

CENTRO DI STUDI STORICI E POLITICI SU AFRICA E MEDIO ORIENTE

**Farewell to the Third World? Farewell to the Peasantry?
Primitive Accumulation and the Rural World in the
Contemporary Development Discourse**

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Mario Zamponi, *Farewell to the Third World? Farewell to the Peasantry? Primitive Accumulation and the Rural World in the Contemporary Development Discourse*

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Introduction¹

In the last two decades there has been a stimulating debate on the role that the practices of development may have (or may not have) in the South of the world (on theories of development see for example: Hettne 1995; Nederveen Pieterse 2001; Parfitt 2002; Peet, Hartwick 2009; McEwan 2009), with a particular attention to rural development and to the role of the peasantry in contemporary global economy (van der Ploeg 2010). This is linked to the discussion within development studies about the role that primitive accumulation can play in developing countries, and whether, within this framework, the historical definition of third world can still have a political value (Moore 2004). This is a very complex debate, since in many of third world countries - and in particular in sub-Saharan Africa, the area where my research interests are concentrated, - an overall economic transformation through processes of primitive accumulation has never been completed.

During the Cold War the “thirdworldism” had developed theories and practices of development within the utopia of a “third way”, trying to get benefits by policies of non aligned nationalism, by variations of the Keynesian model, by models of Soviet planning. Later on, at least for three decades, the neo-liberal discourse has delegitimized the state in the third world as agent of primitive accumulation, considering it just the repository of rent-seeking systems for the élites in power.

Concerning African politics, many scholars have embraced the neo-patrimonial model using various labels: politics of the belly (Bayart 1993), state merchant capital (Moore 2001), disorder as political instrument (Chabal, Daloz 1999), prebendal politics (Joseph 1987). Bratton and van de Walle (1997: 61) argued that “the distinctive institutional hallmark in the ancient regimes of postcolonial Africa is neo-patrimonialism”. However, the neo-patrimonialist analysis or the “personal rule paradigm” as critically Leonard and Strauss describe it (Leonard, Strauss, 2003) does not permit an adequate debate on the complexities and on the difficulties encountered by nation-building process, by economic development and, above all, by redistributive policies in post-independent countries which had to face the political and economic constraints inherited from the colonial period. Indeed, the periphery has remained locked within disarticulated models of accumulation (Moyo, Yeros 2005); in this context, international interventions have faced several hurdles in implementing development policies.

Regarding more specifically the agrarian question and rural development, the classical agrarian question (Bernstein 2002; 2003a; 2004), that is the evolution from the feudal model to the industrial capitalist one, has not been completed in many third world regions, as happened in Europe. Broadly

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speaking, during the twentieth century, a capitalist system that subordinated agriculture has developed, without implementing sustainable industrial processes. Therefore, in developing countries the agrarian question remains still unsolved and closely tied to the national question (Moyo, Yeros 2005). Indeed, the so-called “traditional” pre-capitalist agrarian systems, characterized by significant social relationships between agrarian property and labour, have not been entirely replaced by a process of transition towards capitalism, by means of primitive accumulation (Bernstein 2004). In particular, since the 1980s the structural adjustment programmes have reinforced processes of economic integration at global level, and have increased the level of commoditization of agriculture (Hulme, Woodhouse, 2000), a process which has already started during the colonial period. A new division of labour within the agricultural system has been created; the centre has become more and more specialized in highly capital intensive productions while the periphery faces difficulties both from the point of view of food production and of the export sector, generating those complex and contradictory processes of change of the rural world - in Africa and also elsewhere in developing countries - which have been defined as “agrarian question of labour” (Bernstein 2003a), within the framework of the so-called “communal traditional” agrarian systems (Zamponi 2007).

Moreover, at least since the last decade, the debate has been strongly oriented towards rural development, market-led agrarian reforms, and support to small farmers. The main sponsors of this approach have been international institutions such as the World Bank which insists on the central role of agriculture for development, particularly in order to alleviate poverty (WB 2003; WB 2008). On the other hand there are initiatives coming from “alternative views” which are trying to strengthen the peasants’ role by empowering them politically, also by means of social struggles (Desmarais 2007; Edelman, James 2011).

It is also necessary to discuss these issues in relation to the wide debate originated by the various sections of post-development critique, and the significant debate on development among development studies, post-development and post-colonial discourse (McEwan 2009). Some considerations on this are necessary, even if this is not the focus of my presentation. To start with: what is post-development? There are two definitions that we can synthetically recall here. The first one describes post-development as a “subversive, radical people-based project” (Rahnema 1997). The second one describes it in these terms: an interest “not in development alternatives but in alternatives to development”, an interest “in local culture and knowledge, a critical stance to established scientific discourse, the defence and promotion of localized pluralistic grassroots movements” (Escobar 1995: 215).

Post-development analyses are frequently associated to Foucault's concepts, such as, for instance, archaeology of development, knowledge as power, independent production of the truth, the uprising of the subordinated knowledge. Ziai (2004) has clearly highlighted the existence of relevant deviations or contradictions in relation to Foucault's thought. First: where Foucault emphasizes ruptures, differences, and discontinuities, development is described as a monolithic structure by post-development. Second: a rhetorical strategy of development is to unmask the promise of a universal prosperity as a deceptive mirage or a malign myth. To do this, it is necessary to put into question the Eurocentric political project of mainstream development whose aim is the restructuring of third world societies on the basis of the needs of the West. Third, post development seems to be locked up in the idea of repressive power, where the power of the discourse of development is simply conceived as a conditioning factor with little or no space left for autonomous decisions of local actors, in contrast with the Foucauldian idea that power does not emanate only from the state but it is found in any social relations (Nederveen Pieterse 2000; Brass 2007). Fourth, some analyses of post development often engage themselves in demonizing industrial modernity, and, at the same time, they present a romantic image of rural communities based on pre-modern subsistence agriculture (Agrawal, Gibson 1999). This resounds Hettne's description of neo-populism: "traditional populism was essentially a defence of the territorial community (...) (it) is an attempt to re-create community as an offensive against the industrial system" (Hettne 1995: 117f). Within this framework, I will try to discuss here the debate about third world and rural societies in the contemporary global transformation processes. I will argue that both - third world and peasants - are still politically meaningful in contemporary development discourse, and that they are linked each other given that most of the peasants' communities are still living in third world countries, and in Africa in particular.

Farewell to third world? Or welcome to a "new" third world?

The concept of third world has been used for long time in political analyses and therefore is historically relevant. However, its ideological meaning has always remained ambiguous. On the one hand, in the West conceptions it has sometimes carried pejorative connotations referring to otherness and backwardness; on the other hand a more meaningful alternative and radical construction has been reflected in the thirdworldism, particularly between the 1950s and the 1970s. The conceptual analyses aimed to define a third world clearly separated from the rest of the world have been associated with non alignment, anti-colonialism, economic dependency, and poverty. However, one of the issues about third world has been which status could have a system based on shared colonial system, given that the colonial experiences have been diversified. In the first place,

the third world includes Latin American countries which, mostly, became independent in the 1830s, carrying some scholars to suggest that their relationships with the United States have become more meaningful than those with former colonial powers. Moreover, the concepts of neo-colonialism and economic dependency have been challenged by the transformations occurred in countries that, in some way, have broken the economic dependency such as oil exporting countries, and countries of new industrialization, jointly with new challenges related to the paradigms of globalization (Cammack et al. 1993).

In order to discuss third world we have to place it in the context of contemporary global transformations. Today, the world is confronted with the global capitalistic system, that is a sort of total empire. Therefore, is it the moment to abandon the concept of third world? Even if we must acknowledge that it is a problematic category, we must also reckon that it is still useful in defining relations and processes of the worldwide contemporary geopolitics. We don't need to be worried with semantics. It is obvious that the third world is widely anachronistic after the collapse of what had been the second world. As observed by Therien (1999), after the end of Cold War the tendency has been to replace the categories of first, second and third world by the dichotomy North-South. Moreover, if the end of third world could mean something new, there is little agreement on what is really new. According to Escobar, for some analysts it is necessary to find out a new paradigm. Others speak of the need of a new horizon of political reflection and of struggle. Others highlight that some alternative visions still operate within a modernist conceptual framework. Given that there are many theoretical proposals which oppose modernity, it is necessary to find out new non-Eurocentric perspectives of globality. Some observers recognize, as an example, that social movements are the expression of a new paradigm, of a new political vision, of a new anti-capitalistic imaginary (Escobar 2004).

Berger (2004) is right when saying that the conditions that have seen the emergence of an anti-colonial nationalism at the dawn of thirdworldism have now out-of-date and that the favourite tropes of that period - romantic visions of pre-colonial traditions, Marxist utopia, western knowledge of modernization and development - in some way, have failed. However the question remains open: what political visions can be more appropriate in order to face the capitalist hegemony and support the ongoing anti-hegemonic struggles in some areas of the South?

Therefore, a conceptual category of third world still allows us to concentrate our attention on meaningful topics such as political and economic inequalities. Moreover, it is true that the third world (or the south) is becoming a diffused social category all over the world, rather than just a simple geographic category. The increasing gap between north and south give relevance to the maintenance of the concept. As broad concepts such as blacks and women, allow to reflect having

in mind a political reference, the definition of third world can help us to debate about the main issues concerning contemporary development. One relevant issue is tied to the development of western analyses of global politics, starting, for example, with the clash of civilizations. Having to face a strongly polarized debate from the cultural point of view, it can be useful to find an alternative discourse based on political economy, which emphasizes both the historical aspects of western imperialism and the contemporary obscuring of economic inequalities. The perspective of the third world can therefore offer a corrective tool to those analyses which try to build differences by means of civilization and culture. Therefore, third world can assume political relevance, even if it can be difficult to clearly define it today from the political and geographical point of view, as some authors such as Randall (2004) clearly state.

Going back to the question of the clash of civilizations, it reinforces the dichotomy first-third world even if we cannot avoid to consider both the cultural heterogeneity existing in the third world, and the way it is used in many countries; this is the case of Asian values, for instance, which are strongly used by some leaders (Singapore and Malaysia), to explain and to justify specific attitudes regarding human rights (Thompson 2004). This reflection is interesting, even if it can be embarrassing to accept a certain degree of cultural determinism: however it must be recognized that different political trajectories based on cultural elements exist. As Bayart (1991) suggests it may be necessary to support the elements of political and cultural diversity. In doing so and referring to Braudel's idea of the long *durée* we can better understand the different modalities in responding to the complex challenges of modernity: culture and civilization, relations of power, of economic production, that is the cultural construction of politics.

However, the recent discourse on global governance and its nexus with security, is part of a discourse that seeks to make exceptional the current crisis and to obscure its social foundations rooted in the evolution of neo-liberal global capitalism. Moreover, it paves the way for interventions that attempt to keep the status quo of a profoundly uneven global division of labour. The current crisis, on the contrary, reveals not an exceptional situation that requires security, but how the current global capitalist order displaces insecurity in particular onto marginalised populations, while reproducing an adequate context for accumulation at the global level (Taylor 2009).

Meanwhile, in the era of globalisation and post-developmentalism, concepts favouring nation-states as reference points have been challenged and criticized. The more recent perceptions of world order have created a propitious environment for new theories pointing at the exclusion from the developed world of outsiders, by attributing them "pre-modern levels of state development and sovereignty" (Kreutzmann 2008).

According to Escobar (2004), because of the failure of modernity and the rising of an imperial globality, if we want to find out something beyond the third world we must go beyond modernity. Post modernism must search a transition from the dominion of modern science towards plural forms of knowledge: the question is how de-westernize development; in this regard, modernity is still a central issue to be considered - and a challenge at the same time - for third world countries (Cooper 2005), while development is not at an end (Parfitt 2002).

What is happening today is the strengthening of prescribed norms that hinder emancipation, producing a structural supremacy of policies of inclusion/exclusion. Of course, the dimension of class exclusion - often based on the international role of countries - is particularly meaningful in many parts of the south, and is more and more compatible with liberal democracy.

To sum up this part of my presentation, besides the issues of poverty and inequality, there are at least three important reasons which can be considered relevant in discussing on the maintenance of the category of third world. The first reason is that in the third world attempts to embrace projects of primitive accumulation still exists, even if in a different manner than in the past and within an imperialist context producing new forms of dispossession. The second reason is that these countries are part of the world economy in a different way than the rich ones. The third reason is that they share a common history of submission to global capital (Moore 2004). The concept of Third World allows us to focus the debate on the political and economic inequalities and, possibly, to find out development alternative; it “has become common currency, and its general meaning is understood by all” (Lazreg 2009). Therefore, there is political space to use this concept: probably the “borders of third world” should be redefined and we cannot continue to use it generalizing what third world is, as we will see speaking about the rural world.

The rural world in the third world

To admit that it is possible to continue using the conceptual definition of third world does not mean that a third way to development automatically exists. The creation of new capitalist classes, the transformation of property rights, and the relations of production are ongoing processes within the global economy. Central to the process of primitive accumulation is the so-called enclosure of the commons. Today, in third world countries this process is not coherent because there is a constant and continuous overlapping between communal and private property of the land. In many cases, incumbent élites use the so-called traditional and communal means of production in order to produce commodities and, above all, in order to avoid the costs of reproduction of labour. Therefore, what it is going on is a set of conflicting transformations: we can find elements of preservation of pre-capitalistic modes of production, and, at the same time, productive systems

characterized by a great degree of innovation where capital co-exists with pre-existing situations. This is certainly the case of most of rural Africa (see for instance: Peters 2004; Chimhowu, Woodhouse 2006; Cotula 2007)

Indeed, privatization and commoditization of the land can create both proletarians and petty commodity producers from subsistence producers, as well as new groups of capitalist producers from village leaders, traditional chiefs, local elites, government officials. This can lead to the effect that rural social formations become a sort of small comprador enclaves, while workers remain in an intermediate semi-proletarian situation (Moore 2004). In addition, it must be taken into consideration that customary land tenure systems are characterized by individual control rather than communal one, given that the only aspect of the African agrarian systems that can be defined as communal is the right of each member of a community to have access to the land. Today, we find a very anomalous situation, in which, even if in a context of large commoditization of the land, the formal systems are still the customary ones (Chimhowu, Woodhouse 2006). In this framework a sort of partial primitive accumulation occurs.

Through commoditization of the land, the so-called vernacular markets of the land itself are increasing, a situation where informal rules define the procedures for promoting economic development in the rural areas. Undoubtedly, the peripheral processes of primitive accumulation that lead to capitalist development can coexist with other modes of production (Harrison 2001). Those who participate into the process can benefit by forms of primitive accumulation that not necessarily are transformed in effective relations of capitalist production. Old modes of production are functional to contemporary capitalism: sometimes they are incorporated within it, sometimes not. The difference in the relationship state-society between the first and the third world is built on this incomplete capitalist development, and in the continuous transfer of wealth and labour from the periphery towards the centre: most of sub-Saharan Africa is a good example of these processes. Many of the third world countries are still located within local different forms of ongoing primitive accumulation: the incumbent classes become more and more capitalist, property relations more and more privatized, while the subaltern classes lose the chance to have access to adequate forms of livelihoods through the access to the land, therefore becoming poorer and more marginalized. However, they do not always become fully proletarians, rather they are participating to a complex process of significant agrarian transformation.

Farewell to the peasantry? Or a new re-peasantisation?

The already mentioned current international policy aiming at recovering the rural world (and the petty commodity production in particular) has reinforced a wide debate on whether the peasants are

disappearing in the new global systems. This debate developed since the publication of the book “Disappearing peasantries?” (2000) which stressed how global transformations had heavy consequences on peasants livelihoods favouring wide processes of de-agrarianisation. As recently Oya (2007) stated, a growing literature has emerged on de-agrarianisation (or de-peasantisation) and the increasing importance of the rural off-farm sector, that is, a new form of informalisation extended to rural economies in sub-Saharan Africa. Certainly according to Edelman (2008) in his analysis of agrarian Central America, we have to acknowledge that the campesino of today is usually not the campesino of fifteen years ago.

In discussing the role of peasants and in order to study them in relation to modernity and to development, it is essential to understand who they really are. First of all this group must be considered as highly diversified and heterogeneous (Moyo, Yeros 2005; Borras 2009). Therefore, it is very difficult to define peasants in sociological, economic, and cultural terms because of the great differences existing in the rural areas of developing countries. The composition of rural dwellers is differentiated, including proletarian or semi-proletarian rural groups, small farmers, and highly market-oriented entrepreneurial farmers. Today there are several notions of peasants: a very “fashionable” vision is that of households of tillers organized for the simple reproduction - that is the subsistence - through the solidarity, the reciprocity, and the egalitarian relations of traditional village community living in harmony with the nature. This notion is inspired by various modalities of “agrarian populism” - neo-classical in particular, but also sometimes radical - that celebrate the resistance to industrial urban civilization and the distrust towards the progress, that is against development (Bernstein 2003b). Indeed since the 1990s, particularly in relation to the crises of structural adjustment, to the fight against poverty, etc., a new post-modernist populism has re-emerged, jointly with the neo-liberal rhetoric of subsistence rural communities, paving the way for an essentialist narrative of the peasants (Brass 2002; Brass 2007).

In Africa, for instance, it is therefore complex to say where peasants are within the contemporary neo-liberal political economy. In particular, Bryceson (1999: 185) highlights the “fundamental problem of African peasant agriculture’s inability to compete in today’s global market”, as a component of her broader thesis of “de-agrarianisation” or “de-peasantisation”. For instance, rural dwellers in Africa - the majority - whose reproduction is secured by a combination of farming and off-farm activities, including the many whose off-farm income has been crucial, historically have struggled to meet the reproduction costs of their farming activity. In many cases, the so-called “shrinkage” of the peasant sector occurs because of the collapse of wages, and employment opportunities in the formal sector, intensifying the search for means of livelihood both on and off

the land (Bernstein 2006). This is expressed by the formation of a complex system able to generate multiple rural livelihoods (Francis 2000).

In sub-Saharan Africa the contemporary situation is sharpened by processes of inequality and class division within the peasantry itself (with intra and inter-households deep diversities), with the presence of groups of highly market-oriented petty bourgeoisie, and by increasing struggles for the control of the land made more explicit by the mentioned process of commoditization. We have to take into account that increasing numbers of rural population are “worker-peasants”, that is a sort of semi-proletarians (Bernstein 2006). This points to the related issue of social inequality which, in the conditions of contemporary rural sub-Saharan Africa, as elsewhere, requires to focus on the dynamics of class differentiation in the rural world (Bernstein 2007).

As Kay reminds us, the peasants of Latin America seems in some way blocked in a state of permanent semi-proletarianization (Kay 2000). In Latin American this has produced an important debate between the so-called campesinistas, that is those who in some way see a process of peasantisation, and descampesinistas or proletaristas, that is those who, instead, see the formation of processes of proletarianization. The first vision rejects the idea that the transformations of the rural world have produced wage-earning workers and, consequently, the end of the peasants. They affirm that the peasants, rather than disappearing, have been strengthened. In their vision a wide group of agricultural producers still exists, a group which, in many cases, is also able to compete in the global market. On the contrary, the second vision sees the traditional small farmers as economically neither viable nor in a position to cope with the challenges of the global market: therefore they are transforming themselves into proletarians, while only a smallest minority is able to become small capitalist producers (Kay 2006; Brass 2002).

Therefore, if it is true that current global transformations are modifying the rural question and the role of the peasants, in a context of fragile primitive accumulation, of structural adjustment, and privatizations of the land, new rural relations are developing in order to get access to multiple livelihoods, that is what Kay (2008) calls “new rurality”.

Increasing numbers of the rural population are straddling between the rural and the urban world, while new forms of re-peasantisation seems to occur in many parts of Africa, and in Latin America too. As van der Ploeg (2007) suggests, re-peasantisation is not only an important analytical category that enables us to understand the differentiated impact of the current global economic processes; however it is also a category which can be used to analyse meaningful experiences, such as, for example, the Movimento dos Sem Terra (MST) in Brazil; moreover other struggles and experiences should be considered. Zimbabwe is a very interesting case in Africa for discussion: this case also offers some important insights into wider international discussions about the future of rural worlds,

and the potential for state-led redistributive land reform based (largely) on a smallholder model (Scoones et al. 2010).

In Latin America the situation seems very complex given that, even if 80% of the population is in some way urbanized, this do not exclude a persistence of rural-urban connections, in order to set in motion coping strategies to combat poverty and marginalization. In the case of Brazil - the more industrialized country in Latin America - there is a meaningful number of peasants who in some way are seen as semi-proletarians because of the complex economic and social situation in which they live. In African countries the question is even more relevant, because the percentage of rural population is still very high: at least around 60% in average, with some countries where it is even higher, while strong are the urban-rural linkages (Moyo, Yeros 2005).

Within this complicate context, the contemporary development discourse is concentrated on the possible profitable relationship between rural development policies, redistributive land reform, support of small-scale producers, all solutions considered by some authors as neo-classical populism, as mentioned. Indeed, the populist discourse of backward rural groups without power that must be empowered by means of recognition of their cultural otherness is resurgent (Bernstein 2003b; 2004; 2007). Following this analysis peasants are represented as engaged in a twofold struggle: to remain subsistence producers, and to fight against economic development imposed by external policies. In many of these analyses of agrarian mobilization, the prevailing vision is that rural empowerment from below constitutes a desirable goal, always and wherever (Brass 2002). According to this vision the peasant movements are engaged in struggles against global capitalism, in order to defend pre-capitalistic relations and institutions which can protect them from hunger, deprivation, and poverty. However, some analysts argue that mobilizations of peasants, who form the core of new social movements supported by the postmodern left, are populist in nature (Das 2007: 365). As such, these movements frequently correspond to multi-class alliances reflecting the interests of a rural agrarian bourgeoisie. For instance, the discussion on Chiapas mobilization is a very interesting example of these arguments (Brass 2005).

Tensions and conflicts over land involving a wide range of social actors are marked by strongly local features and are widespread in third world countries. They appear to be intensifying in many contexts, such as in Africa, where the underlying class dynamics provides ample ideological space for populist advocacy of “community” rights (Bernstein 2006).

Indeed, as some radical authors remind us, many of the transformations of institutions within the contemporary governance in Latin America and elsewhere are functional to reformulate the agrarian economy in the interests of the dominant classes: the strength of the neo-liberal state is linked to the weakness of rural movements which are too much heterogeneous (Petras, Veltmayer 2001; 2002).

Even if peasants in the third world, and in Africa in particular, are struggling against poverty and for accessing adequate livelihoods, they are coping with contemporary challenges and contradictions. In this regard we can agree with van der Ploeg (2010: 21-22) when affirms that peasantries in the twenty-first century should be conceptualised and understood in terms of “resistance in a relation perspective”: a resistance taking many forms in order to get their own livelihoods in a context characterized by high external dependency.

Within this framework, neo-liberal programmes of registered title deeds can be an opportunity only for small groups of rural elites. However, they can represent a chance to get security of tenure for wider groups of rural dwellers (in Africa in particular) and therefore they can be able to generate a new class of small peasants, of course inserted in the global capitalist system (see for a discussion: Zamponi 2007).

Peasants are addressing these processes of transformation with the aim to avoid of being destroyed as a class. Through answers that are complex and different from region to region, from situation to situation, relevant section of world agriculture is still peasant-like. The peasants continue to search for their autonomy based on the control of local resources and of the land in particular, and on the generation of local networks in which their farming activities are embedded, in order of being able to guarantee their own space of survival and development within the processes of commoditization (van der Ploeg 2010).

Conclusions

We can say that because of the globalization processes the classical agrarian question is no more central to global economy. However we must acknowledge that as source of national accumulation in the majority of the countries of the South, it has not been solved. Rather, an agrarian question of labour exists, that is which relationship exists between labour and rural classes, as already mentioned (Bernstein 2004). Therefore, in third world societies, which are more and more disarticulated and at the same time globalized, struggles against inequalities are relevant: rural movements are linked both to process of semi-proletarianisation, and to conditions pushing towards re-peasantisation.

Probably, we are allowed to affirm that peasants are far from disappearing, even if they must face serious problems and continuous mechanisms that produce crisis, poverty, and underdevelopment (Bernstein 2003b, Kay 2006, van der Ploeg 2010). Indeed, poverty and competition for land favours de-agrarianisation processes and mechanisms of formation of multiple livelihoods, from both on- and off-farm activities. At the same time, ongoing processes of incomplete primitive accumulation are producing mechanisms of semi-proletarianisation.

Because of this, in most areas of developing countries rural and urban worlds co-exist and overlap. This process seems the only possible as it allows the peasants (or in many cases the worker-peasants) to maintain the access to their land within the so-called traditional land tenure systems as a basic safety net for their own survival (and of their households), jointly with other non permanent off-farm incomes, as occurring in sub-Saharan Africa.

Therefore, if we can take into consideration the possibility to say farewell to the peasantry, this must be placed in the specific contexts and the different historical paths, locating the processes of transformation of the rural areas in the international division of labour of contemporary global imperialism (Bernstein 2003b). At the same time, the state cannot entirely overlook smallholder interests. As petty commodity producers who own land, they are a source of legitimacy for private property itself, and therefore their continued reproduction has an ideological function both for the capital and for the state (Das 2007).

The outcome of these processes, in theory, is a numerically reduced peasantry as an economic agent and as a political force for change, a traditional social category in crisis because of the processes of modernisation, urbanisation and capitalist development of urban-centred industry linked with depeasantisation and (semi)proletarianisation. The current processes of transformation are redefining the peasantry; however they are reconstituting themselves as peasants (van der Ploeg 2010). Indeed, the peasantry cannot be understood purely in numerical terms: they remain the most dynamic force for anti-systemic change, found on the crest of a new wave of class struggle for land reform, local autonomy, social justice, and democracy (Moyo 2003).

Central to the existence of today's peasants - irrespective of where they live and work - is their ongoing struggle for autonomy in a context that is characterized by dependency, exclusion and deprivation. These struggles are basically articulated through the construction and development of networks of social and economic relations that determine strong ties between urban and rural worlds and make possible the access to multiple livelihoods which are central to the maintenance of farming activities. Within this framework, farming can produce some outcomes: it makes survival possible; it allows for further improvements and the enlargement of farming activities; and it allows for the maintenance of, if not the enlargement, of peasants autonomy (van der Ploeg 2007).

In conclusion, following Brigg (2002) the profundity and nuances of Foucauldian thought are sometimes lost in post-development literature. In some cases this depends on the usage of inappropriate rhetorical devices, closely linking the power in development to colonialism. It is probably necessary to recuperate the critical impulse of post-development in order to move away from a generic metaphor of colonization towards a closer understanding of power and of its relationships with the global and local economic and productive systems. As I have tried to discuss

here, an innovative approach to discussion among studies on development, the central role that third world as political category can have, and the relevance of the economic and social role of the peasantry in the south can help to identify new grassroots development strategies.

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