

STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION IN RURAL SOCIAL RELATIONS

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THE DEMISE OF A RURAL ECONOMY. By STEPHEN GUDEMAN. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978. Pp. 176. \$16.50.)
AGRARIAN REFORM AND PEASANT ORGANIZATION ON THE ECUADORIAN COAST. By M. R. REDCLIFT. (London: The Athlone Press, 1978. Pp. 186. \$16.00.)

Introduction

In the 1960s there was a consensus that the peasantry, still an important proportion of the world's population, would disappear as capital accumulation gradually destroyed the vestiges of a previous mode of production. In the 1970s we began to see that economic development had not transformed the peasantry into a class of rural wage laborers and/or small holders, as both neoclassical (Lewis 1955, Johnston 1961, Mellor 1973, Fei and Ranis 1966) and Marxist (Lenin 1956, Rey 1976) scholars had anticipated. There has been a general tendency for agrarian producers to drop as a proportion of the total population (*Statistical Abstract* 1977, pp. 86–87); yet, the question of their functional relation to the larger economy remains in dispute (Wolpe 1971, Meillassoux 1977, Portes 1980). Nevertheless, it is clear that this process of transformation is not unilinear and several theories, from world systems analysis (Wallerstein 1974), to articulation of modes of production analysis (Bartra 1974, Moncayo and Rojas 1979, Villareal 1978, Servolin 1972, Vergopoulos 1975, Gutelman 1975, Bennholdt-Thomsen 1976, Pare 1977, and Rello 1976), to disarticulated accumulation theory (Amin 1975, de Janvry and Garramón 1977, Portes 1980) have attempted to conceptualize both the relationship of agricultural production to the larger economy and the material basis for transformation within that sector. Among anthropologists, the theoretical work of Meillassoux (1977) has encouraged a new mode of discourse vis-à-vis agrarian social relations that attempts to extend an historical materialist analysis to the study of what has been termed noncapitalist or precapitalist modes of production. Finally, there has been an increased focus on political relations, theories of the state, and the impact of state structure and policy on agrarian relations in the periphery (Paige 1975, Bartra 1974, Comité Organizador 1978).

Recent years have also witnessed the emergence of an independent and original voice among Latin American scholars working on the "agrarian question." While one may identify four primary themes within this body of research (peasants and peasant production, the transformation from precapitalist to capitalist production, agrarian reform, and social mobilization), they have not as yet given rise to a body of comparative empirical studies; even national-level studies have been rare. Cross-national and cross-disciplinary work, however, has been on the increase, as seen in such journals as the *Journal of Peasant Studies* (Britain), *Estudios Rurales Latinoamericanos* (Colombia), *Crítica Andina* (Peru), special issues on agrarian relations in *Historia y Sociedad* (Mexico), and two issues of *Latin American Perspectives* (1978). The following sections will consider the first three of these themes, focusing discussion on two recent books that bridge many concerns internal to each of them: Gudeman's *The Demise of a Rural Economy*, and Redclift's *Agrarian Reform and Peasant Organization on the Ecuadorian Coast*.

Peasant Production

Both Marxist and neoclassical scholars have tended to view peasants as, at best, a residual category of stagnant production that would be transformed from without by the dynamic of economic development in the urban industrial sectors of the economy. Neoclassical economists have commonly asserted that this agricultural sector performed the function of providing surplus for the industrial sector. The latter, as it expanded, would draw this surplus labor population into modern industrial production. The remaining population would gradually begin to incorporate increasing amounts of technology and specialize in production for the marketplace (Johnston and Kilby 1975, p. 34).

Marxists in some ways concurred. For Marx, once capital accumulation had begun, peasants represented a class of simple commodity producers who provided the source of the urban proletariat or who were transformed in situ as commodified social relations of production penetrated the agrarian sector. Both neoclassical and Marxist theories viewed precapitalist agriculture as part of an evolutionary transformation: the peasantry would gradually differentiate into a small capitalist class and a rural wage-labor class. The dynamic of transformation was grounded in the forms of capitalist domination over the precapitalist sector. Marx himself (1965, p. 609), however, was careful to note that this general tendency would have historically and geographically specific variations.

The 1970s produced an extended debate regarding the peasantry as an economic category (Ennew, Hirst, and Tribe 1977; Foster-Carter 1978; Mintz 1977). The focus of this controversy has been the autono-

mous status of peasant production: Is it a mode with its own laws of development? The predominant concern has been with the issue of the articulation of the relationship between peasant production and capitalist production. Two primary works, Chayanov (1966) and Meillassoux (1977), have had a widespread impact on empirical studies of peasant social relations in Latin America. Chayanov's theory of agrarian household production argues that, unlike the rationale of capitalist production, the product of familial labor for the peasant is the only category of income, and profit calculations do not exist. Exploring the micro-social-relations theory of labor allocation and consumption activities, he attempts to explain how peasants have managed to survive within a capitalist economy. Meillassoux develops the concept of the "domestic mode of production" wherein power rests in the control of the means of human reproduction, the means of subsistence, and wives. He argues that although no longer autonomous, the domestic community has a capacity to resist transformation by capitalism and still underlies millions of productive units within the capitalist economy. Meillassoux continues his analysis by suggesting that reproduction of the domestic community, the domination of one mode of production by another, constitutes a form of permanent primitive accumulation.

If a central meaning is to be culled from this concern with the peasant economy, it may be asserted to rest in the idea of the family as a unity of production and consumption activities (Shanin 1973; Wolf 1955, 1966; Thorner 1962; Meillassoux 1977; Galeski 1972). This basic insight, however, has given rise to a number of varying conceptualizations of this fact, made evident in the proliferating terminology of various empirical studies, such as colonial modes of production (Alavi 1973, Banaji 1972), tributary modes of production (Rey 1976), simple or petty-commodity modes of production (Bartra 1974, Kahn 1978), and domestic mode of production (Meillassoux 1977). Others—Servolin (1972), Vergopoulos (1975), Gutelman (1975) and Moncayo and Rojas (1979)—have also looked at simple commodity production as a means of conceptualizing the peasant economy. What unites all these authors is the understanding that the peasantry does surrender a surplus to the larger economy within which it is situated.

It is at this juncture that the empirical studies under review here make an important contribution. Gudeman's *The Demise of a Rural Economy* is a case study of a Panamanian rural community. The book covers a period in which the social relations of production within the community were transformed from what Gudeman describes as a "subsistence system, a classless society which grew up on its own" (1978, p. 49) to sugar cane production in which the peasants still hold title to the land, but have lost "control over their productive means" (1978, p. 122). Gudeman's analysis of this process is marked by careful observation

and description; as such it represents an important contribution to the literature of micro-case studies focusing on the transformation of agrarian social relations in Latin America.

The Demise of a Rural Economy carefully reconstructs the social relations of subsistence production. In doing so, it utilizes a new vocabulary for economic anthropology, appropriating from a variety of sources such terms as labor, tools, productivity, distribution, subsistence, surplus, savings and reinvestment, although at times investing them with a new content. By recasting these concepts Gudeman hopes to express the unity of social institutions within the subsistence mode of production. The unique contribution to be made by economic anthropology is an analysis of the "social relations of production which lie behind observable economic facts" (1978, p. 152) through a close empirical analysis of labor allocation within the household as a unit of production; through an empirical analysis of the production process itself; and, finally, through a characterization of the institutions of labor exchange within the community.

Redclift's *Agrarian Reform and Peasant Organization on the Ecuadorian Coast* addresses the problem of peasant production from a view of agrarian structure (the forms of land tenure and differential market capacities of various social groups) and agrarian reform that is fundamentally congruent with the Comité Interamericano de Desarrollo Agrícola analysis of Latin American agriculture. The major element producing a dependence of tenants upon landlords is their "market situation," not the class relationships in which they exist or the dynamics of reproduction characterizing those relationships (1978, p. 7). Precapitalist production is treated as simply a form of labor organization. The interests of specific class positions and the capacities of these classes to realize those interests can, according to the Redclift analysis, only be understood in terms of their relationship to the more general political economy of the nation state. The historical processes of reproduction and/or transformation of peasant production is, therefore, based upon their control of resources (market capacity) and the specific relationship they have with the state.

These two books help us to separate the question of a *formally* (de jure) free labor force from that of the *institutional* (de facto) constraints that condition their lives. Gudeman and Redclift portray in detail the historical process by which the social relations of control within the broader political economy of the nation may compel peasants to submit their formal ownership of the land to the needs of capital and the state. This is especially clear as both Panamanian and Ecuadorian peasants lose control over the *product* of their labor. If one accepts this point, then the question of theoretically expressing the internal laws of production

and reproduction for a peasant mode of production, whatever label one wishes to use to designate it, is no longer necessary: they do not exist.

One may locate the most direct origins of this debate in the contrasting theoretical positions of Frank (1967) and Laclau (1971), wherein the former contends that Latin American social relations have been capitalist from the origins of the Spanish empire (a position directly incorporated by Wallerstein 1974), and the latter argues that feudal or precapitalist relations of production continue to exist in Latin America and are an essential feature of dependent economies. Several recent empirical studies that employ this latter focus on the articulation of precapitalist and capitalist social relations of production are Winson (1978), Moncayo and Rojas (1979), de Janvry and Ground (1978), Meade (1978), and Taussig (1978), all published in *Latin American Perspective's* special issues on agriculture. Taussig provides a particularly interesting analysis of the "subsidy" to capitalist agriculture by peasant subsistence production, which is semiproletarianized, and also analyzes the devastating consequences of this relationship for the health, housing, and nutritional status of rural labor, conditions reported more generally by the FAO (1976).

The Transition to Capitalist Agriculture

The question of a transition in agrarian production relations has traditionally fallen into several camps. First, there are those who emphasize strictly economic forces, notably market capacities, which lead to the absorption of the agrarian population of direct producers into the urban wage-labor force (Schultz 1968). A second group focuses upon the shift from traditional to modern sociology, this leading to urban migration or the shift to innovative and competitively superior production and increasing specialization (McClellan 1961). A third perspective has identified relations of internal colonialism as the predominant force in the transformation of agriculture (Wolpe 1971, Hechter 1975) or unequal exchange relations that lead to an outflow of value (Arrighi 1973). Fourth, the dependency perspective has tended to view agriculture as a source of cheap food, with peasant production allowing for the reproduction of urban labor at low cost and providing a potential release valve in recessionary periods as urban labor returns to the countryside. These arguments have all focused upon social relations within the nation state. More recently, analysis of labor flows has tended to move the level of explanation beyond political borders (Portes 1979).

What is common to all of these perspectives is the tendency to view the transformation in agrarian social relations at an abstract level. It is here that detailed case studies such as those provided by Gudeman

and Redclift can yield fruitful results, demonstrating that potentially vague and seemingly rhetorical allusions to class struggle, market forces, exploitation, and domination may indeed provide a coherent theoretical base for reconstructing the process of transition at the local and regional level while linking it to broader structural tendencies in the process of economic development at the level of the nation state and the world economy.

In Gudeman's analysis, the 1950s presented a moment of transitional struggle for the peasants of Los Boquerones, one touching every aspect of family and community social organization. The resolution of that struggle proved to be double-edged, and Gudeman demonstrates the consequences of the peasants' "victory." The peasants of Los Boquerones gained access to the land and became owners of land, but only within the limits of an agrarian reform policy that inevitably led to their loss of control over what they produced, how they produced it, and what happened to it. The agrarian reform policy compelled the peasants to enter increasingly into production for market and prescribed the limits within which this was possible. Social differentiation began to transform the organizational capacities of the peasantry and "change their worldly conditions, from being independent self-sufficient producers to becoming petty capitalists and day labourers" (1978, p. 122).

In the peasant studies literature one commonly finds reference to market effects and market forces. The great worth of Gudeman's analysis, then, is to decompose the process by which the peasants of this village were reproduced as a landowning/wage-labor force that no longer had effective control over the means of production. While they own title to bits of land, the entire area has become dominated by the local sugar cane mill. The mill controls all production/marketing decisions. Financing is controlled by international capital. The peasantry now lacks the capacity to survive outside market social relations. The transformation is complete. Pare (1977), in her study of Mexico, has developed a parallel argument—if less of an attempt to quantify the relative efficiencies of each form of production—analyzing the maintenance of noncapitalist forms of production as peasants become incorporated as workers in a low-wage/low-security labor force. Thus Gudeman's book responds to the following implicit question: How does the process of economic development not only transform, but at the same time reproduce, the peasantry as a labor force? The thesis that Gudeman offers is the following: "Existing on the margins of the capitalist economy, the rural system contains within it the preconditions for conversion to that 'more advanced' form of production. The crucial link between the two comes not through the market, by means of the exchange of goods or labor, but through control over real property" (p. 113).

In Redclift's volume, "economic development" is analyzed in terms of amounts of investment (foreign and domestic) in various sectors (agriculture and industry), the distribution of the population (rural or urban), the structure of land tenure (latifundia or minifundia), and finally through comparisons of productivity in each sector. Transformation of the peasantry is addressed as a change in forms of labor organization. The primary source of this process is the state. Redclift argues that agrarian reform, the instrument of transformation, was not a response to the peasantry's social mobilization; rather, he takes the position that, in Ecuador, agrarian reform was initiated to meet the needs of the state itself. The state sought to overcome the constraints of existing "tenurial institutions" on expanded production in agriculture. The aim was to introduce capitalist social relations of production in agriculture in order to increase productivity. The material basis for implementing it was oil revenues. Thus we have what has historically been termed a "junker transformation," in which little real redistribution of land occurs but noncapitalist landowners are forced to transform to capitalist production by the state.

Redclift argues that the implementation of this reform has transformed agrarian structure. It has provided the basis for increased economic and political power for peasant producers. It has also led to a process of social differentiation within the peasantry, based on their control of resources and the specific relationship they have with state agencies. This differentiated process of political mobilization is detailed in a number of brief summaries of the experiences of peasants on individual haciendas. He argues that the degree of radicalization of the peasantry is negatively correlated with their degree of "economic advancement" (1978, p. 97); that is, those who most resemble a rural petty bourgeoisie are the least radical. Finally, the radical political character of peasant organizations is linked to the access that they enjoy to support and subsidy from the state. He concludes that the closer peasant economic relations are with the state, the more compliant is the peasant organization. The issue of corporatist authority relations and co-optation becomes central for mobilization.

State Policy and Agrarian Class Relations

The Gudeman and Redclift studies demonstrate that the agricultural sector is not reproduced or transformed through narrowly defined economic activities or forces. They point to the centrality of various forms of organized struggle embracing both capitalist and precapitalist interests. It is facile to note that the agricultural sector of peripheral social formations is an arena of continual change, albeit expressed in different forms and different tendencies as one considers particular nations and

regions within them. Given this complex set of social relations it is necessary to treat the issue of the state and its relationship to organization and struggle.

As the state reproduces class relations, it produces the objective conditions for new forms of organization and new struggles. Attempts to transform agricultural production to increase levels of production require the active intervention of the state. The result is that relations of production in agriculture become politicized. As a capitalist state, the state in most Latin American nations must act within a set of objective limitations that it cannot transcend since it must reproduce the basic structure of capitalist social relations (Altwater 1973, Mueller and Neussuess 1975). It must reproduce a formally free labor force and support a legal and monetary system that protects property and facilitates the circulation of commodities. It must also sustain a political and ideological function that legitimates a process of appropriation of surplus in production. The process of state intervention in agriculture, therefore, embodies both an accumulation and a legitimation function (O'Connor 1973).

Redcliff's empirical study of state intervention in agriculture adopts an implicit theory of the relationship between state and civil society. First, he takes the incapacity of any single group in Ecuador to consolidate its control over the process of political and economic development as evidence that neither class interests nor class capacities can act to explain either the process of economic development or state policy. Rather, he argues that the state has its own interests, interests that include the expansion of state control over all classes. His analysis concludes that economic development does not inevitably lead to full proletarianization of the peasantry. Instead, state intervention to extend markets, consolidate production units, and undertake new investment is balanced with a policy to incorporate direct agricultural producers, promising economic "gains" while ensuring that peasants thus transformed will lose control over their own enterprises.

In large part, this is the same view of transforming agrarian social relations that is found in Gudeman. Both authors presume a strong autonomy of the state leading to uniquely "state" interests and the expansion of state control over agriculture at the expense of the peasantry as they are forced into more extensively commercialized social relations of production and consumption. Gudeman notes that Panamanian agrarian reform policy expropriated and redistributed among the peasants the estates of the old landlords. However, the legitimacy of their property rights (landlords) was sustained and peasants were forced by the terms of their new tenure to enter into market relations to pay for the land. The expansion of state investment in sugar production led to a consolidation of local landholdings within the production process, al-

though individual titles by peasants meant that they received a share of profits from the new sugar mill near Los Boquorones. Yet the newly consolidated production process, highly capital intensive and directly linked to the world market, was not itself within the control of the peasants who owned the land. Equally important, the capacity of the peasants of the village to stay out of the market was eliminated as the spraying of pesticides and herbicides destroyed all other crop production within the area.

Redclift concludes that in Ecuador, as elsewhere in Latin America, the redistribution and democratization aims of agrarian reform have been secondary; the greatest beneficiaries have been the dominant classes who already control most of the land and monopolize marketing. Gudeman likewise views agrarian reform as a means of co-opting a radical peasantry while extending capitalist social relations. This view has recently been echoed in a study of Brazilian agriculture by Sorj (1980).

Conclusion

In each historical period of economic development in Latin America the economic and political power of different sectors of the population has left its imprint on the spatial and social organization of agricultural production. Thus the "agrarian question," the focus on the transformative struggles within agriculture, becomes a central path for studies directed at understanding the more general questions of political economy within Third World nations. An understanding of agrarian social relations, therefore, must be embedded in theories and methodologies that capture the historical and relational dimensions of the problem. As the interests and capacities of specific groups, at the most concrete level, become transformed, the terrain of spatial and social organization in agricultural production and consumption objectifies that process.

As these two studies make clear, state intervention has become necessary to serve what appear to be contradictory functions. The first is the stable reproduction of an agrarian labor force, one that may or may not have formal access to land but which is unable to couple itself voluntarily with one or another form of production. Put differently, the peasantry has lost control over the investment of resources in production, in the social relations of control over the structure of the work process, and finally, it has lost out in the social relations of control over its own survival. This has been the main consequence of agrarian reform interventions in the form of land appropriations, credits and loans, and technological aid, all of which have increasingly tied the material base for direct producers in agriculture to their relationship with the state.

Agrarian reform interventions have also forced large landowners

to transform to capitalist production relations, primarily directed at foreign export, by providing extensive credit and technical aid as well as infrastructural development. Thus, in both cases of state intervention, it has been necessary for the state to control noncompetitive production in order to coordinate the functioning of the general economy and reform and regulate conflict and struggle within rural areas.

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