This faction of the indigenous leadership was transformed into what Charles Hale (2004) has called the '*indio permitido*' and became part and parcel of the power apparatus of neoliberal multiculturalism (p. 69). This, according to Bretón, led to the 'over-ethnicisation' of issues of rural development that ended up obscuring processes of land concentration and lumpenproletarianization of a large sector of the Ecuadorian rural labour force.

Coming to similar conclusions but working with Foucault's idea of governmentality and biopower, Raúl Zibechi contends that the most important danger for movements today is that of being swollen by the logic of the state and institutional politics, and in the process losing their autonomy. According to him, the experience of the CONAIE exemplifies this danger. Having been at the forefront of several uprisings and grassroots democratic practices in the 1990s, its leaders – without consulting their members – adopted a statist strategy (p. 287) that contradicted the alternative potential of the movement. On the opposite end, the path taken by the Zapatistas in Chiapas is, for Zibechi, 'the most coherent and explicit' new form of doing politics (p. 145) in Latin America. Peter Rosset (interviewed in *¿Cambio de rumbo en las políticas agrarias latinoamericanas?*) is more pragmatic. He believes that electing left-wing governments has been an important step, but that movements need to be able to keep their autonomy by adopting a position of 'constructive support' for appropriate policies and one of critique and pressure when they are not. From the perspective of peasant movements, one of the fundamental conditions should be the guarantee by national states that food will be purchased from peasant producers instead of agribusiness (p. 195). The debate on the relationship between social movements and the state or their strategies towards state power is far from over, but the three cited authors can be said to represent the diversity of opinions on this matter.

The case of Ecuador is, however, very different from that of Bolivia, mainly because Correa, unlike Evo Morales, does not have a social movement activist trajectory. His relationship with social movements is thus much more ambiguous and his governing style is more reminiscent of Latin American populist politicians. Juan Pablo Muñoz characterizes the current Correa government as a 'developmental government with social vocation, sprinkled with a good doses of Christian morality with a new form of *caudillismo*, as well as an anti-imperialist and revolutionary rhetoric' (p. 157). Nevertheless, Correa has responded to the peasant and indigenous movement by calling a Constituent Assembly and later enshrining the principle of food sovereignty into the Ecuadorian Constitution. However, in opposition to this, Correa's mining law continues to encourage extractive industries that often encroach on indigenous territories. Movements have reacted differently to Correas' political ambiguity. This time, the CONAIE has stayed away from any formal alliance with Correa and has criticized its food sovereignty laws for being too lenient with GMO seeds. The CONAIE has even reclaimed its leading role of the past by successfully calling on a mass mobilization against these measures of the Correa government on 22 March 2012. The

Confederación Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinas, Indígenas y Negras (FENOCIN), having no prior experience of cooperation with the government, has decided not to oppose Correa, and some of its leaders took positions within the state because they saw the progressive government as an opportunity to achieve certain reforms (Rosset interview, p. 205).⁴

This seems to be the general rule in the region. Rural movements take the decision whether or not to collaborate with political parties and the state on the basis of their own experiences with them and rarely on ideological grounds. What the recent experiences and dilemmas in Ecuador, Bolivia and Brazil to a lesser extent suggest is that rural social movements seem to be entering into a new, much more complicated, cycle of mobilization: a cycle that will place them in opposition to allied governments and parties that have not implemented the reforms needed to support peasant producers and move away from neoliberalism, but also a cycle in which movement leaders attempt to push for change from within the state. Depending on how this is resolved, this new cycle is bound to provide further material for heated discussion between radical autonomists and more state-centred scholars. Relying on Foucault's concept of governmentality to discredit attempts of social movements to bring about social change, as Zibechi has recently done, does not provide a fruitful avenue for analysis. It tends to reify the state, by transforming it into an encompassing structure that imposes a certain logic on all the agents involved with it. By doing so, it also posits anti-state strategies as superior to any other strategy, instead of seeing them as the results of very peculiar processes and internal decisions of social movements, which by definition should not be subject to generalization.

COMMENTS ON THE SCHOLARSHIP ON RURAL SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN LATIN AMERICA

In general, the state of the art of scholarship on agrarian movements seems to be following the dynamism of agrarian movements, but its limitations are the reflection of the fragmented nature of the academic world. Because of the importance of rural movements in Latin American politics, a great amount of research is being carried out, and very often involves multidisciplinary approaches and intensive and fascinating fieldwork. This has the advantage of providing very detailed descriptions of a great variety of cases. The downside is that in this era of academic over-specialization, most of the scholarship is organized around single case studies that often do not engage in debate or dialogue with findings from other case studies. Most of the research simply attempts to identify trends rather than examining them through comparative studies that have the clear objective of explaining the commonalities and differences as well as the diverging trajectories. Moreover, the use of theory seems uneven. Only a minority of researchers are preoccupied with applying an encompassing and coherent theoretical framework to understand their case studies. Most of the scholarship surveyed in this review, with the exception of Giarracca and Teubal, Horacio Mackinlay, Bernardo Mançano Fernandes and Cliff Welch Jordi Gascón, and Raúl Zibechi, adopts a view that is too narrowly focused on the current neoliberal conjuncture, instead of taking an historical perspective that could interrogate the role of the global conjuncture on national processes of mobilization. Most of the scholarship also looks at social movements more or less in isolation from their adversaries,

⁴ Since the Constituent Assembly, the FENOCIN has gradually distanced itself from the Correa government until it definitively broke with it in its national congress of March 2013.

be it state officials, agribusiness or traditional landlords, and their allies. Clearly, there is a research gap on the dynamic results and limitations of the politics of conflict and alliances of rural social movements in relation to other actors.

Because they seek to insert specific processes into larger trends and understand policy outcomes in terms of the balance of power, theoretical approaches that come closer to a more holistic perspective are still those that adopt a class-based political economy approach to rural mobilization. Historically informed political economy approaches, which weave together global and local processes and take class seriously by understanding this as being the result of struggles between classes at the national level, are still the approaches that allow us to understand rural processes in all their complexities. The challenge for rural scholars thus remains to attempt to provide a detailed account of the nature of the tree (the case study of a specific sector or movement) without losing sight of the forest (the ongoing and changing dynamic of specific national countrysides within the current globalization of agriculture).

Finally, a great deal of the scholarship reviewed in this essay has focused on state policies or the strategies of rural movements towards the state. However, very few scholars explicitly deal with a particular conception of the state or refer to the theoretical discussions around state theory. Few scholars attempt to theorize what is specific or peculiar about the form that the state takes in the countryside or the role that it plays in social conflict over resources. This is nowhere more evident than in Carmen Deere and Frederick Joyce's edited book *Rural Social Movements in Latin America*, in which the class analysis of state policies by social movement representatives and activist academics contrasts with the fundamentally pluralist conception of the state of most other contributors. Because of the centrality of the state in much of the research, whether it is explicitly acknowledged or not, there seems to be a need to bring the state back in (once again), not only thematically but also through a theoretically sophisticated discussion on the nature and role of the state in the ongoing process of neoliberal globalization of the countryside, or in the emerging post-neoliberal models of development.

Considering the extreme complexity of processes of rural transformation in Latin America and the diversity of organizational experiences and political strategies of rural movements, no single book could possibly provide a complete picture of the new faces of the Latin American countryside. Hence, activists, students and scholars should read *Rural Social Movements in Latin America. Organizing for Sustainable Livelihoods* to get a clear idea of this diversity. They should read *¿Cambio de rumbo en las políticas agrarias latinoamericanas? Estado, movimientos sociales campesinos y soberanía alimentaria* to understand what have been the main political achievements or setbacks of the most 'successful' rural social movements that have engaged with the state through alliances with political parties, and what new contradictions are emerging from these uneasy alliances. *Campesinato e agronegócio na América Latina: a questão agrária atual* is a must read for anyone looking for theoretically informed analysis of the discourses and strategies of agribusiness and governments, as well as the responses by peasant movements. Finally, *Autonomías y Emancipaciones. América Latina en Movimiento* should be consulted by those interested in reflecting on the alternative potential of some of the most important social movements of the region.

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