

**INTRODUCTION TO**  
**FAMILY AGRICULTURE AND**  
**THE CONVERGENCE OF PEASANT STRUGGLES TODAY**  
  
***FACING THE DOMINATION OF FINANCIAL CAPITAL***

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This book, driven by a collective reflection within the framework of the World Forum for Alternatives, is dedicated to the problems faced by the Southern and Northern family agricultures in the current neoliberal era of financial capital domination worldwide, and to the revival of peasant struggles for their social emancipation and legitimate right of access to land and food. Obviously, such struggles also concern all categories of workers and the people as a whole because what is at stake is the challenge to reach food sovereignty and to build our societies, at the local, national and global levels, on the principles of social justice, equality and real democracy.

The food crisis, which erupted in 2007–2008 and resulted in catastrophic effects on the peoples of numerous countries of the South, especially Africa, as well as popular rebellions, represent two of the many dimensions of the crisis of the capitalist world system. Other very worrying aspects include socioeconomic, political, ideological, energy, or climatic ones. The food and agricultural dimensions of the current systemic crisis reveal the global failure and deep dysfunctions that characterise the agricultural ‘model’ imposed worldwide by financial capital and transnational agribusiness corporations since the beginning of the neoliberal era in

the late 1970s, along with the implementation of austerity policies in the North and the structural adjustment plans (SAPs) in the global South. For more than three and a half decades, the peasantries of the world have been suffering an intensification of attacks by capital on their land, natural resources and means of production. These attacks have also been eroding national sovereignty and the role of the state, destroying individuals, families and communities, devastating the environment, and threatening the survival of huge numbers of human beings across the world.

The dysfunctions affecting the agricultural sectors can be perceived by identifying a series of striking paradoxes. As a matter of fact, approximately three billion people on the planet today continue to suffer from hunger (one-third) or malnutrition (two-thirds), although agricultural productions are greatly exceeding food needs, with an effective overproduction of at least 150 per cent. Furthermore, a huge majority of these people are themselves peasants or living in rural areas: three-quarters of those suffering from undernourishment are rural. Meanwhile, the expansion of the areas for cultivation worldwide is accompanied by a significant decline in peasant populations compared to the populations in the urban areas, which absorb the massive and persistent rural exodus, mainly into growing miserable slums. Moreover, an increasing proportion of land is cultivated by transnational corporations, which do not direct their agricultural production towards food consumption, but rather towards energy or industrial outlets (for example, agro-fuels). In most countries of the South that are excluded from the benefits of capitalist globalisation, particularly sub-Saharan Africa and South East Asia, a relative dynamism of agricultural exports derived from rental commercial crops coexists with increasing imports of basic products to meet food needs. Clearly, and urgently, things must change.

This project was initiated as an attempt to make sense of how these urgent global problems are manifested in the North and the South, and while there are common traits in how global capital goes after profit, the receptions on the ground differ. Hence, it is important for struggles in different parts of the world – affected differently but also sharing related features – to develop a concerted understanding of the problems and prioritise strategies that take heed of the differences and share common visions for the future. Thus, in this book, authors from different continents have been invited to make their contributions and offer different perspectives and reflections and to relate their local struggles and immediate concerns to a global and long-term vision.

### **Theoretical and Historical Framework**

The first chapter provides a broad theoretical and historical framework for the book. Samir Amin proposes a series of analytical elements to answer major questions about the appropriate kind of agriculture (capitalist, socialist or peasant) to guarantee the objective of food sovereignty; the agricultural productions to be prioritised to reach a development model, which is able to conciliate the improvement in food supply and the preservation of the environment for the generations to come; and the reflection on the resolution of the agrarian question by constructing convergence of struggles within diversity.

First, he analyses family agriculture in the present world and the differences between the North and the South. In the North (North America and Western Europe), a modern and highly productive family agriculture largely dominates, absorbs technological innovations, efficiently supplies these countries' food demands and produces exportable surpluses. However, while totally integrated into the capitalist system, this agriculture does not share a key characteristic of capitalism: its labour organisation generally requires a reduced and

polyvalent workforce. Furthermore, within the capitalist logic, a significant part of the income generated by farmers – even when they own land and equipment and receive subsidies – is controlled and collected by segments of commercial, industrial and financial capital, implying that their remuneration does not correspond to their productivity. Therefore, family agriculture can be assimilated to the status of a subcontractor or an artisan working in a putting-out system, and squeezed between supermarkets, agribusiness and banking.

In the South where peasant families constitute almost half of humanity (three billion people), the types of agricultural systems vary widely, with considerable differences in productivity among them (from mechanised latifundium to micro or small parcels, with lands for self-consumption or cash crop exports, etc.). But, taken as a whole, these Southern agricultures – that are more often than not peasant ones – suffer from a huge and growing productivity gap as compared to those of the North. Most family agricultures of the South are under-equipped, non-competitive and destined for subsistence food, which explains the poverty of the rural world, the inefficiency to supply food to cities, and other serious problems affecting these societies. However, the Southern peasant agriculture is also largely integrated into the local and dominant global capitalist system and their profits are consequently siphoned by dominant capital.

Here, the crucial question is whether agriculture in the South could be modernised by capitalism. Amin says no, and demonstrates why it is so. He criticises the notion of ‘food security’ – as an alternative to food sovereignty – disseminated by international organisations and Northern governments, according to which the South should rely on a specialisation in cash crop products for export to cover food deficits. It results in disaster, as the recent food crisis has shown. What is absolutely necessary is food sovereignty. For that, a *sine qua non* is

access to land for all peasants, to be considered a goal towards which most struggles in rural areas are oriented. For this reason Amin differentiates the types of land tenure systems in the South, depending on the ownership status.

The first system is land tenure based on private ownership – ‘absolute right’, only limited by public laws and eventual environmental regulations. Since the ‘enclosures’ process in early capitalism in Western Europe, this is seen as the ‘modern’ form of landownership by the ‘liberal’ ideology’s rhetoric and management rationale by making land a ‘merchandise’ exchangeable at market price. Opposing this idea, Samir Amin asserts that it is unsustainable to draw from the construction of Northern modernity rules for the advancement of the peoples of the global South. To change land into private property, the present reactivation of the ‘enclosures’ process involves dispossession of peasants, as in the colonial times. Other forms of regulating the right to use land are conceivable and can produce similar results, avoiding the foreseeable destruction by capitalism.

Land tenure not based on private ownership is the second system, which takes heterogeneous forms and where access to land is simultaneously regulated by various rules that are derived from institutions involving individuals, communities and the state. Among these are ‘customary’ rules that traditionally guarantee access to land to all families – but it does not mean equal rights. These rights of use by communities are limited by the state and only exist today in deteriorated forms, attacked by capitalist expansion and its associated private appropriation. Amin gives several past and present examples of such situations in Asia and Africa. Frequently, European colonial powers left surviving customary practices to retain their domination (like ‘*économie de traite*’ in the French colonial administration). The same phenomenon is occurring today under imperialist pressures.

However, popular revolutions in Asia or Africa sometimes challenged this legacy. Among them, China and Vietnam (we could add Cuba in Latin America to this too) constitute unique examples of the success of a land system based on the rights of all peasants within the village. This constitutes equal access to and use of land, with the state as the sole owner and equal land distribution among usufructuary peasant families. Amin examines the evolution of this system based on the suppression of private landownership, up until the present times, as well as its viability and ability to resist the attacks it is suffering in rural China and Vietnam nowadays. Peasant struggles are currently active in these two countries to defend the most precious accomplishment of their revolutions.

Elsewhere, agrarian reforms implemented by non-revolutionary hegemonic blocks generally only dispossessed large landowners to the benefit of middle (or even rich) peasants, ignoring the interests of the poor. However, Samir Amin affirms that new waves of agrarian reforms are needed today to meet the legitimate demands of the poorest and landless peasants in India, South East Asia, Kenya, South Africa, the Arab countries and many parts of Latin America. This is true even for other Southern regions where capitalist private ownership rights have not yet penetrated deeply (or formally), such as in inter-tropical Africa.

This could be done through an expansion of the definition of public property to include land, along with a movement of democratisation (and not 'retreat') of the state and the minimisation of inequalities. Nevertheless, the success of these agrarian reforms always remains uncertain because such redistributions maintain tenure systems led by the principle of ownership and even reinforce the adherence to private property. In the dominant discourse, serving the interests of capital and its agribusiness model, a 'modern reform' of the land

tenure system means privatisation, which is the exact opposite of what the challenges of building of democratic and alternative agricultural projects based on prosperous peasant family economies as a whole really require. Consequently, the only obstacle to the fast trend of commodification and private appropriation of landownership is the resistance and organisation of its victims: the peasants.

## **Regional Perspectives**

The following parts of the book present and analyse, by region, the experiences of peasant struggles to defend their inalienable rights for access to land and food sovereignty. The regions covered are Latin America, Africa, Asia, Oceania and Europe.

In Chapter 2, João Pedro Stedile examines the forms and tendencies of capital penetration in the agricultural sector in Latin America, especially through transnational corporations. Stedile also studies the current challenges imposed on peasant movements of this continent and their programmes, in particular those of the international movement La Via Campesina.

Stedile begins by analysing the mechanisms through which capital accumulated outside of agriculture has taken control of this sector and concentrated it worldwide in the current phase of financialised capitalism. Discussing the consequences of the recent capital crisis and the intensified assault of financial capital on agriculture and the environment, Stedile elaborates how, due to the crisis, large Northern corporations fled to peripheral countries to save their volatile capital by investing in fixed assets, such as land, minerals, raw materials, water, biodiversity territories, or tropical agriculture, and by taking over renewable energy sources, particularly productions of sugarcane and maize for ethanol or soybean and African palm for vegetable oil (agro-fuels). This generated huge speculative operations in the futures markets

and a rise in the prices of agricultural (and mining) goods traded in the global futures stock exchange markets, without any correlation to production costs and the actual value of the socially needed labour time.

Stedile then analyses the consequences of the imposition of corporate private ownership of natural resources on the life and organisation of the peasants, with peoples and states losing sovereignty over food and productive processes. The destructive ‘model’ of capital for agriculture – agribusiness, or ‘agriculture without people’ – brings deep and insuperable contradictions that need to be understood in order to act upon them.

With this aim, Stedile defends what could be the main elements of a peasant programme that promotes workers’ control, anti-capitalist agricultures, food sovereignty and environmental protection in the countries of the South where the peasantry predominates and suffers. This alternative platform, promoted by the international movement La Via Campesina, among others, includes: prioritising policies of food sovereignty and healthy foods; preventing the concentration of private land and nature ownership; diversifying agriculture; increasing labour and land productivity and adopting machines that respect the environment; reorganising agricultural industries into small and medium scale, controlled by workers and peasants; controlling food production by domestic social forces and prohibiting foreign capital from owning land in any country; stopping deforestation; preserving and disseminating native improved seeds and preventing the spread of genetically modified (GMO) seeds; ensuring access to water as the right to a common good for every citizen and developing infrastructure in rural communities; implementing a popular energy sovereignty and reviewing current models of transportation; ensuring the rights of indigenous communities; promoting socially-oriented public policies for agriculture; universalising social welfare for the entire population; generalising educational (and literacy) programmes in rural areas and enhancing local cultural

habits; changing the international free-trade agreements that function to the detriment of the peoples; and encouraging social relations based on human values built over millennia, such as solidarity and equality – which are the very values of socialism.

João Pedro Stedile presents some organisational and political challenges for peasant movements, at the local and global levels, in order to face the current disadvantageous balance of power, where global capital is on the offensive to control nature and agricultural goods. Such an analysis results from the experienced realities in Latin America, especially in Brazil, and from the struggles and resistances of these peasant movements against capitalist destructions. And last, Stedile suggests addressing the interests of transnational capital and its control mechanisms by: building a popular, alternative development model of agricultural production managed by the peasants and workers; by transforming the struggle for land into a struggle for territory; developing a technological matrix based on agroecology, free schools in the countryside, training programmes at all levels and alternative means of mass communication; and creating opportunities for mass social struggles and building alliances against the class enemies gathering all sectors living in rural areas as well as city workers, nationally and internationally.

In Chapter 3, with a specific focus on Southern Africa, Sam Moyo presents an overview of the African peasantries who have suffered repeated attacks under colonialism, post-independence and neoliberal capitalism. He goes on to outline the perspectives of rebuilding them on the reaffirmation of the inalienability of land rights and collective food sovereignty. His starting point is the desperate situation of most African peasants, who are facing a crisis of social reproduction, food insecurity and insufficient incomes from farming, and their survival strategies despite the state's withdrawal. Regardless of the diversity of African

agricultures, their persistent and generalised failure to increase productivity and supplies as well as to resolve key agrarian questions of enhancing the social reproduction of the majority of the peasantries – conceived as elements of democratisation and national development – is clear and dramatic.

Centuries of systemic land alienation and exploitation of peasantries' labour, through unequal integration into the capitalist world system during colonial and post-independence periods, resulted in the underdevelopment of the agrarian systems. SAPs exacerbated extroversion, extraction of surplus value, land concentration, food imports and aid dependency. Recently, a new assault led by foreign land-grabbing actors dispossessed the peasantry of its lands and natural resources and intensified its labour exploitation. Such accumulation processes undermine the social value of peasant production based on self-employed family labour and self-consumption as well as its ability to adopt technologies and crops to expand low energy-intensive production for its social reproduction. These evolutions, which are driven by financialised capital and agri-business at the expense of the poor and marginalised peasantries, fuel local conflicts and accentuate the polarisation of agrarian accumulation (from 'above' rather than from below).

Moyo examines the long-run history of the destruction of African food production systems by analysing the trajectory of primitive accumulation and disarticulation of these agrarian societies. He describes the various phases, forms and trends of land alienation, dispossession and incorporation of the peasantries, from colonialism, post-independence developmentalism, to neoliberalism and its re-institutionalised primitive accumulation. He finally touches upon the current crisis involving land grabbing and 'contracted farmers'. Then, he explains the underdevelopment of the agrarian productive forces, using examples from country members

of the mal-integrated Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the persistence of qualitative changes in the agrarian surplus extraction and its externalisation through the unequal world and subregional trade regimes under neoliberalism. Here, the recent global food price and agrarian crisis, especially in the SADC region, as well as South African capital's hegemony are studied. Moyo assesses the social consequences of such processes on the collapse of basic food consumption and the fast increase in food-related poverty – except in a few 'secure' enclaves (in South Africa) – and on the more recent alternative strategies within the neoliberal context and the 'push' to universalise the commodification of land.

Moyo concludes that the real alternative is one that supports priorities given to food sovereignty and a sustainable use of resources by autonomous small producers, in which democracy is inclusive and solidly founded on social progress. This requires a wide range of public policy decisions of restructuring these food systems, including the choices of the basic commodities to be produced in order to satisfy social needs, a redistribution of the means of food production, especially land, inputs and water, substantial infrastructural investments, and enhancing the peasantries' human resources. If the state pursues more systematic and voluntary agrarian reforms to sustain rural development at the national level, this task will also include regional integrations. As a consequence, a re-orientation of the SADC region's agricultural (and industrial) policies towards more collective strategies to defend food sovereignty and land rights is needed, in order to reverse the present free-trade and market-based approach of this regionalisation.

Chapter 4 moves to Asia, where Erebus Wong and Jade Tsui Sit, following Wen Tiejun's theses, attempt to rethink the main problematics of 'rural China' in the development of the country in order to argue for rural regeneration as an alternative to a destructive

‘modernisation’. The latter is often reduced to industrialisation and the empowering of the state, pursued through several phases from the middle of the nineteenth century to the revolutionary period with its radical social changes. It seems to be relevant to reconsider the intellectual heritage of the rural reconstruction movement – active during the 1920s and 1930s but much neglected today – in post-developmental China, where the rural sector has been historically exploited.

To understand the present situation of China’s peasantry – which is the majority of its population – it is necessary to examine in depth the mechanisms involved beyond the collectivisation-liberalisation dichotomy. Land is a key issue for China, which has to nourish 19 per cent of the world’s population with 8 per cent of the world’s arable land. In spite of considerable agricultural output, only 13 per cent of its total land area can be cultivated. The explanation is to be found in the fact that land is collectively owned by village communities and distributed within peasant households, who use it mainly for food production to maintain self-sufficiency. Wong and Sit propose a historical overview of China’s modernisation to capture the essence of its developmental trajectory in the last 60 years. After 1949, the new regime underwent a period of Soviet-style industrialisation, installing an asymmetric dual system clearly unfavourable to the peasantry. However, despite the industrialisation strategy, the peasantry has benefited from the radical land reforms.

Nowadays, many peasants (and workers) are increasingly suffering from exploitation and injustice, but a few residual socialist practices subsist, including the legacy of land reforms. In the mid-1980s, the promotion of export-oriented growth generated flows of migrant workers from the rural areas to cities – mostly comprised of surplus labour force from rural households that owned a small plot, without land expropriation. The rural sector took up the cost of social reproduction of labour and served as a buffer to absorb social risks in urban areas caused by

current pro-capital reforms. It also revealed its stabilising capacity by regulating the labour market and re-absorbing unemployed migrant workers in cities during cyclic crises.

Nevertheless, mainstream intellectuals support the neoliberal ideology to advocate land commodification. Under the pressures of construction projects led by fiscally constrained local governments and real estate speculators, land expropriation accelerated in the 1990s. About 40–50 million peasants lost their land; the landless appeared in the 2000s, especially after the 2003 law modifying collective arable land legislation and excluding a new generation from land allocation through redistribution. Wong and Sit explain the dangers associated with such evolutions, which weaken the mechanisms of risk management through internalisation in rural community, in a time when 200 million peasant migrant workers are living in cities and evolving into the working class. This is why, inspired by Wen Tiejun's analysis of the agrarian and rural problem of China, who is considered to have played the role of social stabiliser by absorbing the cost of crisis, they defend collective landownership in rural areas as the most precious legacy of the 1949 revolution.

China's take-off is largely based on the exploitation of its rural sector. Today, the export-oriented model has become such a path dependency and internal disequilibriums are so deep that China has to make great efforts to switch its trajectory of development in order to invest into rural society, to guarantee social progress and to preserve the environment. According to the authors, solutions for an alternative path could be to reactivate and revalorise the status of the peasantry, to rediscover the pioneering ideas of the rural reconstruction movements (promoted by Liang Shuming or James Yen, among others), and to support the experiments of rural regeneration currently developed in the country, as renewed and powerful insights, both

popular and ecological, to overcome the destructive aspects of contemporary global capitalism.

In Chapter 5, Utsa Patnaik exposes the political-economic context of the peasant struggles for livelihood security and land in India. She begins by recalling that peasantry and rural workers of the global South are under historically unprecedented pressures today by attacks by capital, especially on the means of securing livelihood, and among them land, in order to control the use of lands for its own purposes, and divert agricultural land for non-agricultural purposes. Such a movement looks similar to that of primitive accumulation in Western Europe of the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, but today, the Southern peasantry has nowhere to migrate, except to the immense slums of the megalopolis. However, peasants are now turning from passive resistance to active contestation of global capital domination, transforming them from objects to subjects of history.

Patnaik examines, in a first part, the agrarian distress, suicides and unemployment in India. She states that inequalities have increased considerably in the country from the early 1990s under neoliberal policies and that the living condition of the masses of the labouring poor today is globally worse – except where positive interventions have taken place to stabilise livelihood. In rural India, this situation results from attempts to take over peasant lands and resources by domestic and foreign corporations, supported by the state. In parallel, unemployment is partly due to the inability to translate higher economic growth without income redistribution into job creation, while purchasing power has been eroded by inflation prices of basic needs for ordinary people, forgotten by the ruling classes' strategy of submission to financial capital.

The author points out that the main trend observed in the Indian economy – which has two-thirds of its workforce occupied in agriculture – is that the relative share of agriculture, forestry and fishing in the gross domestic product, especially for key crops like food grains, has declined, while that of industry has stagnated, but of services has increased fast. In a general context of trade openness, fiscal contraction, price-stabilisation system dismantling and land acquisition for Special Economic Zones (SEZs), the state has launched an attack on small farmers, in the name of ‘development’ but in fact for the benefit of a small minority of real estate speculators, thus creating an agrarian crisis intensifying into the struggle for land.

As a consequence, small producers have been exposed to the ups and downs of prices, forced to be indebted to money lenders and banks, have lost lands against unpaid debts or even committed suicide. With the implementation of the neoliberal agenda, land ownership concentration is happening at an all-India level and livelihood insecurity is spreading. Therefore, farming is becoming unviable. The author analyses the ongoing resistances of farmers to land acquisition (particularly when the state creates SEZs) or to change in land use (setting up extractives). She describes the repression suffered by peasant rebellions, from Maharashtra to Uttar Pradesh for instance, and also the victories won when the state governments have had to withdraw their projects or concede compensations, like in West Bengal.

Patnaik recalls the fundamental economic characteristics of land, which is not produced by human labour, and the implications of its pricing, which is completely different from that of agricultural commodities (prices are anchored to amounts of labour used for producing them). Based on market capitalisation of incomes, the price of land – in a capitalist system – can vary considerably, depending on its use and the associated yield. Here lies the root of the

discontent of farmers, constrained (and cheated) by the state governments to sell their lands at extremely low prices, that is, with compensations far below the profits earned by private investors or speculators (sometimes subsidised), who parcel them for lucrative commercial or residential purposes. One adverse effect (among others, including environmental ones) is that the total cropped area becomes stagnant and the growth in output slows down, leading to inflation in food prices and a contraction of demand. The author finally asserts that to think – like the corporates in collusion with the state do in India – that peasants can be treated as dupes is a mistake because they are now aware of their rights and are strongly resisting their exploitation.

Chapter 6 deals with Oceania, more specifically Papua New Guinea, which gained independence from Australia in as recently as 1975. The authors Rémy Herrera and Poëura Tetoe elucidate the ‘*Papua Niugini Paradox*’, that is, the striking coexistence of an alleged ‘archaic’ (i.e., not based on private property) system of landownership – as in most Oceanian insular countries – and the vivacity of the peasants’ resistance against current neoliberal forms of capitalism, such as the penetration of foreign direct investment in mining, hydrocarbons and natural resources, including forestry and water. Access to land is a real issue in this country where a majority of the population is still involved in subsistence crops for self-consumption, ‘customary’ rules persist on more than 90 per cent of the soil territory, and the use of land is the source of acute conflicts between transnational corporations, the state and the society.

To begin with, the authors examine the people’s attachment to land. European colonisation integrated the indigenous people into global capitalism, transforming most of them into small farmers and making them dependent on colonial plantation companies. Despite this tendency,

a distinctive feature characterising this peasant society today is the persistence of traditional institutions to defend collective landownership. Herrera and Tetoe analyse this connection to land, customary practices and management, and collective ownership of land in a context where land is always the object of desire of private interests and under pressure to be registered and privatised. The authors explain the ambivalence in the position of the state, which faces pressures from foreign investors and international donors, to the point that the dominance of traditional collective forms of social organisation within the unusual structure of land tenure has not prevented the increased export of minerals, hydrocarbons and agribusiness products. The protective role of the state over customary land use has only been effective where private interests are not involved and no natural resources have been discovered. Elsewhere, the state has been taking over land to sell the exploitation of all resources. The access to natural resources and their exploitation by foreign transnationals are being carried out with the support of the state, which articulates this process of land appropriation with the previous ancestral structures of collective landownership, without introducing 'free' land markets.

Even though the logic of 'ideology of landownership' is gaining ground and many peasants have been receptive to financial compensations (e.g., distribution of royalties), the social structures instead of collapsing have adapted to it. Despite constant and convergent pressures towards individualisation of landownership by foreign transnationals, the governments of developed countries as well as international institutions, successive Papua New Guinean authorities have not succeeded in challenging customary collective landownership. The reason is to be found in the legitimate popular resistance by the peasant society against privatisation of land, the imposition of modern register for lands and their management by capitalist laws.

Herrera and Teto trace the history of the registration of customary land and the establishment of cadastral systems from the Australian colonial administration to the recent ‘land reform’ component of the SAPs, that has been jointly imposed by the Papua New Guinean state and foreign donors like Australian Cooperation, USAID, IMF, World Bank and Asian Development Bank. They affirm the legitimacy of popular mobilisations gathering large sections of civil society (and even fractions of the military) against privatisation of customary land as common patrimony and of their revendication for social progress, in one of the countries with the lowest social indicators in the world.

What is defended is the legitimacy of the principle of collective landowning and free access to the peasant community land; what is demonstrated is the possibility of other rules for land use; and what is recommended is to maintain the existence of non-capitalist peasant farming. Potent constraints obliterate the struggles of a people longing to master their collective destiny. The government has little room for manoeuvre. But an alternative to neoliberalism is required, along with the emergence of a class alliance around the peasantry, to draw a modern development strategy that benefits the Papua New Guinean people.

In Chapter 7, co-written by Gérard Choplin and part of the team of European Coordination of La Via Campesina (J. Berthelot, C. Boisgontier, G. Kastler, R. Louail, P. Nicholson, J. Riffaud, G. Savigny, J. Verlinden), the difficulties of European agriculture, which is very diverse in its productions and structures, as well as the farmer struggles in this continent are examined. Most of these farmers receive incomes lower than the minimum wages of other professional categories and live under the pressure of repeated sectoral crises due to neoliberal policies and the risk of elimination of their small- or medium-sized farms. While agricultural work is poorly recognised and the environment is threatened, subsidies intended to

compensate prices that are often below production costs primarily benefit a minority of large producers and agribusinesses and impose dumping on the Southern countries. The confrontation is not between North and South, but between two visions of agriculture: agricultural liberalisation and food sovereignty. The authors demonstrate that a Europe without farmers would not be proof of its development. Things must change and they will change only if European farmers and citizens act together, in solidarity with Southern peasant movements, to draw societies out from their submission to transnational corporations and their logic of maximising private profits.

In the first part, Choplin et al. explain in detail the common problems encountered by farmers, in spite of their diversities, who are dealing with production industrialisation and globalisation: pressure of productivism, disappearance of small farmers, attacks on peasant agriculture by agribusiness, indebtedness and bankruptcy, outsourcing of agricultural production, monoculture plantations, dissemination of GMOs, pollution, etc. In the face of these destructive tendencies and the inertia of professional organisations defending the interests of dominant economic powers, European farmers have started to resist. The authors describe the evolutions of these struggles, culminating in the emergence of a European farmer movement, connected with civil society and international movements, to propose alternatives, from the European Farmers Coordination to the European Coordination of La Via Campesina, and from local-national to globalised struggles: against the concentration of lands by large farms and agribusiness (by the French farmers from Larzac, for example), the introduction of GMOs (and genetic-transgenic technologies imposed by Monsanto and others), the appropriation of seeds by seed industrial firms, or current neoliberal agricultural policies and rules of international trade promoted by the WTO.

The authors analyse the alternatives opened by the global crisis of the dominant system. According to them, the tasks of the European farmers should be to make food sovereignty (conceived as a right and a duty) the framework of agricultural policies and to build a large alliance of European citizens – producers and consumers – to achieve this goal; to promote a new farming model generating employment, a well-nourished population and respect for the environment; to work towards global food governance; and to participate in international mobilisations for the defence of nature, climate and biodiversity under attack by WTO free-trade agreements. Grassroots initiatives to relocate food production have multiplied today in the continent.

Finally, the European Coordination of La Via Campesina team concludes that another European common agricultural and food policy is possible, which presupposes deep changes in priorities. The latter should strive to maintain and develop a sustainable and social peasant agriculture, feeding the people, preserving health and the environment and keeping rural landscapes alive; guarantee peasants decent living conditions thanks to stable and sufficient incomes and recognition and attractiveness of their profession; relocate food as much as possible; and allocate public supports in priority to productions that are effectively beneficial for employment and the environment.

### **Convergence against the Domination of Financial Capital**

All the contributions of this book, be they theoretical or empirical, and whichever country or region they consider, emphasise the general failure of capitalism to solve the agrarian and agricultural issues. The recent deterioration of the situation of peasant agricultures following the exacerbation of the food dimension of the current systemic crisis of capitalism has revealed and confirmed once again the permanent and structural inability of such a system to

resolve the deep internal contradictions it has generated since its very origins, not only at the local, national and regional levels, but also worldwide.

Even in the richest countries of the North, where productivity boosted by technological progress is very high and food provision is available for a large majority of the population, the problems experienced by most family agricultures to keep their smallholding farms, maintain their productive activities and work in satisfactory and decent conditions, the problems faced by consumers to master both the variety and the quality of their food as well as the problems encountered by every citizen to conserve natural resources and protect the environment, are exceeding the bounds of the bearable.

In the South, be it Latin America, Africa, Asia or Oceania, where average levels of productivity and mechanisation in agriculture are often weaker, the difficulties are more worrying. Today, nearly half the Southern countries have lost the capacity to produce and supply what their people demand and need to eat. Post-independence Africa was self-sufficient for its food provisioning at the beginning of the 1960s but is today a net food importer continent. Even as we highlight it here, around three billion under-nourished persons – mostly poor peasants or landless – are suffering from hunger, while masses of rural families who have lost their lands do not anymore have access to land and means of food production. In most peripheral societies pauperisation is spreading, and the living conditions in rural areas – as well as in huge urban slums congested with the rural exodus – are dramatic, that is, simply inhuman and unacceptable.

Clearly identified by all the authors, the common enemy of the peoples – wherever they may be living (or just surviving), working and resisting, in the South or in the North – is financial capital, which pushes people deeper and deeper into indebtedness and consequently subjects them to super-exploitation. Despite the numerous, multidimensional and complex

contradictions of the current world system, it is precisely high financial capital, in crisis, that has launched a modern *conquista*, characterised by repeated assaults on all public goods and common heritage of humanity, through a commodification of life including land and the environment, and an attack on livelihood, along with an overexploitation of labour – peasants and workers taken as a whole.

As finance capitalism becomes more barbaric and destructive than ever, the structural problem for the survival of late capitalism is downward pressure on the profit rates. Financialisation as an answer creates only a debt-driven economy and the only thing that this system will offer, until it is in its death agony, is the worsening exploitation of labour and life. The peasantries of the global South will continue to be dispossessed from their land and means of livelihood. The contradictions of the capitalist global system have now become so deep and so unsolvable that the system brinks on collapse. To be able to relaunch a cycle of expansion at the centre of the world system, the current systemic crisis must destroy gigantic amounts of fictitious capital and transfer the costs to the global South – to the majority of the world's population – as well as to the environment.

The present situation does not resemble the beginning of the end of the crisis, but rather the beginning of a long-run process of implosion and collapse of the present phase of financialised capitalism. For humanity to get out of this impasse, radical change is the only hope. This forces us to reconsider the alternatives of social transformation which must be beyond capitalism.

The difficulties are significantly complicated by the choices made by most of the states in the global South – not only in the so-called 'emerging' countries, such as China, India, Brazil and South Africa, but also in the current 'revolutionary' processes of Latin America – in favour of (one of the many varieties of) capitalism. Beyond their recent success in terms of

high GDP growth rates and despite their differentiated contents and implications, such pro-capitalist development strategies – including those implemented in China – are illusory and unsustainable.

Hence, for the great majority of the people in the South and in the North, the struggle against deteriorating conditions is at the same time the struggle against processes of the globalisation of capitalistic relations spearheaded by financial capital, that is, a struggle against capitalism itself, waged on multiple fronts. Among the programmatic demands are, what La Via Campesina has campaigned for: agriculture should be withdrawn from the WTO; agro-fuels should be banned; and control of technology, pricing and market by transnational agribusiness corporations should be rejected. Demands put to the state to defend national food sovereignty are legitimate and necessary. However, it has to be reckoned that in the era of the hegemony of global capital and transnational business, the role of the state is, more often than not, compromised. Financial capital has bonded interest blocs across local, national and international levels. Thus, exerting public pressure for critical policies against the aggression and manipulation of financial capital and transnational agribusiness is a necessary strategic move for mobilisation. While it needs to be stressed that a state's reason of existence is to protect the society, failing which it might as well not be, the people and the movements need to at the same time actualise all potentials for reduction of their dependency on capital, debt and the market. This is all the more necessary for peasant and family agriculture. The guiding principle is community's control over and management of land and water as commons, which must not be allowed to be privatised or commodified. The Cochabamba struggles over water and gas are exemplary. Agrarian reform to redistribute land to the tiller is high on the agenda in most countries in South and South East Asia, Africa and Latin America. As La Via Campesina demands, the struggle is not just for 'land' (for individual households to operate in an atomised manner, vulnerable to the dictates of the market and financial capital), but also

for ‘territory’, which involves cultural, social and economic reorganisation of communal relations to produce and live in a cooperative or collective manner. This necessitates that the ‘commons’ are not objects for appropriation or control still operating in the logic of capitalism, but focal nodes supporting a different relationship of the community members among themselves and in relation to nature.

Food sovereignty remains at the core of the struggle. To attain food sovereignty, a mode of production other than the capitalist mode of production dictated by speculative markets and extensive and intensive machines in the subjugation and expropriation of the people has to be practised. This even calls into question national boundaries, for sustainable food production, distribution and consumption is based on bioregions and watershed systems, rather than the political borders of modern nation-states. What is also called into question is the mode of consumption and circulation with its destructive impacts on nature and value systems of communities that have acquired the wisdom through the centuries to live in sustainable ways. One important insight is the practice of sharing beyond monetary measures that reduce social relations to calculations of gain and loss. The people’s struggles and demands show that in relating to each other, what needs to be envisioned includes modes other than those of capitalistic relations. They also demonstrate the importance of the ecological dimension by recognising that the current capitalist crisis is at the same time a profound ecological crisis brought about by the extractive industries that exhaust the earth’s resources and contaminate water, land and air; the industrialisations that contribute to global warming and climate change; science and technology, on which modern capitalism thrives and which have proven their powers of overwhelming destruction through not only nuclear weapons (which are produced for intended mass annihilation) but also nuclear power plants such as the ones in Chernobyl and Fukushima (which bring unintended self-destruction); and the capitalistic systems of food production and supply that are completely dependent on petrol as fuel.

Thus, strategies to reduce dependence on or control by finance capitalism are to be devised, ranging from establishing the state's control over financial capital to the protection of food and livelihood items from price speculation and market manipulation. For the social movements, the paramount task is to defend food sovereignty not only at the national level but also at the local level. Local self-organisation at the grassroots level to place food sovereignty and environmental security as priority and to fend off attempts at manipulation by financial capital (even microcredit at the grassroots level is dubious in its use of debt to control the peasants' mode of life and mode of production) requires direct actions innovative in their intellectual and affective dimensions for going beyond the dead end of capitalism. In this connection, we see more and more debates in the social movements on the defence of the commons, re-ruralisation, re-peasantisation and rebuilding of rural and urban communities that nurture and practise values different from capitalistic ones – values of reciprocity and communality.

A radical reimagination of the ways in which human societies produce and consume is the only way out of the current catastrophic crisis that humanity is in. Without food sovereignty, that is, autonomous communal self-management in the production, distribution and consumption of food, no sustainable, diversified economy or political autonomy will be built. Without reversing the logic of the maximisation of profit and the concentration of private ownership, especially that of land and the means of production, no state policy and leadership will be consistent or effective. Without radically questioning the hyper concentration of power in the hands of high financial capital, no genuinely substantive democracy, with social progress and participation of the people at all levels and in all the processes of decision-making concerning their collective future, will be possible.

Thus, a key question in front of us is the question of subjectivity and agency, that is, the question of the production of subjectivities by the struggling people themselves in going

beyond contradictions that inform their struggles. How can we envisage the classes and the masses for this social transformation or revolution? What can be the role of family farmers, small peasants and farm workers? Many progressive movements and leftist thinkers have historically had ideological difficulties to understand the peasantries and political difficulties to build class alliances with them. It was and still is the case in most capitalist countries, even during revolutionary processes, including where peasants had been fundamental components or actors of these revolutions, such as in France (1789), Mexico (1910), Russia (1917), China (1949) or Cuba (1959), besides others.

Yesterday as today, peasant and family agricultures are sometimes stereotyped as being underproductive, inefficient, backward, even archaic, and inevitably condemned, therefore, to disappear in the very movement towards ‘development’. ‘Modernisation’ is too often conceived as (and reduced to) industrialisation, and more recently as extending services, that is, as being antagonistic to maintaining small or medium-sized family agricultures that are oriented towards self-sufficiency and local demand. This amounts to saying that, notwithstanding the structural connections between modernisation, colonisation and racism, modernisation is a good thing to pursue and a telos to achieve.

Consequently, and unfortunately, the anti-capitalist nature of family agricultures is unheeded, hence its potential ability for structural changes and transformation of the societies and economies we are living in is underestimated. In social movements or worker organisations, many leftist theoreticians still feel that peasants are ‘residuals’ of the past, defending corporatist or sectoral interests, and they are not seen as fighting for common objectives convergent with those of other workers and citizens. For this to change, it is necessary to take a radical critique of modernisation, where urbanisation and industrialisation have been presented as progress and development, the violence and plunder of imperialism and colonialism have been concealed or understated, and racism brought in to justify the pillage.

Alongside this progress and development, privileging science and technology and an anthropocentric exploitation of nature, what used to be the commons are seized from the users, especially food producers in rural and indigenous communities.

In this predatory onslaught on the commons, production, rather than for the reproduction and enhancing of lives, is put into motion for the accumulation of more and more money – capital that seeks to command labour power and take control over every aspect of social life through mechanisms and processes of privatisation. Thus, the processes of globalisation of capitalistic relations can be seen in a way as the spread of cancerous cells traversing the entirety of social life. Exploitation takes place indiscriminately by subsuming every form of labour into the valorisation machine that produces values through the domination of fantasies and desires with an overflowing supply of monetary garb, the symbol of wealth and well-being that is in fact the instrument of the exploitation of life.

Hence, the struggle to recover the commons is to assert the right to autonomous life and self-management for the majority across the wide global spectrum. In the face of the difficult task of offsetting the almost irreversible damages to the very existence of the earth as habitat for humans and other species under global warming, climate change and human-induced catastrophes like the nuclear crisis, farmers, as much as workers or other social sectors, are the protagonists and actors for change. It is a question of alliance of struggles on all fronts, building interdependent and mutual support as well as learning from one another that enhance our capacities for autonomous life and self-management.

Access to land and other resources necessary for the reproduction of life, as commons, is a legitimate right for all peasants, workers and common people. If food sovereignty is to safeguard modes of autonomous collective self-management, it is necessary to accept the continuation of family agricultures in the foreseeable future in the twenty-first century. If

agrarian and agricultural questions are to be solved, it will be obligatory to liberate ourselves from the destructive logics that currently drive capitalism under high finance domination. If the present rules of the imperialist domination of international trade are to be modified, we – peasants, workers and people of the North and the South – must unite and together face our common enemies – financial capital and its local allies – in order to recreate viable visions, rebuild alternative strategies and participate in the long arduous road to communism.