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## From Peasant Studies to Agrarian Change

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*This inaugural essay surveys themes and approaches in agrarian political economy over the last three decades, especially with reference to contributions to, and debates in, the Journal of Peasant Studies of which T.J. Byres was editor from 1973 to 2000 and Henry Bernstein editor from 1985 to 2000. We indicate intellectual strengths and lacunae, new approaches to longstanding issues, and new concerns which emerged over that period, and which inform the project of this new Journal of Agrarian Change and the challenges it presents.*

*Key words:* agrarian change, capitalism, class analysis, development, peasants, political economy

We are pleased to introduce this inaugural issue of the *Journal of Agrarian Change* (JAC). While the title is new, the intellectual project of the journal inevitably has its own history and context. To present our version of the nature, trajectory and challenges of that intellectual project is fitting; it serves as a discipline for us as founding editors of JAC and as a statement of intent to our contributors and readers. To do this requires reference to the *Journal of Peasant Studies* (JPS), of which T.J. Byres was the founder, with Charles Curwen and Teodor Shanin, and joint editor from 1973 to 2000, with Henry Bernstein joint editor from 1985 to 2000 (the final issue we edited was Vol. 27 No. 4 of July 2000). Of course, those nearly three decades of our association with JPS, charted in its volumes 1–27, witnessed great changes in the world – economic and social, political and ideological – and with them major shifts in intellectual concerns and fashions, not least (if hardly exclusively) as the latter are produced and consumed in the academies of Europe and North America.

Informed by these observations, this introductory statement is divided into three parts. First it sketches the context and concerns of the 1960s and early 1970s which generated the formation (and title) of JPS; second, it identifies aspects of the course of JPS – the themes and approaches it encompassed – from 1973 to 2000; finally, it suggests how this new *Journal of Agrarian Change* seeks to present and encourage scholarship and debate that illuminate processes of agrarian change, both historical and contemporary, through the perspectives of political economy.

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### PEASANT STUDIES: A FOUNDING MOMENT

The origins of *JPS* have been sketched by Byres (1994), to which readers can refer.<sup>1</sup> Several features of his brief account merit selective emphasis and elaboration for present purposes. Byres described how *JPS* emerged from the Peasants Seminar of the University of London, which he convened with Charles Curwen from 1972 to 1989, and highlighted the synergy between that long-running seminar and *JPS* (Byres 1994, and forthcoming). The aim of the seminar was to provide a stimulus to, and forum for, the consideration of issues of agrarian change, increasingly recognized to be as important as they were largely neglected and inadequately researched. Those issues concerned ‘peasantries and their social structures; the nature and logic of peasant agriculture; peasantries and their “moral communities”; and peasants and politics’ (Byres 1994, 2). These are indeed ‘very broad themes’, as Byres noted, but they incorporated a specific and pointed charge in the conditions of intellectual work in the 1960s and 1970s for several reasons.

One reason, and an enduring preoccupation, was the effort to understand better the problems and prospects of economic and social development of poorer countries (only recently independent of colonial rule in most of Asia and Africa), in which ‘the peasant is a very essential factor of the population, production and political power’ as Engels (1970, 457) had remarked of France and Germany some 80 years earlier. A second and connected reason (in addition to its intrinsic interest) was the commitment to exploring and testing the possible contributions to such understanding of knowledge of (i) pre-capitalist agrarian formations in different parts of the world, (ii) paths of agrarian change in transitions to capitalism in the now developed countries and (iii) the dynamics of agrarian transformation – or lack of transformation – in Latin American, Asian and African experiences of colonialism, and the legacies of those dynamics for subsequent processes of development/underdevelopment.

Third, if historical and comparative approaches to issues of development/underdevelopment in poor countries related the study of peasantries to the paths of development of *capitalism* (and their pre-capitalist antecedents), the contemporary ‘peasant question’ (or better ‘peasant questions’) also resonated the concerns of anti-imperialism and transitions to *socialism*. Two of the defining global moments of the 1960s and early 1970s were the Vietnamese war of national liberation against US imperialism and the ‘Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution’ and its aftermath in China. While international progressive support for the former was unanimous, together with recognition of its social base in the peasantry of Vietnam, comprehending the baffling course of the latter – and the role in it of China’s hundreds of millions of rural producers – generated (or further provoked) a range of sharp and symptomatic disagreements about the conditions,

<sup>1</sup> The individuals involved in producing *JPS* from 1973 to 1994 are listed by Byres (1994, 1–2). The only significant change thereafter until Vol. 27 No. 4 of July 2000 was that Tom Brass’s tenure as joint editor from October 1990 (Vol. 18 No. 1) ended in July 1998 (Vol. 25 No. 4).

strategies and prospects of socialist development, and specifically socialist agrarian transformation, in poor countries. Of course, casting its long shadow over those disagreements was the first and fateful experience of social revolution and collectivization of agriculture in a mostly agrarian society, that of the USSR (see note 4 below).

In sum, these were some of the principal preoccupations of the ‘Peasant Seminar’ and the founding moment of the *Journal of Peasant Studies*. What were the intellectual resources then available to get to grips with these concerns? First, this was a moment of intense interest in Marxist ideas.<sup>2</sup> Yet, while often rich in analytical suggestion and insight, the reflections of classic Marxism on matters agrarian are fragmentary at best, constrained, inevitably, by the circumstances and preoccupations they addressed. In the context of the 1960s and early 1970s, marked by the intensity of continuing national liberation struggles (in Africa as well as Asia, and of rural guerilla movements in Latin America), and by the increasingly evident difficulties of capitalist development in poor countries with large peasant populations, it was probably above all the influence of Maoism that demanded a response and inflected the quest for a new ‘peasant studies’ that could engage effectively with the dramatic events of the time. The claims of Maoism, in effect, forced attention on peasantries beyond the ‘classic’ Marxist motifs (or at least the principally European zones they addressed) of their place in transitions to capitalism (Marx, Lenin), in ‘socialist primitive accumulation’ (Lenin, Preobrazhensky, Bukharin, Trotsky, Stalin), and in class struggle in conditions of (emergent) bourgeois democracy (Marx, Kautsky).<sup>3</sup> Whether those claims

<sup>2</sup> Both reflecting and stimulating this interest were the first English translations of important texts taken up by the emergent ‘peasant studies’, including the first full translation of Marx’s *Grundrisse*, published in 1973 (an English language edition of extracts from the *Grundrisse* on *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations* had been published in 1964); Marx’s theorization of the formal and real subsumption of labour by capital, published as an Appendix to Ben Fowkes’ new translation of volume 1 of *Capital* in 1976; and notable editions of selections from Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks* (1971), *Letters from Prison* (1975) and *Political Writings, 1910–1920* (1977). Kautsky’s *The Agrarian Question* only became available to anglophone readers in a full translation in 1988, although a translation of extracts from the French edition by Jairus Banaji (1976b) attracted wide attention. There were also English language editions of texts by leading protagonists of the Bolshevik debates of the 1920s, for example, Preobrazhensky (1965, 1980) and Bukharin (1971). In addition to the official *Selected Works*, writings of Mao Zedong appeared in new editions of translation and commentary, for example Schram (1969, 1974). The efflorescence of Marxist intellectual work and debate in British and North American universities added journals like *Antipode*, *Capital and Class*, *Critique of Anthropology*, *History Workshop*, *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, *Race and Class*, *Radical Sociology*, *Review of African Political Economy* and *Review of Radical Political Economy* – as well as the *Journal of Peasant Studies* – to existing independent socialist journals like *Monthly Review* and *Science and Society* in the USA and *New Left Review* in Britain. See also note 7.

<sup>3</sup> The concerns of classic Marxism were focused on the problematic of the transition from feudalism to capitalism, in both its western European heartlands and the adjacent zones of incomplete transition/‘backwardness’ (what would later be called ‘underdevelopment’) in southern and eastern Europe. *JPS* was to publish a number of articles on Spain, southern Italy and Greece, and on Russia before the October revolution and during the 1920s. We should not forget, however, the importance of analyses of imperialism by Lenin and others to subsequent work on development/underdevelopment in the peripheries of imperialism. For example, Rosa Luxemburg’s *The Accumulation of Capital* (1963) was an important theoretical influence on the formulation, in the 1960s and 1970s, of the articulation of modes of production to explain specific forms of agrarian underdevelopment, and their reproduction, in the conditions of capitalist imperialism.

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amounted to filling gaps in ‘classic’ Marxism, or to its fundamental revision (in the direction of ‘Third Worldism’, peasants as the revolutionary force of the current epoch, etc.), demanded attention and response across a wide terrain of analytical, empirical and political issues.

In the circumstances thus sketched, a second intellectual stimulus – and resource – noted by Byres (1994) was the recent appearance of a number of works that, in their various ways, had a major impact on an emergent ‘peasant studies’. Byres cited Eric Wolf’s textbook on *Peasants* (1966, and his equally seminal *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century*, 1969), Barrington Moore Jr’s study of *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy. Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (1966) and the first English translation of A.V. Chayanov, *The Theory of Peasant Economy* (1966, written in the 1920s).<sup>4</sup> Wolf and Barrington Moore Jr were major figures of critical dissent from the mainstream orthodoxies of the American academy, whose writings served to illuminate some of the tensions and lacunae in the traditions of ‘classic’ Marxism. Both exemplified the application of historical and comparative analysis with great flair and a challenging eclecticism. Perhaps most significantly, both extended the challenge to ‘classic’ Marxism beyond its virtually exclusive European focus (and without succumbing to the temptations of a modish Maoism). Wolf’s ideas about peasant social structure and its dynamics were informed by his studies of Mexico, and Latin America and the Caribbean more widely, and his book on peasant wars comprised case studies of Mexico, Russia, China, Vietnam, Algeria and Cuba. Barrington Moore’s great comparative study encompassed the ‘classic’ European instances of England and France, the USA, and Japan, China and India (further informed by his interest in the historical trajectories of Prussia/Germany and Russia/USSR).

In relation to the broad themes noted by Byres (and listed above), Wolf’s work was especially relevant to that of peasant social structure, Barrington Moore’s to peasants and politics (as was Wolf 1969), and Chayanov’s, of course, to the nature and logic of peasant agriculture.<sup>5</sup> In their various ways, these three authors tabled themes and issues that were to permeate the theoretical and empirical work that featured in *JPS*. Wolf’s approach to peasant social structure exemplified the problematic question of whether ‘peasants’/‘peasantry’ constitutes a specific single

<sup>4</sup> To which should be added important works by Lewin (1968) and Shanin (1972), among others, that challenged accepted Marxist versions of Russian agrarian society before the October revolution and in the 1920s, in relation to the class differentiation of the peasantry and the collectivization of agriculture from 1929. Shanin, one of the founding editors of *JPS*, wrote two further monographs on Russia before 1917 (Shanin 1985, 1986), edited a volume of Marx’s correspondence with Zasulich, and other texts, plus a number of essays in *Late Marx and the Russian Road* (1983), and edited an influential anthology on *Peasants and Peasant Societies* (1971) that extended the themes of Russian (neo) populism to the contemporary Third World and its issues of development/underdevelopment. The Russian debates from the 1890s to the moment of Stalin’s collectivization of agriculture in 1929 were probably the most important single source of subsequent Marxist thought about agrarian questions in poor countries, notably for communist parties in Asia (China, Vietnam, India; see also the survey of Turkish agrarian debates by Seddon and Margulies 1984).

<sup>5</sup> All were also relevant, at least by implication, to the fourth broad theme of peasant ‘moral community’, established more explicitly and centrally by another seminal work of the intellectual conjuncture, James Scott’s *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* (1976).

(and singular) social entity – formation, type, class, etc. – across different modes of production and historical epochs. Barrington Moore argued the centrality of struggle between classes of pre-capitalist landed property and (peasant) agrarian labour in the differential paths of state formation in the modern world.<sup>6</sup> The work of Chayanov was an original and distinctive approach to the economics of peasant production and reproduction, which had a major impact that we return to below. The distinctiveness, and indeed peculiarity, of Chayanov's model consisted in its combination of a claim for peasant economy as a general (and generic) 'type', akin to a mode of production, and staking that claim on a marginalist analysis of the economic behaviour of the peasant household as both unitary farming enterprise and site of (biological) reproduction. Following its translation, Chayanov's work became enormously influential in the anglophone academy, not least as an inspiration of neo-populist analysis of peasants and agricultural development.

These pointers do not exhaust the political and intellectual contours, resources and currents of the founding moment of peasant studies, of course. We should also note the contributions of intellectuals from the imperialist periphery on the distinctive agrarian questions shaped by colonial conditions (for example, on India, Roy 1922 and Palme Dutt 1940; on Africa, Plaatje 1987, first published 1916, and various essays of Amilcar Cabral, who trained as an agronomist, reprinted in Cabral 1971, 1979); and those contributions (many by communist scholars) from the 1940s that reopened and advanced debate on feudalism and the development of capitalism in northwestern Europe (e.g. Dobb 1963, first published in 1946; Dobb et al. 1954; Hilton 1976; there was also a major debate in India from the 1950s about the pre-capitalist agrarian formations of South Asia, see below). And, confronting the concerns of materialist and other critical scholarship, there were new bodies of work in the mainstream social sciences that addressed problems and prospects of development – economic and political – in the poor countries of Latin America, Asia and Africa, and that fed off and into contestation between the capitalist and socialist blocs over the claims of their respective development models and for allies and clients in the 'three continents'. The intrinsic conservatism of that mainstream social science turned to questions of development and underdevelopment was often as thin intellectually as it was loaded ideologically, for example, in Economics, Anthropology and Politics. Nonetheless, it required critique, and the formulation, application and development of alternative approaches able to demonstrate analytically superior results.

These, then, were some of the principal concerns, intellectual sources and terms of reference and debate that fuelled an emergent and critical 'peasant studies', and also help explain why it was designated '*peasant studies*' – the common term in the titles of the books by Wolf, Barrington Moore and Chayanov (as well as Lewin, Shanin and Scott) that we have cited, and apparently linking the

<sup>6</sup> The observation of the Editorial Statement in the first issue of *JPS* that 'the way in which peasants disappear has a decisive influence on the nature of the society to come' echoed a key conclusion of Barrington Moore's argument.

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various intellectual objects of their authors. Engagement with those concerns in the ‘Peasant Seminar’ ‘quickly revealed a host of unresolved issues, a ferment of ideas, and a burning contemporary relevance’ that suggested ‘a strong case for the discipline and focus of a journal’ (Byres 1994, 3).<sup>7</sup> How *JPS* served as a medium of exploration of the concerns of its founding moment, and how those concerns evolved over a period of major change and upheaval in the world, are likewise surveyed in the next section of this essay.<sup>8</sup>

### 1973–2000: THEMES AND APPROACHES

At its outset, the ‘peasant studies’ described above necessarily confronted the central issue of peasants/peasantry as a general (and generic) social ‘type’: whether there are essential qualities of ‘peasantness’ applicable to, and illuminating, different parts of the world in different periods of their histories, not least the poorer countries of Latin America, Asia and Africa and their contemporary processes of development/underdevelopment (Byres forthcoming).

Peasant essentialism can be constructed around various qualities of ‘peasantness’ by various analytical methods and with various ideological effects (and intentions). Those qualities include such familiar notions as household farming organized for simple reproduction ('subsistence'), the solidarities, reciprocities and egalitarianism of (village) community, and commitment to the values of a way of life based on household and community, kin and locale (and harmony with nature, a motif revived and privileged by current ‘green’ discourses). The qualities of an essential ‘peasantness’ can be constructed in formal theories of peasant behaviour (of which Chayanov’s model of peasant economy is paradigmatic), and in sociological and cultural(ist) conceptions of what makes peasants different and special (contrasted explicitly or implicitly with proletarians on one hand, market-oriented and entrepreneurial ‘farmers’ on the other). Such essentialist constructions acknowledge the relations of peasants with other social groups and entities – landlords, merchants, the state, the urban in general – and typically view them as relations of subordination and exploitation that also define the peasant condition and generate the politics of peasant resistance.

The most important methodological issue of peasant essentialism is its argument (or assumption) that the core elements of peasant ‘society’ – household, kin, community, locale – produce (or express) a distinctive *internal* logic or

<sup>7</sup> Given our interpretation of the founding moment of *JPS*, we can only be amused by the multiple misunderstandings contained within and/or encouraged by the observation of Kearney (1996, 38): ‘With government and corporate money to support it, by the early 1960s research on peasant societies had become a growth industry in anthropology . . . Several milestones of this trend are (*sic*) the founding in the early 1970s of the *Journal of Peasant Studies* and the *Peasant Studies Newsletter*’. Kearney here appropriated – and misleadingly so – from Silverman (1979), the only citation of *JPS* in the bibliography of Kearney’s book on *Reconceptualizing the Peasantry*. He would have done better to note more carefully what Silverman (1979, 52) wrote about the fusion of Marxist and other radical scholarship in establishing peasant studies, and *a fortiori JPS*.

<sup>8</sup> Our sketch can only be selective and illustrative rather than comprehensive, and is presented, as suggested earlier, to help suggest an evolving agenda of issues in the analysis of agrarian change.

dynamic, whether cultural, sociological, economic, or in some combination. It follows that the relations of peasants with powerful others amount to various forms of appropriation and oppression *external* to the inner essence/dynamic of peasant existence, which can thus not only survive their demise but subsequently, and consequently, flourish. This is evident in Chayanov's vision of peasants as 'an independent class' (see below), and in his *Peasant Farm Organization* and *On the Theory of Non-capitalist Economic Systems* (1966) which theorize respectively the internal logic of peasantry (essential, hence unchanging) and forms of its external relations (variable and contingent).

These essentialist ideas do not attach to any one ideological position or programme. They can inform both left and right versions of the disappearance of the peasantry necessary to economic, social and cultural progress ('development'). They can inspire varieties of populism that celebrate 'resistance' to urban-industrial civilization and its discontents ('anti-development'), or that advocate a more humane, *and* effective, programme of development that frees the productive energies, and social and moral virtues, of the peasantry from its historic condition of subjugation and exploitation. The latter has probably never been better expressed than in Chayanov's definition of neo-populism: 'a theory for the development of agriculture on the basis of cooperative peasant households, a peasantry organized cooperatively as an independent class and technically superior to all other forms of agricultural organization' (Bourgholtzer 1999, 3, 16).

The prevalent (if not inevitable) associations of methodological essentialism with a populist ideological stance – 'taking the part of peasants'<sup>9</sup> – also inflected the founding moment of peasant studies and has permeated its contestations and controversies ever since. Its influences are evident in the references of the Editorial Statement in the first issue of *JPS* to peasants as a 'social class', 'peasant societies' and 'generic characteristics' of peasants (Byres et al. 1973), as well as essays in its early issues that sought (albeit from different perspectives) to define, theorize and/or generalize about peasant economy (Shanin 1973, 1974), social structure (Meillassoux 1973; Mintz 1973; Alavi 1973) and ideology and politics (Hobsbawm 1973; Alavi 1973).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The title of a lucid essay on sub-Saharan Africa by Williams (1976) that champions, as well as unifies, the methodological and ideological positions summarized. Because of the current widespread fashion of agrarian populism it is, perhaps, easy to forget that it often gained its initial purchase in opposition to ideologically negative constructions of peasant essentialism: peasants as intrinsically backward, bound to tradition and custom, reactionary, etc., with their resonances in currents of both the Marxist tradition ('rural idiocy') and that of bourgeois modernization/development.

<sup>10</sup> As so often in social science, it is difficult to disentangle elements of genuine theoretical abstraction (as in Chayanov, for example) from more or less plausible empirical generalization in ideal types of peasants/peasantry/peasant society (as, say, in Shanin 1973, 1974, who invokes Chayanov). The method of ideal typification typically (if not uniquely) confronts the problem of deciding when those so designated cease to be peasants, and on what criteria derived from their ideal-typical characteristics: when they become more 'market-oriented'? When they derive less than half of household income from their own farming? When they abandon the values of community? And so on . . . see the interesting response of Kitching (1998b), in the post-Soviet context, to 'the spuriously essentialist question "are rural Russian people still peasants or not?"'

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Many articles in *JPS* from the beginning contributed to a critique of various forms of peasant essentialism and agrarian populism, more and less explicitly (and polemically), and to formulating, applying and testing alternative approaches to analysis of agrarian structure and change. Major (and sometimes connected) examples of the latter included, first, attempts to investigate peasantries through their locations in different modes of production and the social formations they shape, that is, how different peasantries are constituted through their relations with other classes and entities: landed property, merchant capital, money-lending capital, different forms of state, urban centres of demand and power, and so on, all of which are found in pre-capitalist formations as well as capitalism (if not with the same social content), while others are specific to the latter, notably agrarian capital, and intersectoral linkages between agriculture and modern industry in the social divisions of labour of both national economies and a world economy whose development is a definitive feature of the era of capital. Analyzing peasantries as constituted through such relations, including therefore how the latter are *internalized* in (diverse) economic and social arrangements and dynamics of peasant life, evidently contests the method of constructing an essential peasantness from the inside, as it were.

A second (and connected) challenge, and alternative approach, to this characteristic method of peasant essentialism focuses on tendencies to class differentiation as an effect of contradictory class relations *intrinsic* to peasant production in certain historical conditions, above all those of transitions to capitalism and capitalist development/underdevelopment in the formations of the imperialist periphery. A third area, likewise connected with both of the above, is that of a range of linkages of peasant production and wage labour, including the supply by peasant households of labour to other peasant households, to large(r)-scale capitalist farms and plantations, to non-agricultural rural enterprises and to urban industry, and its implications for peasant class formation and the differential location of peasant classes in social divisions of labour.

These alternative approaches inspired by, and aspiring to, a materialist political economy of agrarian structure and change, were applied to the broad thematic areas noted earlier: pre-capitalist agrarian formations, transitions to capitalism in the developed/industrialized countries, projects of socialist agrarian transition, experiences of colonialism in the imperialist periphery and contradictory processes of development/underdevelopment in poor countries after the end of colonial rule.

### *Pre-capitalist Formations*

When *JPS* began, probably the most influential Marxist historical debate of direct relevance was that concerning European feudalism, with its particular interest in why it yielded the original transition to capitalism. One of the key figures of that debate, Rodney Hilton, was an early and valued contributor to *JPS*. He considered the specificity of the medieval European peasantry within the class structure of feudalism (Hilton 1974), advanced and assessed explanations of

inequality among medieval peasants, explicitly rejecting the argument from (Chayanovian) demographic differentiation (Hilton 1978) and, in more evidently comparative fashion, inquired into the relative unimportance of sharecropping as a form of tenancy in medieval England, which he attributed to the power of English feudal landed property (Hilton 1990).<sup>11</sup> Hilton saw no intellectual value in attempts to conceptualize or generalize peasants as a social ‘type’ across different modes of production and historical epochs.

Other contributions on pre-capitalist class structure and its dynamics shared this view, and were further shaped by two features that signalled a distinctive intellectual style and unfolding agenda from the beginning of *JPS*: an explicit, and typically elaborated, theoretical statement (or problematization, in effect) of an object of inquiry, and a commitment to comparative analysis that extended beyond Europe. The first of these traits was evident in Banaji’s examination (1976a) of agrarian commodity production in feudalism and contrast of its organization in eastern and western Europe: the capacity of landlord power to mobilize servile labour for manorial production in the east repressed the space for peasant commodity production and class differentiation that emerged in the west. Kay (1974) likewise focused on the contrast of east European *Gutherrschaft* (demesne production with servile labour) and west European *Grundherrschaft* (peasant production on rented manorial land), and their paths of transition, to illuminate the formation of the colonial *hacienda* in Latin America and its trajectories in changing economic, demographic and political conditions, also introducing and applying the concept of ‘external’ and ‘internal’ proletarianization (that is, to the manor/*hacienda*). Like Hilton and Banaji, Kay showed how specific forms of pre-capitalist landed property and organization of farming, their specific mechanisms of appropriation, and (variant) social and political power, generated different types of peasantries and peasant classes.<sup>12</sup>

The two intellectual features (noted above) were combined strongly in considerations of pre-capitalist modes of production in Asia – no doubt because of the need to confront more directly the theorization of feudalism *qua* mode of production in its applications beyond the European formations that provided its original referent. There had been a vigorous debate in Indian historiography for several decades over the social character of pre-colonial South Asia, that hinged on the nature and applicability of concepts of feudalism and involved intense

<sup>11</sup> Sharecropping generated much interest and was the subject of a special double issue of *JPS* that collected a number of theoretical discussions and empirical studies of very different historical contexts (Byres 1983); see further below.

<sup>12</sup> As a cautionary note to the (unavoidably) highly schematic presentation throughout this essay, we can quote Hilton and Kay to give a more adequate sense of the theoretical and empirical richness of their arguments, and perhaps as a proxy for other authors whose ideas we select and (brutally) compress for purposes of illustration. Hilton (1978, 271) suggested that peasant class formation in feudalism was the outcome of ‘the complex interplay between land availability, technical progress, inheritance and endowment customs, demands for rent and tax and the resistance capacity of the peasants . . . (with) the relative strength of these factors chang(ing) considerably during the medieval period’; Kay (1974, 69) examined ‘the impact of changes in the market, in population, in the socio-political relationships between landlords, peasants and the urban bourgeoisie, and in agricultural technology, on the evolution of the manorial and hacienda system in Europe and Latin America’.

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intra-Marxist debate as well as exchanges with non-Marxist scholarship (among others, Kosambi 1956; Sharma 1957–8, 1965, 1974a, 1974b; Habib 1962, 1969; Sircar 1966, 1969). Mukhia (1981) revived this debate in *JPS* with a review of its various positions (including understandings of European feudalism) and an argument that South Asia had not been feudal because of its ‘self-dependent’ or ‘free’ peasant production, subject to exaction through state taxes but not to the servile condition of feudal peasants in Europe with their obligations to landed property. The debate then extended with a special double issue of *JPS* on *Feudalism and Non-European Societies* (Byres and Mukhia 1985), in which Mukhia’s thesis was subjected to wide-ranging critique: of its theorization of feudalism by, above all, labour service as its distinguishing form of appropriation of peasant surplus labour, to which Wickham (1985) counterposed a more fundamental, generic notion of ‘coercive rent-taking’; of the view that organization and control of the labour process by peasants in feudal Europe and pre-colonial South Asia was as different as Mukhia proposed (R.S. Sharma 1985; also Singh 1993); and of Mukhia’s argument of a lack of contradiction and social tension in the agrarian relations of pre-colonial South Asia, ‘a kind of equilibrium’ that generated a ‘changeless system’ compared to feudalism in Europe, for which he was taken to task by Habib (1985).<sup>13</sup> The contribution of Dirlak (1985) to this special issue extended the comparative frame to China, and that of Wickham (1985) to Iran and Turkey as well.

Wickham’s observations were taken up by Berkay (1987) in a powerful theoretical intervention that reviewed Turkish historiographical debates, and argued that tax and rent as modes of appropriation of peasant surplus labour do not constitute a ‘modal difference’, and that feudalism is ‘the most basic and universal pre-capitalist mode of exploitation’ (also argued by Haldon 1989, in his analysis of late Rome and Byzantium). As with Mukhia’s original article (1981), Berkay’s led to a special double issue of *JPS*, *New Approaches to State and Peasantry in Ottoman History* (Berkay and Faroqhi 1991), which explored, *inter alia*, a thematic/problematic also of great relevance to the South Asian debate (and its controversies surrounding the Asiatic mode of production), namely the centrality of the state rather than (feudal) landed property to the class structure of the great pre-capitalist agrarian civilizations of Asia. Berkay (1991a, 1991b) and Haldon (1991) sought to subvert the ‘state fetishism’, in Berkay’s term, that had characterized Ottoman historiography (as had a certain landlord fetishism that of European feudalism, in Berkay’s view) so as better to problematize and investigate the social conditions of peasant production, and forms of property in land and/or claims on peasant surplus labour, which could also yield more nuanced and fruitful accounts of the state in Asian ‘feudalisms’.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> While this aspect of Mukhia’s thesis seems to resonate Marx’s (much contested) notion of the Asiatic mode of production, Mukhia made clear his aspiration to the theorization of a mode of production more adequate to South Asian pre-capitalist formations than either the feudal or Asiatic modes.

<sup>14</sup> To some extent the ecological bases of agricultural production featured in Mukhia’s account; this theme was extended in Bray’s (1983) comparative examination of patterns of evolution in rice-growing societies of Southeast and East Asia, subsequently elaborated in her remarkable book (Bray 1986). We also note here the important contributions to *JPS* on India’s pre-colonial history by Frank Perlin (1978, 1984, 1985).

In addition to these contributions to investigation of the social relations and labour processes of agrarian production, and structures of political power, in pre-capitalist formations, there were others that focused on class struggle in the form of peasant rebellions in various contexts. A special issue on *The Peasant War in Germany of 1525* (Bak 1975), that marked its 450th anniversary and the 125th anniversary of Engels' book on it, combined discussion of Engels' analysis with the results of relevant recent scholarship, and a broader comparative essay by Graus (1975) on late medieval peasant wars in the context of social crises of feudalism. There were also articles on the Pugachev revolt of 1773–5 in Russia, from which Longworth (1975) sought to derive aspects of the sociology of peasant uprisings, and especially their leadership, of wider applicability, and on peasant struggles in Tokugawa Japan from 1590 to 1760 over the distribution of the agricultural surplus with landed property, in which Burton (1978) emphasized the divisive effects of differentiation among the Japanese peasantry.<sup>15</sup>

### *Transitions to Capitalism I*

While these contributions focused on the theorization and applications of the feudal mode of production (sometimes with attention to more general issues of theory and method concerning modes of production, e.g. Berkay 1987; Haldon 1991), another development in the wider debate, initiated by the work of Robert Brenner (1976; Aston and Philpin 1985), stimulated rethinking of the theorization of feudalism and the comparative study of its historical trajectories to those concerning capitalism.<sup>16</sup> Brenner's work challenged the inherited, and teleological, notion that feudalism as a mode of production contained the 'seeds' of the capitalist mode of production that was to succeed it. This is a claim of great significance for the study of agrarian change for many reasons, not least its implications for longstanding attempts to explain the world-historical 'failure' of pre-capitalist agrarian formations elsewhere than Europe (and regarded as non-'feudal') to undergo an indigenous transition to capitalism. For Brenner, the transition to capitalism was not the inevitable outcome of the contradictions of any generic 'European' feudalism, but a conjunctural result of English feudalism with its highly specific – and atypical – structural features (see also Wood 1999).

<sup>15</sup> Japan was usually the only 'non-European' formation brought into the framework of feudalism prior to the debates in *JPS* on south and especially western Asia, and also had a rich debate in the 1920s and 1930s on the agrarian transition to capitalism that remains largely unknown outside Japan (Hoston 1986, chapter 8). It is the more surprising and regrettable, then, that from 1973 to 2000 *JPS* published only two articles on Japan: that by Burton cited, and another by Bowen (1978), also on peasant rebellion, in the Meiji period (Ka 1991, wrote about Japanese agrarian capital in colonial Taiwan).

<sup>16</sup> Much of the material presented below under the thematic rubrics of colonialism and development/underdevelopment (*Transitions to Capitalism II*) also grappled, more or less explicitly, with theoretical issues of identifying and explaining capitalism, as we show. However, it is appropriate here to refer to Neocosmos' important essay (1986) on Marx's 'third class', namely capitalist landed property, and its place in capitalist development, which is a corrective to tendencies to treat landed property/rent as exclusively pre-capitalist.

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Some aspects and ramifications of Brenner's seminal argument were taken up in *JPS*. Albritton (1993) contested the designation of agrarian capitalism in England before the nineteenth century according to the criterion of generalized wage labour in farming, to which Zmolek (2000) responded. Comminel (2000) followed a Brennerian path in his comparison of English and French feudalism to identify the features of the former that generated its unique transition to capitalism, notably its distinctive structure of manorial lordship. Chibber (1998) applied Brenner's concept of 'social property relations' to the question of whether medieval and early modern south India was undergoing an indigenous transition to capitalism prior to (and disrupted by) the impact of colonialism, advancing an original analysis of its class relations and dynamics, and concluding that no such transition was in train.

The impact and development of Brenner's ideas will continue to shape debate of feudalism and the transition to capitalism, as in the notable examples of work by Chibber and Comminel cited.<sup>17</sup> Other contributions to *JPS* on the transition to capitalism in England included Manning (1975) on the peasantry in the English revolution; Howell (1975) on the family farm from 1300 to 1700; Wrightson (1977) on aspects of social differentiation in rural England from c.1580 to 1660; Wells (1979) on the development of the rural proletariat and social protest from 1700 to 1850; Russell (2000) on parliamentary enclosure and the fate of the commons from the mid-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries; and – on the peripheries of the English transition – Carter (1976, 1977) on northeast Scotland, and Cohen (1990) and Gray (1993) on proto-industrialization in rural Ireland. *JPS* also carried articles on paths of agrarian transition in the very different conditions of the USA: on post-bellum sharecropping in the cotton south (Mandle 1983) and its subsequent replacement by wage labour from the 1940s, which Mann (1987) related to changes in global fibre markets and manufacturing technologies; Angelo (1995) explored some of the same terrain as Mandle and Mann, and formulated a 'southern social structure of accumulation' from 1865 to 1945, highlighting the role of the planter class in the recreation of unfree labour after the abolition of slavery; there was a remarkable essay by Post (1995) on the transformation of the northern countryside before the civil war and the agrarian origins of US capitalism; and McClelland (1997) on the emergence of industrial agriculture in California, 1870–1910, including its recruitment and deployment of immigrant labour.

Restricting consideration to cases of 'completed transition' such as England and the USA, however, would be to miss the largest part of the contributions to *JPS* that addressed the forms, mechanisms, rhythms and contradictions of the development of capitalist agriculture (including 'arrested', 'blocked' or otherwise 'incomplete' transitions) in the great variety of historical contexts suggested by our other categories: experiences of socialist construction, experiences of colonialism,

<sup>17</sup> We hope to publish in the second issue of *Journal of Agrarian Change* a major essay by Brenner that reprises and elaborates the principal elements of his distinctive theoretical approach, and applies them to the agrarian history of the Low Countries.

the trajectories of development/underdevelopment of the imperialist periphery after colonial rule.<sup>18</sup>

*From Capitalism to Socialism; Socialism to Capitalism*

Here the agrarian history of late Tsarist and early Soviet Russia and its contested interpretations provided as potent an initial reference point (as note 4 and our references to Chayanov suggested) as England had for the investigation of feudalism, and original transition to capitalism. Lenin (1964a, first published 1899) was the only major work of classic Marxism to address the development of capitalism in an ‘underdeveloped’ or ‘backward’ social formation, defined as a largely agrarian economy inhabited by largely peasant producers, and coexistent with developed (industrial) capitalism elsewhere. Second, Lenin emphasized the class differentiation of the peasantry as the principal path of the development of capitalism in the Russian countryside. He derived the empirical basis of his argument from the probably unique series of census data on Russian rural households from 1870 onwards, Marxist interpretation of which was wholly at odds with that of Chayanov and neo-populism more generally. Third, the issues at stake assumed a new force in the historically unprecedented circumstances of the formation of the Soviet state after 1917, fusing urgent economic and political concerns about the place of the peasantry in socialist construction.

There were two contemporary Russian arguments against Lenin’s thesis of the class differentiation of the peasantry: Chayanov’s argument that variations in size of holding between peasant households were explicable by the cycle of generational reproduction – demographic differentiation – and the argument of the levelling mechanism of social mobility within the peasantry, reasserted by Shanin (1972).<sup>19</sup> The theoretical construction of Chayanov’s model of peasant economy, and his interpretation of the census statistics, were subjected to thorough examination and critique in the early *JPS* by Harrison (1975, 1977b; see also Ennew et al. 1977), as was the social mobility thesis (Harrison 1977a; also Cox 1979).<sup>20</sup> The class differentiation of the Russian peasantry was a continuing preoccupation into

<sup>18</sup> Some of the issues that appear below are already hinted at by other articles on western Europe and North America, for example, on the peripheral position of northeast Scotland explored by Carter (1976) on ‘the articulation of capitalist and peasant agriculture’ between 1840 and 1914, and by his analysis (1977) of the differentiation of the Aberdeenshire peasantry, 1696–1870; the attention drawn to English small-scale family farming in the nineteenth century by Reed (1986) and in the twentieth century by Donajgrodzki (1989); the seminal theorization of family farming in developed capitalism by Friedmann (1978, 1980), to which we return, and other contributions on family farming in the developed capitalist countries by Hedley (1981), Lem (1988) and Schulman et al. (1989).

<sup>19</sup> Shanin counterposed the social mobility argument to Chayanovian demographic differentiation, which he termed ‘biological determinism’ (1972, 101–9), as well as to Lenin’s thesis.

<sup>20</sup> Harrison (1979) reaffirmed his respect for Chayanov by way of identifying the problems of a (politically) ‘subordinate Marxism’ restricted to reactive theoretical critique and unable to advance ‘practical theory’, illustrated with reference to three (connected) themes of great significance for Soviet history (and beyond): the lack of Bolshevik political work, experience and organization in the countryside; a tradition of Bolshevik ultra-leftism towards the peasantry; and the failure to transcend these problems after 1917, despite some ‘fresh and creative impulses’ shown by Lenin and Bukharin in the early and late 1920s, respectively.

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the 1920s and its NEP (New Economic Policy), and generated theoretical and methodological innovations by Kritsman and his associates. In a special issue on *Kritsman and the Agrarian Marxists*, based on an abridged and annotated translation by Littlejohn of Kritsman's *Class Stratification in the Soviet Countryside* (published in 1926), Cox (1984) argued Kritsman's intellectual importance in formulating more nuanced and effective methods of analysis of peasant class differentiation, while Littlejohn (1984) located the concerns of the Agrarian Marxists in the context of Soviet economic policy and its politics in the several years before the collectivization of agriculture in 1929.<sup>21</sup>

Both peasant class differentiation and the sociology of peasant political action (signalled above in the context of feudalism and the transition to capitalism in Europe and Japan) quickly became enduring themes of *JPS* in a variety of contexts, as we shall illustrate. The social character of the peasantry was similarly a preoccupation of socialist parties and movements in China (e.g. Nolan 1976) and Vietnam (White 1983, 1986), and – as part of very different agrarian class structures – in Mozambique (Harris 1980; O'Laughlin 1996) and Nicaragua (Kaimowitz 1986; Zalkin 1989; Spoor 1990). This interest only highlighted the paucity of discussion in *JPS* of peasant political action in socialist agrarian transitions, and the processes of struggle that preceded them: nothing on Russia/USSR; two contributions on the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in the 1920s and 1930s (Bianco 1975; Tiedemann 1996/7); and two on Vietnam during the liberation war in the 1950s (White 1983) and after its victory in the north (White 1986) that delved more deeply into complexities and tensions in party-peasant relations than other contributions in this area.

There was perhaps an even more marked silence about the forms of organization and performance of socialist agriculture, and its contributions to economic development and especially industrialization.<sup>22</sup> Articles in *JPS* on the Soviet experience considered only the 1920s before the abrupt and draconian collectivization of agriculture, although Nolan (1976) – a scholar of China – compared collectivization in the USSR and China and suggested reasons for the greater success of the latter, including the much stronger rural presence and political strength of the CCP than of the Bolsheviks. Otherwise, it is interesting that

<sup>21</sup> Cox and Littlejohn's 1984 edition was one of three special issues of *JPS* that featured original English translations of Russian texts of the 1920s. The others were R.E.F. Smith's edition of *The Russian Peasant 1920 and 1984* (1976) that comprised Gorky's *On the Russian Peasantry*, extracts from Bol'shakov's *The Soviet Countryside 1917–1924*, and Chayanov's fantasy novella of peasant socialism, set in 1984, *The Journey of My Brother Alexei to the Land of Peasant Utopia* and Frank Bourgholtzer's edition of *Aleksandr Chayanov and Russian Berlin* (1999) that featured 38 letters written by Chayanov from England and Germany in 1922–3, and included an outline of his current work that Chayanov wrote for the OGPU while in prison in 1931. This edition filled major gaps in Chayanov's biography in the 1920s and 1930s, and shed valuable new light on his intellectual (and personal) relationships and theoretical and practical preoccupations.

<sup>22</sup> The near silence on peasant politics in transitions to socialism, and complete silence on collectivization (other than Maoist celebration of the 'mass line' and the success of China's communes, e.g. Sklair 1979) were perhaps symptomatic of anxieties on the Left at the time and its defensiveness in face of a barrage of damnation of collectivization, in relation to both the fate of the peasantry in the USSR and the performance of Soviet agriculture. Much of this criticism was from the Right of Soviet studies, but not all of it.

there was greater attention to various forms of the social organization of agriculture and their interrelations – state farms, different types of production cooperatives, individual peasant production – (as well as of rural labour markets and trade, for example) in more recent attempts at socialist transition (of mostly shorter duration) in Mozambique (Harris 1980; Mackintosh 1987), Ethiopia (Griffin and Hay 1985), Nicaragua (Kaimowitz 1986; Zalkin 1989; Spoor 1990) and Cuba (Deere et al. 1994).

Of the (again) relatively few contributions on the place of agriculture in socialist (and indeed capitalist) industrialization – a central motif in the political economy of development of poor countries (Mitra 1977) – Littlejohn (1984) considered the Soviet debates of the late 1920s on the linkages between agricultural policy and industrialization, and a later article by Chandra (1992) proposed that Bukharin had formulated ‘a viable scheme of industrialization by 1928’. Chandra tested this through a counter-factual exercise on agricultural performance, the overall rate of investment, industrial growth, problems of labour supply, and the means to finance industrialization, using available statistical and other evidence on the Soviet economy of the 1920s (NEP) and 1930s (collectivization and draft industrialization). He concluded that Bukharin’s scheme was a viable alternative to Stalinist ‘socialist primitive accumulation’ (in the term of Preobrazhensky 1965), anticipated much of the later growth models of Kalecki (drawn on by Karshenas 1996/7, and Patnaik 1996/7), and provided lessons to a non-capitalist path of development for ‘late industrializing nations’. Both Littlejohn and Chandra seemed to accept the (‘revisionist’) position that the collectivization of agriculture did not contribute to Soviet industrialization, and Karshenas (1996/7) found no evidence of any net transfer of surplus from agriculture to industry in China before or after the moment of decollectivization and other market-oriented reform from the late 1970s (see note 60 below).

In contrast, there were many more articles on the course and effects of market-oriented reform in China, and on the collapse of Russian agriculture after 1990.<sup>23</sup> Concern about the distributional effects of reform in China was expressed early on by Nolan and White (1979) and various dimensions of this issue – including rural industrialization and wage employment – explored subsequently by Martin (1990), Bramall and Jones (1993), McKinley and Griffin (1993) and Saith (1995) in primarily economic analyses drawing on official statistics and survey results. Bramall (1993) confronted directly the question whether China’s ‘agricultural miracle’ could be attributed to decollectivization, as claimed by triumphalist views of the virtues of private farming. He concluded that much more important to growth in the 1980s were changes in relative prices favourable to agriculture and increased supplies of farm inputs (both themes of Soviet debates of the NEP period, and of their discussion by Harrison, Littlejohn and Chandra, above). This is not to deny, of course, the efflorescence of rural capitalism in China since the late 1970s and its effects for class differentiation and

<sup>23</sup> Spoor (1990) and Deere et al. (1994) considered agricultural policy reform in Nicaragua in the late 1980s and Cuba in the 1990s, respectively.

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growing income inequality within and between households, villages and regions, detailed in the other articles cited.<sup>24</sup>

In the face of China's dynamic economic trajectory, with all its social contradictions, Russian agriculture since 1990 experienced its 'worst slump in output and demand' ever (Kitching 1998a). The vast gaps in the former Soviet Union between the official rhetoric of reform, institutional capacities, and macroeconomic conditions, and their effects for any plausible transition to capitalist agriculture, were explored by Spoor (1995), comparing early transition in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan; in the assessment of the prospects of 'peasant farming' in Russia by Butterfield et al. (1996); in relation to obstacles to the formation of any political bloc able to secure significant government financial support to farming (Wegren 1997) and/or more conducive macroeconomic policies (Wegren 1998). Kitching (1998a) drew particular attention to issues of farm labour, as part of the explanation of why a few state farms survived the collapse of Russian agriculture, and (1998b) in relation to the role of 'private plots' in the 1990s, as a variation on the theme of the 'peasants' revenge'.<sup>25</sup> He argued that while use of 'private plots' was 'an absolutely essential means of survival' for farmworker families in the Russian crisis of the 1990s (as it was for many urban families), this did not express the re-emergence of any peasant spirit from the rubble of the *kolkhoz*, of any ambition to 'independent' household farming as a mode of livelihood and way of life. Indeed, when Russian farmworkers today term themselves 'peasants', as they commonly do, this expresses their despair and anger that they can not be 'proper' proletarians, securely employed and adequately rewarded by large, scientifically managed modern agricultural enterprises.<sup>26</sup>

### *Colonialism*

The Russian and Chinese revolutions generated attempts of an historically unprecedented type, and of an unprecedented scale and intensity, to achieve economic

<sup>24</sup> Other articles on China in the reform period included Croll (1987) on the emergence of a new 'aggregate family' structure able to deploy its members' labour and other resources in different branches and locations of activity, agricultural and non-agricultural, rural and urban; Beller-Hann (1997) on the Uighur peasantry in Xinjiang, that illustrated aspects of the nationalities question as well as of uneven regional development; and Lu (1997) on government decentralization, in effect the pressure on local government to raise much of its revenue, and the resultant increasing burden of (local) taxation and levies on rural producers and their (sometimes violent) responses. Peter Nolan (above) subsequently became a strong supporter of Chinese agricultural policy reform (Nolan 1988) and once more compared China and Russia to the former's advantage, this time in the context of their post-Maoist and post-Soviet trajectories (Nolan 1996/7).

<sup>25</sup> Tepicht (1975) presented another version of the 'peasants' revenge', drawing on the experience of the USSR and Soviet bloc and extending it to the contemporary Third World. He suggested that the project of socialist construction – and development more generally – in poor countries is 'captured' by mass migration from the countryside into the urban labour force and state bureaux, with the consequences of 'a peasant-style *labour intensive* form of industrialization', a 'middle class' of *apparatchiks* given to conspicuous consumption, and the transformation of communist and socialist parties into nationalist ones. And, he asserted, generally in the modern world peasants/rural people want to become urban.

<sup>26</sup> Kitching's articles initiated a series that will be as important as that of Harrison on the 1920s. We are pleased therefore to publish a further article by Kitching in this first issue, with the promise of more to come.

development and industrialization in predominantly agrarian, and peasant, countries. They thus had a special resonance in the peripheral formations of imperialism during colonialism and after, when analysis of the contradictions and challenges, problems and prospects, of economic and social transformation was framed by concern both with internal sources of ‘backwardness’, in effect – persistent, if reconfigured, pre-capitalist social forms – and with external sources of ‘exploitation’: forcible integration in international markets and divisions of labour dominated by the centres of developed, industrial capitalism.

The uneven coverage of colonial experiences of agrarian change in *JPS* is instructive both thematically and historically. There was very little on Latin America, colonized before the emergence of industrial capitalism and mostly decolonized as the latter began its international ascendancy, with the notable exception of Kay’s comparative essay (1974) on the European feudal manor and Spanish colonial *hacienda* (above). However, this is as appropriate a point as any to acknowledge that the boundaries of our five thematic areas, chosen for their analytical rationale and expositional utility, are hardly impermeable (as our review of issues and material in the previous section illustrates; also note 11). The division of stages of Latin American history by the markers of colonial rule and political independence invites transgression, for example, in relation to peasants and rural workers of indigenous (‘Indian’) origin subject to national oppression during colonialism *and* thereafter in ways that remain suggestively ‘colonial’ by provenance and analogy, if not formally so by the criterion of national sovereignty. This is well illustrated, for example, by the internal expansion of frontiers of settlement (e.g. Foweraker 1982, on Brazil) and the conflicts they generated with native Americans (e.g. Rutledge 1977a, on Argentina), processes as central to North American as Latin American agrarian history, of course (Byres 1996, 186–210).

One sequence of articles on colonial South Asia in *JPS* concentrated on peasant uprisings and politics more generally, of which an early and notable example was Ranajit Guha’s essay (1974) on the 1860 uprising of peasants subjected to Bengal’s ‘indigo seignories’, and his analysis of a play about planter atrocities, *Neel-Darpan*, published the same year and which became ‘the focus of a legal and political contest between the Calcutta liberals and European planters’. This essay has been seen as the founding text of the subaltern studies school (Sathyamurthy 1990, 99) and was also the first in *JPS* to analyze representations of the peasantry in a number of media.<sup>27</sup> Among the contributions that followed (and generated much debate in the pages of *JPS*) were Charlesworth’s (1980) analysis of rural agitation from 1914 to 1947 which criticized the ‘middle peasant thesis’ associated with Eric Wolf and Hamza Alavi, and a special issue on peasant movements

<sup>27</sup> Others included Craig (1974) on novels of peasant crisis (which appeared in the same issue as Guha); Bhalla (1986) on the nineteenth-century British novel and the pastoral myth; Juneja (1988) on rural society in French painting from Millet to van Gogh; and Brass (1996/7) on popular culture as a vehicle of populist fictions. These articles form a different category to the many peasant songs, poems and aphorisms that appeared in *JPS* under the rubric of ‘Peasants Speak’, and Byres’ review article on Scottish peasant song (1976).

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in twentieth-century Bihar (Das 1982) that spanned the periods of colonial rule and political independence.<sup>28</sup>

There were fewer contributions in the early years of *JPS* on the agrarian political economy of colonial India, relative to those on peasant politics and to later contributions on colonial agrarian change, when, perhaps, the powerful perspectives applied to contemporary problems of agricultural development (of which Bhaduri 1973, 1983a, and Bharadwaj 1985, were signal statements) had started to influence the agendas of historians. Beginning with Amin (1981) on peasant production of sugar cane in Gorakhpur (UP) in the 1930s through to Nazir (2000) on the origins of peasant debt, mortgage and land alienation, in the colonial Punjab, an accumulating sequence of articles – as incisive theoretically as they were detailed empirically – explored the forms, dynamics and connections of the colonial land settlements and tax regimes, patterns of commoditization of peasant farming and their ecological dimensions, peasant class differentiation and the role of merchant capital. For example, Mishra (1982) compared commoditization in late nineteenth-century Bombay and Punjab, and argued a link between the dominance of merchant capital and agricultural stagnation in the former and the formation of a state-sponsored rich peasantry and dynamic growth in the latter; Pandian (1987) provided an innovative analysis of ‘rainfall as an instrument of production’ integrated with his account of the forces and relations of production in the agrarian system of late nineteenth-century Nanchilnadu; Datta (1989) analyzed patterns of commoditization in late eighteenth-century Bengal in terms of the formal subsumption of peasant labour by merchant capital, as an alternative to the thesis of ‘semi-feudalism’ (see below); and Kaiwar (1992) considered views that attributed agrarian stagnation in the Bombay presidency to lack of investment and technical innovation, and to demographic growth, arguing that these factors themselves require explanation in terms of prevailing social property relations (Brenner’s concept noted earlier), which he suggested were those of a peasant petty production entrenched by the *ryotwari* settlement and reproduced through practices of subdivision.

These various themes and approaches in colonial history, as we suggested, have an analytical affinity with, and relevance to, the terms of investigation and debate of subsequent processes of development/underdevelopment, to which we come back below. The same applies to the fewer articles published on the formation of a colonial working class. Omvedt (1980) analyzed labour migration from the 1880s to the 1930s in terms of an agrarian structure that bore the costs of (re)producing labour power for capitalist mines, plantations and factories, in an articulation of modes of production orchestrated by the colonial state. Plantation labour in South Asia was considered further in three of the contributions to a special issue on *Plantations, Peasants and Proletarians in Colonial Asia* (Daniel et al.

<sup>28</sup> It is possible that this focus on peasant movements reflected the interest in (and enthusiasm for) their ‘revolutionary potential’ that was part of the founding moment of peasant studies outlined earlier; in the South Asian context it may also have represented a reaction to the apparent undervaluation of peasant revolt in Indian history by Barrington Moore Jr (1966) (see Chaudhury 1973, 341).

1992), while most articles in *JPS* on other areas of colonial Asia also focused on plantation labour regimes and workers' struggles. The special issue cited also featured essays on Indochina/Vietnam, Java, Malaya/Malaysia and the Philippines, and there were other articles on plantations in Sumatra (Stoler 1986), the Philippines (Aguilar 1994) and Java (Bernstein and Pitt 1974; Gordon 1999).<sup>29</sup>

Colonialism in sub-Saharan Africa was treated primarily through the theme of initially enforced commoditization,<sup>30</sup> often with an emphasis on the *formation* of peasantries, as well as their class differentiation, in East Africa (Cliffe 1977), Tanganyika/Tanzania (Bryceson 1980), Gold Coast/Ghana (Howard 1980; Grischow 1998) and northern Nigeria (Shenton and Lennihan 1981; Kohnert 1986).<sup>31</sup> Phimister (1986) argued that a class of peasant commodity producers had emerged by the early 1920s in Southern Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, contrary to the then prevailing view of the wholesale subjugation and (semi-)proletarianization of rural Africans by settler colonialism (Arrighi 1967, 1970), and providing an early indication of what later became a key issue in debates about land redistribution in Zimbabwe and post-apartheid South Africa (e.g. Levin and Neocosmos 1989, and their critique of the 'linear proletarianization thesis'). On South Africa itself (and spanning its formal constitutional divide of colonial and Union status), Keegan's essay (1983) on sharecropping by Africans on the farms of settler landed property in the early twentieth century anticipated his subsequent seminal monograph (Keegan 1986). In another notable article, the late Michael Cowen (an outstanding pioneer of materialist scholarship on sub-Saharan Africa) and R.W. Shenton (1991) examined government policy on credit and land tenure in British West Africa from 1905 to 1937, in the light of their thesis of 'Fabian colonialism': a doctrine and practice of social engineering that sought simultaneously to integrate African land and labour into commodity production, and to contain class formation in the name of trusteeship and the preservation of African 'custom'

<sup>29</sup> It is appropriate to note too articles on the diasporas of Indian indentured labour in the sugar plantations of Mauritius (Carter 1992), Fiji (Kelly 1992), Malaya/Malaysia (Ramasamy 1992), and South Africa where Freund (1991) charted 'the rise and decline of an Indian peasantry in Natal' after the end of indenture.

<sup>30</sup> Given the relative lateness of colonization of Africa (the principal example of territorial expansion in the period of modern imperialism, as analyzed by Lenin 1964b, written in 1916), and its methods, the theme of (initially) forcible commoditization effected through taxation and labour obligations was always prominent, for example, in the book by a veteran South African communist, Albert Nzula, written in Moscow in the early 1930s (Nzula et al. 1979), and in the work of a leading theorist of the articulation of modes of production, Pierre-Philippe Rey (1976a, 1976b). Despite a common provenance in colonial experience, processes of forcible commoditization in Africa stimulated different analytical preoccupations than in South Asia, where the seminal article of Bharadwaj (1985) and its concept of 'forced commercialization' connected with the structuring of peasant differentiation by interlinked markets/modes of exploitation (see note 43).

<sup>31</sup> Another major theme in the broader political economy of colonial (and settler) Africa, and relevant here, is patterns of cyclical labour migration from rural areas to centres of large-scale employment – mines, plantations, ports, etc. – for example, in the vast regional labour migration system of southern Africa (Cliffe 1978; Bernstein 1996a; O'Laughlin 1996, 1998). Theorizing this process and its effects, in the context of West and Equatorial Africa, was the original stimulus to the formulation of the idea of articulation of modes of production by French Marxist anthropologists (of whom Meillassoux 1973, 1983, contributed to *JPS*), a theoretical approach which, in fact, was taken up much more in relation to Latin America than Africa in articles in *JPS* (see below).

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and ‘community’ (see also Grischow 1998).<sup>32</sup> On political themes, Basil Davidson (1974) considered ‘African peasants and revolution’ in the context of national liberation struggles being waged in Portugal’s African colonies when his article was published, and in yet another highly original piece on colonial Africa, Furedi (1974) explored the social composition of Mau Mau in Kenya’s ‘White Highlands’.

In all the ‘three continents’ of the imperialist periphery, experiences of colonialism and their impact on agrarian structures and dynamics provided the various ‘initial conditions’ confronted by projects of economic and social development from the moment of independence, to which we turn next.

### *Development/Underdevelopment: Transitions to Capitalism II*

By far the largest number of contributions to *JPS* from 1973 to 2000 fell under this rubric of contemporary concerns, and many of them – in different ways and to different degrees – shared theoretical preoccupations with the other thematic areas sketched so far. If there is a common current here, it is analysis of the development of capitalist agriculture – or the development/underdevelopment of agriculture in peripheral capitalist society, to paraphrase Kautsky (1988) – combining theoretical with empirical investigation of its extraordinary ‘substantive diversity’ (Byres 1996, 9). This problematic includes how agrarian class structures, their contributions to general economic development, and the forms and effects of the politics they generate, shape and are shaped by state policies and practices.

We begin with a convenient (if not analytically conclusive) distinction between large-scale capitalist agricultural enterprises employing wage labour and ‘peasant capitalism’.<sup>33</sup> From the beginning, most articles on the former concerned Latin America and the various phases of increasing commoditization of *hacienda* production, and changing organization of plantation production. The principal emphasis was on labour regimes and practices, often portrayed as containing ‘pre-capitalist’ elements in one, or both, of two senses: (i) that of regimes of unfree labour, and/or (ii) the fluid and ambiguous social boundary (or simply connection?) between agricultural wage labour and at least vestigial ‘peasant’ subsistence farming (see Standing 1981). The first was exemplified by *hacienda* labour regimes in Chile until the 1930s, described unequivocally as ‘pre-capitalist’ by Kay (1981), and by the recruitment via *engache* (debt bondage) of sugar cane cutters in Peru until the 1960s (Scott 1976). The second was explored for plantation economies in Cuba by Mintz (1974) and Martinez-Alier (1974) and in Colombia by LeGrand (1984), and in one or another variant of a *hacienda-minifundia*

<sup>32</sup> ‘Fabian colonialism’ can be seen as one variant on their broader theme of *Doctrines of Development* (Cowen and Shenton 1996), a work that is as original and important as it is difficult. They also generously contributed a specially written version of parts of the book, on ‘agrarian doctrines of development’, to *JPS* at our request (Cowen and Shenton 1998a, 1998b).

<sup>33</sup> It is salutary to recall the debate in Sandinista Nicaragua about whether the country’s agrarian class structure corresponded (more) to a (large-scale) ‘capitalist agro-export model’ or to one of peasant capitalism (Kaimowitz 1986).

model (whether *minifundia* held outside the *hacienda* or within it through some form of labour tenancy) for southern Spain and highland Peru by Martinez-Alier (1974) and northeast Brazil by Goodman (1977).

These authors all emphasized that the complex and often fragile arrangements of such wage labour regimes, to be explicable at all, have to be located precisely in particular branches of production at particular times, and the latter related to the characteristics of the markets they supply and the broader agrarian class structure and patterns of economic change. Kay's account (1981) of Chile included a shift towards wage labour regimes from the 1930s.<sup>34</sup> Scott (1976) likewise noted a shift towards more 'proletarian' labour regimes in Peruvian sugar plantations from the 1960s, which he attributed to a combination of population growth, heavy rural–urban migration, the unionization of plantation field labour and technical change in cane harvesting.<sup>35</sup> Demographic growth, the proportional (if not absolute) reduction of the economically active population in agriculture, and accelerating urban migration in Latin America generally from the 1950s, featured in de Janvry's accounts of the structural causes of rural poverty and their implications for paths of development/underdevelopment (de Janvry and Garramon 1977; de Janvry et al. 1989, who also remarked the shrinkage of 'core', skilled and permanently employed, farm labour as a strategy of agrarian capital in Latin America – as elsewhere).

For South Asia, interest concentrated on peasant capitalism (below), with the exception of Breman's studies of large sugar enterprises in Gujarat (1978, 1979, 1990). Ewert and Hamman (1996) described 'ethnic corporatist' labour regimes in the highly capitalized fruit and wine farms of South Africa's Western Cape in the 1990s: the division of the labour force into a small 'core' group of permanent employees (in this case, so-called 'Coloureds') and a larger group of seasonal and casual workers (Africans originating from the poverty-stricken Eastern Cape). This kind of ethnic division of the agricultural proletariat, engineered or otherwise encouraged by agrarian capital, was also remarked for the sugar plantations of the Dominican Republic from 1870 to the 1930s by Baud (1992).<sup>36</sup>

A somewhat different aspect of the operations of agribusiness capital, that started to attract interest from the late 1980s, is contract farming. While this was not a completely novel arrangement – and indeed had colonial antecedents, for example, indigo planting in Bengal (Guha 1974), and sugar planting in UP (Amin 1981), Java (Knight 1992) and Taiwan (Ka 1991) – it was now connected with contemporary modes of internationalization of corporate agribusiness (Goodman

<sup>34</sup> A distinctive and important feature of Kay's article was that it linked agrarian change/transition to the overall pattern of capitalist development of Chile which saw the displacement, by the 1960s, of agrarian by industrial capital as the dominant element in the political bloc of the state. Kay also applied the concept of class alliances as an analytical tool, as did Birtek and Keyder (1975) in the Turkish context.

<sup>35</sup> Scott's later account (1985) of the selective mechanization of harvesting on three Peruvian sugar plantations was the most detailed analysis of technical change, and its strategic adoption by agrarian capital, that appeared in *JPS*.

<sup>36</sup> There will be articles on farm labour in South Africa and Zimbabwe in forthcoming issues of the *Journal of Agrarian Change*.

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and Watts 1994). A sequence of articles on this theme commenced with Carney (1988) on rice farming in the Gambia and Clapp's prize-winning essay on Latin America (1988), and continued with contributions on Chile (Korovkin 1992), Cyprus (Morvaridi 1995), Indonesia (White 1997) and Cameroon (Konings 1998). Contract farming also appeared in the context of discussions of globalization (Banaji 1996/7; Raikes and Gibbon 2000).

We turn now to peasant capitalism. Peasant class differentiation was the most pervasive motif across all of our thematic areas: a more or less emergent process in different types of feudalism; one source of the formation of classes of agrarian capital and labour in transitions to capitalism in Europe; peasant capitalism as a more or less potent threat to projects of socialist agrarian transformation and industrial accumulation; rooted in (if also constrained by) the conditions and dynamics of commoditization initiated by colonial integration in world markets and divisions of labour; key to agrarian change in processes of contemporary underdevelopment/development. Here, the critique of Chayanovian ideas, and/or its associated discussion of methods of identifying peasant classes, were extended to the study of contemporary agrarian change in articles by Patnaik (1979, 1988), Bardhan (1982), da Silva (1984), Athreya et al. (1987), Crummett (1987), Akram-Lodhi (1993, 1995) and Krishnaji (1995),<sup>37</sup> and generated a further and fundamental disagreement over the productivity of different types of farming, of major significance to agrarian development. This concerned the 'inverse relationship' of farm size and yield (productivity of land). The inverse relationship was asserted as the basis of agricultural development in poor countries in a seminal work of contemporary neo-populist economics by Lipton (1977), who also argued that the rationale of betting on the small farmer is blocked by the 'urban bias' of states in thrall to a political alliance of urban capital and labour (*and* large-scale farmers).<sup>38</sup> In a review essay on Lipton, Byres (1979) contested the theoretical basis and empirical claims of the inverse relationship, and countered the thesis of urban bias with that of rural bias: the political power of landed property and agrarian capital (including rich peasants) to secure policies on subsidies and prices

<sup>37</sup> Deere and de Janvry (1981) and Schulman et al. (1989) tested for both demographic and class differentiation from survey data for northern Peru and the southern USA, respectively; Hunt (1979) applied a Chayanovian schema, with additional explanatory variables, to survey data from eastern Kenya with positive results; Pollitt (1977) considered problems in enumerating the 'peasantry' from census data in pre-revolutionary Cuba.

<sup>38</sup> The inverse relationship had featured in the debates of the German SDP (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*) in the late nineteenth century, and had been noted and discussed in a number of other places thereafter. But the site of the most prolonged and intense debate on the inverse relationship was India: a debate started there by Amartya Sen in 1962 in a remarkable article that suggested a Chayanovian explanation, apparently independently of knowledge of Chayanov's work (a debate that even now is not spent in India). Notions of urban bias *avant la lettre* had long been a staple of agrarian populism in India (Byres 1988), as elsewhere. That poor peasant production may generate relatively high yields due to its intensity of work was emphasized by Patnaik (1979) in her wide-ranging critique of neo-populism; that both yield and labour productivity increase with the scale of farming and its capitalization was argued by Roy (1981) and Dyer (1991, 1996/7). Another, and highly original, argument about the source of pervasive (neo-)populist policies to promote small farmer development is Cowen and Shenton's analysis of 'agrarian doctrines of development' (1998a, 1998b).

(the inter-sectoral terms of trade) that benefit them at the expense of industrial accumulation. Byres thus linked the debate to issues of agrarian class structure.

The large numbers of articles in *JPS* on specific instances and paths of peasant differentiation in Latin America, Asia and Africa, however, suggested issues that, at the least, complicated any simplistic application of a Leninist schema, for various reasons. One is the evident coexistence in many social formations of both peasant capitalism and large-scale capitalist agricultural sectors and enterprises (see note 33), the connections, and implications, of which were considered in relatively few articles: several that surveyed the overall agrarian class structure and its trajectory in Latin American countries – Chile (Kay 1981), Mexico (Bartra and Otero 1987) and Nicaragua (Kaimowitz 1986; Zalkin 1989; Spoor 1990) – and O’Laughlin’s (1996) critique of dualist conceptions of the agrarian structure of Mozambique (shared across the ideological divide by FRELIMO and the World Bank), and proposal of an alternative, and nuanced, class analysis.<sup>39</sup>

A more fundamental challenge to the limits of the Leninist approach arrived with the powerful impact of feminist analysis of gender relations in peasant production. The gender blindness of both Chayanovian and Leninist perspectives on the nature and dynamics of peasant economy is evident. While gender relations featured in some articles before the mid-1980s,<sup>40</sup> it was only from M. Sharma’s article on northern India in 1985 that gender analysis registered a belated, if rapidly growing, impact in *JPS* in relation to that core concern of ‘peasant studies’: the constitution, composition and functioning of the actually existing households invoked by models of household (or ‘family’) production and reproduction. The feminist contribution to, and revitalization of, longstanding areas of debate about peasant economy not only problematized prevailing – and inadequately theorized – notions of ‘the’ (peasant) household in terms of its internal (‘domestic’) relations and contradictions (Sharma 1985; Agarwal 1986, 1990; Crummett 1987; Carney 1988; Kabeer 1991; Gray 1993; O’Laughlin 1998), but also in relation to access to land (Agarwal 1988, 1994; Carney 1988; Mackenzie 1990; Kapadia 1996), rural labour markets and labour regimes (Agarwal 1986; Carney 1988; Kelly 1992; Kapadia 1993; Hart 1996; da Corta and Venkateshwarlu 1999), rural industrialization (Gray 1993; Kapadia 1995) and rural politics (Hart 1991; Ackelsberg 1993; Agarwal 1994; Tanner 1994). Most of these analyses are relevant to, and stimulate awareness of, the complex configurations of peasant class formation, whether implicitly (for example, in accounts of the gendered

<sup>39</sup> Harriss (1992, 222) suggested that ‘debates over agrarian structure in India have tended to ignore . . . larger political economic forces’ that affect patterns of agrarian change and agricultural performance and productivity.

<sup>40</sup> Omvedt (1978) on women and rural revolt in India; Hansen (1982) on changing gender divisions of labour in late nineteenth-century Denmark; Bennholdt-Thomsen (1982) on peasant subsistence/female domestic production in the reproduction of capital; and Gallin (1984) on family structure in Taiwan. Harrison (1977a) had suggested that particular effects of patriarchy in the patterns of commoditization and peasant class differentiation characteristic of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Russia were a more fruitful element of explanation of practices of household partition than the argument from social mobility.

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features of rural poverty by Agarwal 1986, 1990 and Kabeer 1991) or more explicitly (as in Crummett 1987 and Cohen 1990).<sup>41</sup>

Another area of debate bearing on the complexities of peasant class differentiation concerns the ways in which, and extent to which, differentiation is inflected, and arguably constrained, by elements of pre-capitalist social relations and practices in processes of commoditization. Here again, there was a marked divergence of approach between articles on Latin America and Africa which often appealed to the concept of articulation of modes (or forms) of production (on Latin America, Scott 1976; Goodman 1977; Muratorio 1980; Soiffer and Howe 1982; Painter 1986; on Africa, Cliffe 1977; Hamazaoui 1979)<sup>42</sup> and those on South Asia that deployed various notions of a ‘backward’ or ‘semi-feudal’ agrarian structure and/or interlinked markets/modes of exploitation.<sup>43</sup> A key concern in the South Asian context is how the exactions of ‘parasitic’ class forces – landed property,<sup>44</sup> merchant’s capital and money-lending capital, or various combinations of them – depress incentives to peasant farmers to invest in enhanced productivity (and, by extension, inhibit their class differentiation), and/or relieve landed property of any need to do so, because of its basis in rent through share-cropping and other ('weak') tenancy arrangements and/or its exploitation of bonded labour. Semi-feudalism (Bhaduri 1973) or ‘backward agriculture’ (Bhaduri 1983a), and how it depresses transition to a fully capitalist agriculture, was summarized thus by Srivastava (1989a, 387, note 1): ‘the dominant surplus appropriators . . . in a low-productivity, and mainly self-subsistence agrarian (structure) . . . exercise some degree of extra-economic coercion and are relatively inured from the risks of production, either due to leasing out, or due to the use of semi-servile labour. Surplus is exacted from the direct producers in the form of money or kind rent, usury and labour-rent’. While ‘semi-feudalism’ was rarely invoked explicitly (Dyer 1996/7 was an exception), the more generic, and perhaps less

<sup>41</sup> Interestingly, the emergence and appeal of ‘green’ discourses and currents claiming the authority of feminism – ‘eco-feminism’ and its essentializing of ‘the female’ – were subjected to increasing critique from various perspectives in the 1990s by Jackson (1993), Brass (1994b), Agarwal (1998), Mawdsley (1998) and Jewitt (2000), above all in the Indian context. The Chipko movement of the 1970s in the forests of the Uttarakhand Himalaya was granted an especially iconic status by eco-feminism, of which Mawdsley (1998, 37) observed: ‘very little is left of the Chipko movement(s) in its region of origin save for its memory – a decline that is rarely analyzed in . . . neopopulist accounts, and is sometimes not even evident when “the Chipko movement” is glibly deployed as an example of an environmental and/or women’s movement in the South.’

<sup>42</sup> On Africa, Bernstein (1979) formulated the concept of a ‘simple reproduction squeeze’ in peasant farming, and, influenced by Banaji (1977), proposed a theorization (subsequently abandoned) of peasants as ‘wage labour equivalents’; Mamdani’s seminal analysis of the ‘extreme but not exceptional’ character of the agrarian question in Uganda (1987) distinguished ‘accumulation from below’ (peasant capitalism) and ‘accumulation from above’ (through extra-economic coercion exercised by ‘bureaucrat capital’).

<sup>43</sup> Which have their historical roots in the forms of ‘forced commerce’ (Bhaduri 1983a) or ‘forced commercialization’ (Bharadwaj, 1985) introduced by colonialism, and its interventions in land tenure and rent and tax regimes (Bagchi 1992) that often reconfigured, without eliminating, pre-existing (pre-capitalist) social relations and practices in ways that shaped colonial agrarian class structure (as outlined for colonial South Asia above).

<sup>44</sup> Of a modest scale in India and Bangladesh compared with Latin America, but nonetheless potent in relation to the conditions of existence of poor peasants and agricultural workers.

charged, notion of a structurally ‘backward agriculture’ influenced discussion of rural class structure and peasant production, with reference to rural credit (Sarap 1987), tenancy contracts (Srivastava 1989a), interlinked modes of exploitation (Srivastava 1989b) and land markets (Sarap 1998).

A further, somewhat related, area is that of rural labour regimes, one aspect of which, just indicated, is the recruitment of labour via sharecropping and other forms of tenancy (and associated ‘interlinked’ markets/modes of exploitation). The position that sharecropping is a pre-capitalist means of combining the land and labour disposed of by different classes, or a transitional one destined to disappear under capitalism, was argued by Pearce (1983), Patnaik (1983) and Bhaduri (1983b).<sup>45</sup> Another aspect, of special relevance to the development of peasant capitalism accelerated by the Green Revolution, notably in northern India (among others, Byres 1981; Roy 1981; Patnaik 1991; Harriss 1992), is that of rural labour markets and wage labour. A persistent issue here is the social content of bonded and other unfree labour. Views of such labour as ‘pre-’ or ‘non-’capitalist were challenged by the argument of Tom Brass (1986b, 1990, 1997, also Brass and Bernstein 1992) that unfree labour – ‘deproletarianization’ – is a characteristic strategy of capitalist restructuring rather than an index of a ‘persistent’ pre-capitalism. The challenge was taken up by Lerche (1995) and Rao (1999a, 1999b),<sup>46</sup> and also connects – or ought to do so – to analyses of how rural labour markets, and labour processes, are shaped by gender as well as class relations (or, how class relations are gendered). An element of confusion may have entered the debate on bonded labour in India through conflation of various theoretical claims concerning the *tendencies* of peasant capitalism, with *trends* that may register a shift away from bonded and unfree labour in recent years (Byres et al. 1999). Given the extraordinary diversity of agrarian conditions in different parts of India, the evidence has to be carefully contextualized and assessed; even if trends can be established with some confidence, they are likely to be highly uneven between different parts of the country and to retain, and/or establish new, gendered characteristics of rural labour markets (da Corta and Venkateshwarlu 1999).<sup>47</sup>

If there are many possible manifestations of the fluid social boundary between peasants – or some classes of peasants – and wage labour, including forms of

<sup>45</sup> Some of the economic arguments about why, and in what conditions, tenancy is used by landed property (and even agrarian capital) as a means of securing labour were reviewed and assessed by Martinez-Alier (1974, 1983), Caballero (1983) and Pertev (1986). Other articles on sharecropping in post- (or non-) colonial situations, not cited so far, concerned Tunisia (Hamzaoui 1979), Turkey (Keyder 1983a), Italy (Gill 1983), Brazil (Stolcke and Hall 1983), Malaysia (Halim 1983), the Philippines (Fegan 1986) and Pakistan (Majid 1998).

<sup>46</sup> See also Rao’s review essay (1999b) on Brass and van der Linden (1997), and Brass’s collection of essays (1999), of which several first appeared in *JPS*.

<sup>47</sup> If there are trends away from bonded labour (and certain forms of tenancy) in the peasant capitalism of South Asia, this may be explained in part by the growth of rural non-agricultural wage employment (Chandrasekhar 1993, 1997; Byres et al. 1999). Another area of inquiry into rural labour markets in India was stimulated by evidence of their marked divergences of employment arrangements and wage levels, even within the same localities. Bardhan and Rudra (1986) and Rao (1988) explored patron-client relations as a mode of labour recruitment in these fragmented and often highly localized markets, also implying the significance of pre- or non-capitalist relations and indeed a ‘village moral economy’ (Bardhan and Rudra 1986).

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'household' farming and rural residence that support or accommodate a reserve army of labour, there is another issue that comes from the other direction: how income from outside their own farming (including wage remittances) can enable the reproduction of poor and middle peasant farming (and indeed accumulation by rich peasants).<sup>48</sup> This touches on the other social boundary, as it were, of peasant production: that is, peasants as possessors of the means of agricultural production.<sup>49</sup>

Here an innovative debate in *JPS* (and elsewhere) about the theoretical specification of petty commodity production (PCP) or simple commodity production (SCP) was relevant. The widespread existence of family farming in contemporary western Europe and North America, and its explanation,<sup>50</sup> not only confounds a simplistic (and erroneous) view that the archetypal farm organization of (advanced) capitalism is the large-scale, wage-labour enterprise (by analogy with capitalist manufacturing industry), but generated a fruitful dialogue between researchers of agricultural PCP/SCP in core and peripheral capitalism. An important stimulus derived from Friedmann's work on family grain farming in the American prairies (1980, also 1978). Friedmann theorized the family farm in developed capitalism via its insertion in markets that provide its conditions of existence and subject it to the full competitive disciplines of commodity production in capitalism, hence enabling its analysis as a type of SCP generic to the capitalist mode of production and explicable by its laws of motion. By contrast, peasant producers are not amenable to a similarly generic theorization as important elements of their conditions of existence are satisfied by variant non-market relations that affect access to land, labour and instruments of production.

The challenge of Friedmann's argument stimulated subsequent articles on other ways of theorizing PCP/SCP in relation to peasant production, notably by Chevalier (1983) and Gavin Smith (1985), both concerned with Peru (see also Carol Smith 1984b). Bernstein (1988) responded with an elaboration of an alternative theoretical approach formulated by Gibbon and Neocosmos (1985): that contemporary peasant production in poor countries is best understood as constituted within generalized commodity production, conceived as the imperative of integration in commodity relations to social reproduction (Marx's 'dull compulsion of economic forces') rather than Friedmann's conception of necessarily 'full' market integration.<sup>51</sup> Among the implications of this approach are (i) its

<sup>48</sup> Not that this is an historically novel process; for example, Munting (1976) identified and analyzed the massive contribution of wage income from labour migration to the reproduction of peasant farming in Russia's Tula province between 1900 and 1917.

<sup>49</sup> On however modest a scale for many, and however unevenly distributed those means of production between different classes of the peasantry. In his review essay on Kautsky (1988), Banaji (1990) provided a strong reminder of, and insistence on, property in the means of production as a condition of peasant farming, and its effects.

<sup>50</sup> Including explanations from Marxian value theory, for example, how the gap between labour time and production time, imposed by the natural conditions of farming, delays the realization of profit from capital invested in agricultural production, hence discourages that investment (Mann and Dickinson 1978).

<sup>51</sup> Some of the issues at stake were shared with other contributions on cognate themes, for example, the criticisms by Chevalier (1983) and Aguilar (1989) of mechanistic and/or ideal-typical understandings of capitalism, and their effects; analyses of non-agricultural PCP, and its class differentiation, in

provision of an adequate theoretical specification of the *tendency* to class differentiation, postulated as the contradictory combination of the class places of capital and labour in peasant production in conditions of generalized commodity production; (ii) the uneven allocation of those class places within PCP enterprises ('households'), for example, by gendered divisions of property, labour and income; (iii) what determines whether, how, and how much, the tendency to class differentiation is realized in actual *trends* of class formation (including the effects of counter-tendencies)<sup>52</sup> and (iv) that one possible outcome of differentiation, according to specific circumstances, may be the consolidation of middle peasant strata and/or 'capitalized family farms' suggested, with reference to Friedmann's work, for Turkey by Keyder (1983b) and Venezuela by Llambi (1988).

How do approaches to peasant production in contemporary conditions, and its tendency to class differentiation, inform different understandings of processes of development/underdevelopment as transitions to capitalism, including industrialization? This question, of course, points to a wide range of complex issues which cluster around three central themes and the connections between them. The first focuses especially, if not exclusively, on the social relations and forms of agricultural production (its class character and dynamics) and their effects for the means of production/productive forces deployed and paths of technical change (or stagnation). The second concerns the places of different forms of agriculture in social divisions of labour, factor and commodity markets, and commodity chains, within national economies and the international economy. The third considers how those economic spaces are shaped by the relative strengths of different agrarian classes in wider political structures and processes, including those of state policy and practice.

While there was a great deal of discussion of the social relations and forms of agricultural production, as we have illustrated, technical aspects of labour processes, and technical change, tended to be restricted to the descriptive or contextual protocol, as it were, of studies of agrarian class structure and rural social change, with few exceptions (e.g. Byres 1981; Scott 1985; Pandian 1987). Pandian

Central America by Cook (1976, 1984), Littlefield (1979) and Smith (1984a); investigation of the 'obtrusive logic of capitalist calculation' (O'Brien 1987) in PCP by Zapotec stoneworkers in contemporary Mexico (Cook 1976) and Sudanese peasant farmers (O'Brien 1987); MacWilliam's argument (1988) of the *de facto* commoditization of 'communal' land in the expansion of peasant commodity production in Papua New Guinea; analyses of 'customary' institutions of cooperative labour as a vehicle of class differentiation and exploitation in processes of commoditization (Mamdani 1987; Schrauwers 1998; see also Worby 1995) – and how those institutions and processes are gendered (Carney 1988). In addition, theorizing PCP/SCP in the ways illustrated contests explanations of the 'persistence' of peasant production by its 'functions' for capital (e.g. Vergopoulos 1978) and 'exploitation' through the terms of exchange (see Yunez 1988).

<sup>52</sup> That tendencies have counter-tendencies is a fairly basic expression of Marx's dialectical method, for example, in his analysis of the rate of profit. The possibility of counter-tendencies to peasant class differentiation was noted in Kritsman's work in the 1920s (Cox 1984), cited above, and illustrated by Bhaduri et al. (1986) who argued, with reference to Bangladesh, that peasant class 'polarization' generates wage employment opportunities that enable poor peasants to continue to reproduce their farming enterprises, thereby paradoxically 'stabilizing' this marginal stratum of the peasantry rather than leading to its inevitable demise.

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(1987, 61), in fact, commented on the ‘inadequate interest in analyzing the productive forces’ in the intense debate on peasant capitalism and agrarian transition in India. In this context, as in others, reference to the technical basis of agriculture, and technical change, focused mainly on how it reflects and stimulates class differentiation and class struggle, how mechanization is adopted to substitute for labour and/or to facilitate the restructuring of labour processes in other ways, as labour becomes more scarce and/or more costly, better organized, more militant, and so on. A notable exception was Meager’s article (1990) that analyzed the international institutional framework of biotechnology innovation and application, illustrating the latter with a Nigerian case study. Nonetheless, very few contributions engaged with theorizing issues of technical change (other than very broadly, e.g. Mann and Dickinson 1978; Bernstein 1990) rather than assuming it, or sought to analyze its determinants (rather than effects) in particular social and ecological conditions of production.<sup>53</sup>

If the treatment of technology and technical change exhibited notable lacunae, the same applies *a fortiori* to consideration of the ecological conditions of farming and environmental change, with a few notable exceptions (Bray 1983; Pandian 1987). Martinez-Alier and Naredo (1982) examined the ideas of the intriguing figure of Sergei Podolinsky, a late nineteenth-century ‘Marxist precursor of energy economics’, and Engels’ unfavourable comments about Podolinsky to Marx; Joan Martinez-Alier (1995, 143) subsequently upbraided *JPS* for its paucity of material on ‘political ecology’. The charge is undeniable, and indeed a central concern of most articles on ecological themes that appeared, belatedly, in *JPS* in the 1990s was the critique of environmentalist discourses (see note 41, also Sinha et al. 1997; Sinha 2000; Baumann 1998; only Saldanha 1990 deployed the notion of political ecology in a concrete analysis). While ‘political ecology’ is (or aspires to) a particular analytical approach, as well as proclaiming an ideological or political stance, and necessary as discursive critique might be, the *Journal of Agrarian Change* will welcome theoretically and/or empirically rigorous contributions from any perspective that can help reduce the intellectual deficit of agrarian political economy on ecology and environmental issues.<sup>54</sup>

Given that large-scale capitalist agriculture in Latin America since the 1950s, say, or peasant capitalism in northern India since the 1970s, registered significant (if uneven) advances in productivity, how did this contribute, or fail to contribute, to a (more) developed (more industrialized) capitalist economy? This is a key question for the political economy of development, and an extremely difficult one. To the extent that it embodies the associations, and assumptions, of previous transitions to a fully developed capitalism, the question itself may require rethinking in the light of changes in the structures and functioning of the capitalist world economy, shaped by the effects of those historic transitions in

<sup>53</sup> It is symptomatic, perhaps, that more general reflection on issues of technology and technical change in *JPS* tended to be in review articles (Byres 1980, 1998; Nazir 1993).

<sup>54</sup> Jewitt’s analysis of her fieldwork in northeast India (2000) is an appropriate example; also Bernstein and Woodhouse (forthcoming in *JAC*).

western Europe, North America and East Asia (Byres 1991, 1996; Bernstein 1996/7). To the extent that there were attempts to confront this question more or less directly, they involved several arguments.<sup>55</sup> One is that social transformation of the conditions of agricultural production and connected productivity gains have not been sufficiently dynamic and/or generalized and/or sustained to generate the momentum necessary for transition to (a more developed) capitalism. This is the common logic of, variously, ideas of the articulation of modes of production, and of persistent ‘semi-feudalism’ and other forms of pre- (or non-) capitalist social relations and forms, which have been illustrated; of ‘structural dualism’ in Latin American development (de Janvry and Garramon 1977); and of the vulnerabilities of the agrarian sectors of poorer countries, and of their economies more generally, in international markets and divisions of labour (Patnaik 1996/7). Another argument, also noted above, is that surplus generated and appropriated *within* agriculture by various means (rent, interest, profit on production and/or trade) is not transferred *outside* agriculture, at least in ways available to industrial accumulation (via the inter-sectoral terms of trade, or effective taxation of landed property and the profits of agrarian capital), and that there may be net transfers (via the terms of trade, subsidies, ‘institutional rents’, etc.) to agrarian property and capital – both of which express the political strength of the latter and its capacity to effect ‘rural bias’ in state policies and expenditure (amongst others, Mitra 1977; Byres 1977, 1979, 1981; Gibbon 1992; Karshenas 1996/7).

These illustrations touch on both the second and third themes noted: agricultural branches and sectors in social divisions of labour and commodity markets, and the politics of agrarian classes and of state policies and practices. The second theme featured in many articles with reference to domestic and international market conditions, and how their connections and shifts affect particular agricultural branches and forms of production, including explanations of the trajectories of sharecropping in Turkey (Keyder 1983a) and Tuscany (Gill 1983), for example, and debate of the effects of Iran’s oil boom for agricultural performance (Katouzian 1978; Hakimian 1988; Karshenas 1990). While there was less general theoretical work in this area than concrete instances of the importance of divisions of labour and commodity markets (as we similarly suggested for the area of technology and technical change), some articles considered analytical issues of wider relevance. These included investigations of the specific relations, institutions and dynamics of markets for foodgrains in Mozambique (Mackintosh 1987)

<sup>55</sup> Apart from recognition that generally, with the exception of capitalist East Asia (and perhaps parts of Southeast Asia), Latin America is the most industrialized of the ‘three continents’, and that the most dynamic zones of peasant capitalism in northern India also have the most substantial rural industrialization in the country. Of course, it may be that the development of agrarian capitalism is not a sufficient condition of industrialization (and never was), nor even a necessary condition (Byres 1991, on East Asia; Byres 1996, on Prussia). It is also appropriate to note here, without necessarily agreeing, the scepticism of Comninel (2000; also Wood 1999) concerning either/both the historical record and contemporary prospect of a major role for peasant class differentiation in transitions to (industrial) capitalism; this scepticism is shared by Kay (1974) and de Janvry (1981) concerning the relative weight of peasant capitalism in Latin America’s overall trajectories of agricultural growth.

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and Bangladesh (Crow 1989);<sup>56</sup> discussions and applications of new methods of commodity chain analysis (Bernstein 1996b; Gibbon 1997; Raikes and Gibbon 2000); and explorations of the (rapidly) emergent theme of globalization, including Meager (1990) on the political economy of biotechnology corporations, Goodman and Watts' critical survey of literature on capitalist restructuring and 'the global agro-food system' (1994), Banaji on globalization and restructuring of Indian food processing industries (1996/7) and Raikes and Gibbon's pioneering assessment of globalization and export agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa (2000). While still only a preliminary analysis, the latter set a standard for similar investigation by its empirical care and analytical finesse in relating very different international commodity chains for particular crops to different forms of both peasant and capitalist production in Africa.

We turn now to issues of the state and agrarian politics, which also pervade all our thematic areas. Having said that, the state is especially central to the motifs of development/underdevelopment in the 'three continents', in relation to both the project of state-led 'national development' (capitalist as well as socialist) from the 1950s (in Asia and Africa with political independence, and often earlier in Latin America) and the assault on that project by the global(izing) neo-liberal ascendancy from the late 1970s. The character, policies and practices of states in processes of agrarian capitalist transition featured as an important dimension of many of the concerns sketched, and articles cited, in this section, in relation to the (typically contradictory) imperatives of accumulation and ideological legitimization, and how those imperatives are shaped by, and shape, the balance of forces between landed property/agrarian capital (including peasant capitalism) and (i) classes of agrarian labour and (ii) other capitals and urban classes.

A key motif of the period of state-led development in Latin America and Asia was redistributive land reform (and tenure reform) – land to the tiller – typically conceived as necessary to the removal of 'feudal' and other parasitic landlordism and the development of more productive uses of land.<sup>57</sup> Diverse programmes, methods and results of land reform were addressed in a wide range of contexts, including India and Pakistan (Joshi 1974a, 1974b), Iran (Katouzian 1974; Majd and Nowshirvani 1993), Chile (Kay 1975, 1981), Bangladesh (Jannuzi and Peach 1979), Sri Lanka (Herring 1981), Mexico (Bartra and Otero 1987; Miller 1994), Peru (Assies 1987), Nepal (Caplan 1991), Turkey (Karaömerlioğlu 2000), and

<sup>56</sup> On the connected and wider theme of food availability, articles by Patnaik (1991) and Nolan (1993) took issue with the work of A.K. Sen in different ways (with a reply to Nolan by Sen 1993), and Mooij (1998) and Swaminathan (2000) investigated the politics and practices of India's food Public Distribution System. Who gets to eat what, and how, in terms of class and gender was one of the issues in Agarwal's important essays on poverty (1986) and 'coping with seasonality and calamity' (1990) in rural India.

<sup>57</sup> This rationale expressed the antipathy to 'feudalism' (pre-capitalist formations) shared by Marxist and classic bourgeois versions of development and modernization. Redistributive land reform was the most significant economic policy of the first phase of socialist revolution in Russia, China and Vietnam, followed later by collectivization (above). The equivalent strategy in Cuba, Nicaragua and Mozambique was the nationalization of large capitalist estates, and both measures were pursued in Ethiopia after 1975.

Portugal – at the time still emblematic of ‘backwardness’ in southern Europe – after the revolution of 1974 (Rutledge 1977b; Cabral 1978).<sup>58</sup> While land reform may have vanished from the agenda of development policy in the era of neoliberalism (with the symptomatic exception of the World Bank’s interest in land titling and property rights more generally), it retains at least its symbolic potency in long delayed transitions from ‘racial capitalism’ in southern Africa, and *JPS* published substantial analysis and debate of the land and agrarian questions in post-apartheid South Africa (Bernstein 1996c, 1998; James 2000).<sup>59</sup>

Articles in *JPS* covered many specific aspects of policies on prices, credit, input supply, cooperatives and other elements of institutional and financial support to agriculture (or particular categories of farmers) germane to accounts of agrarian change in particular contexts. One area of particular interest, because of its centrality to models of accumulation in processes of development (Mitra 1977; Saith 1990), was indicated above, namely policy issues and instruments concerning inter-sectoral resource flows between agriculture and other sectors: the site of contesting claims of ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ bias. In the 1980s, a key plank in the programme of structural adjustment was to ‘reform’ (abolish) policies, above all pricing policies, held to discriminate against agriculture and to distort key macroeconomic conditions of growth/development (Gibbon 1992). To support this position and objective, the World Bank undertook a massive study on ‘the political economy of agricultural pricing policy’ in a comprehensive array of developing countries. Karshenas (1996/7) presented a meticulous critique of this study that exposed its theoretical, methodological and empirical defects, and provided an alternative explanation of evidence on inter-sectoral resource flows in China, Iran, India, Japan and Taiwan. He concluded that dynamic economies in non-agricultural sectors and the efficiency of resource use in agriculture (largely ignored by proponents of ‘urban bias’) are key to understanding patterns of inter-sectoral resource flows and particular trajectories of economic development.<sup>60</sup> This was the most sustained and methodical general treatment of this theme, which Karshenas (1990) had earlier explored for Iran, and Ellis (1983) and Wuyts (1994) explored for Tanzania in the 1970s.<sup>61</sup> Ellis (1983) concluded that there had been a net transfer from agriculture in this instance, engineered by state control of crop marketing as well as prices, with predictably dire consequences for agricultural production. Wuyts (1994) connected trends in agricultural prices with those of (public) investment in industrialization to arrive at a more dynamic

<sup>58</sup> Assies (1987) incorporated an extensive critique of de Janvry’s influential analysis (1981) of the political economy of land reform in Latin America; the effects of land reform entered the accounts of some of the many other articles on Peru in *JPS*, for example, Brass (1980, 1986a).

<sup>59</sup> We anticipate that the first special thematic issue of *Journal of Agrarian Change* will address the current politics of land in Zimbabwe.

<sup>60</sup> The other side of this coin is that the lack of evidence of net transfers from agriculture to industry in the countries concerned suggests a need to problematize the notion (or assumption) that (initial) industrialization requires such transfers on a large scale (see also Saith 1990).

<sup>61</sup> This was the fateful decade between the confidence in state-led development in the global boom conditions of the 1960s and the tidal wave of structural adjustment in global conditions of recession and escalating debt in the 1980s.

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conclusion: that a high and rising rate of investment exerted upward pressure on the price of food relative to export crops, and the consequent decline in export volumes and earnings had negative effects for industrial production and the supply of manufactured goods to the peasantry.

The ideology, strategies and experiences of structural adjustment with regard to agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa from the 1980s were the principal focus of articles by Bernstein (1990) and Gibbon (1992), and were also discussed in contributions by O'Laughlin (1996) and Raikes and Gibbon (2000), while Moore (1999) concentrated on the 'governance' agenda of the World Bank with special reference to Africa. Saith (1990) assessed structural adjustment along with other models in his masterly survey of development strategies and the rural poor and Mooij (1998) considered changes introduced with structural adjustment in her political economy of the food Public Distribution System in India, noting the contradictory impulses and effects of attempts by Indian governments in the 1990s simultaneously to implement neo-liberal reform, placate the (capitalist and rich peasant) farm lobbies and claim legitimacy with India's poor voters and with the international social policy and aid arena.

Like the state, agrarian politics featured in all our thematic areas, albeit with additional dimensions in this, the last of the five. As noted earlier, peasant uprisings, movements, *jacqueries*, and other 'disturbances' were a feature of pre-capitalist formations rooted in exploitation of peasant labour, marked key moments of transitions to capitalism in Europe and Japan (and Latin America) and of the struggles that led to socialist regimes in Russia, China and Vietnam, and contributed to anti-colonial struggles in Asia and Africa. This is indeed the terrain of the 'peasant wars' that excited the interest (and enthusiasms) of the founding moment of 'peasant studies' (above). The first issue of *JPS* contained a magisterial, and provocative, essay on 'peasants and politics' by Eric Hobsbawm (1973; it provoked a Maoist inspired response from Corrigan 1975), and an article by Hamza Alavi (1973) that explored, *inter alia*, the concepts of factions and patron-client relations in rural micro-politics (see also Bodemann 1982; Soiffer and Howe 1982).

Subsequent contributions to *JPS* were to interrogate simple notions of 'peasant movements' from various perspectives, and to extend the range of rural politics examined in various ways.<sup>62</sup> There was, however, relatively little on rural politics in, roughly, the second half of the twentieth century that conformed to 'peasant movements' in the sense inherited from earlier periods and processes of anti-'feudal' and national liberation struggle (although the latter continued into the early 1960s in Algeria and 1970s in Vietnam, Portugal's African colonies and Rhodesia/Zimbabwe). The main exception to this observation perhaps is struggles over land, as in Peru in the 1960s (T. Brass 1980, 1989); widespread local land seizures in the Philippines in the second half of the 1980s in conditions of political crisis that Kerkvliet (1993) compared with similar events in Russia in 1905 and 1917–8, Peru in the 1960s, Portugal in 1974–5 and Indonesia in 1964–5;

<sup>62</sup> 'Peasant Movements' enjoyed a special rubric in *JPS* from the beginning, like 'Peasants Speak' (note 27).

and the land occupations of the Landless Workers Movement MST (*Movimiento Rural San Terra*) in Brazil – ‘the most dynamic social movement in Latin America’ according to Petras (1998, 124), but not a ‘peasant movement in the traditional sense’ (Petras 1997, 21). Nor did the more recent absence of ‘peasant movements in the traditional sense’ mean that those of earlier historical periods and processes were not debated, in terms of their class composition, ideologies and programmes. For example, Charlesworth (1980) and Brass (1991) criticized the thesis of ‘the middle peasant’ as the backbone of, respectively, rural agitation in colonial India and the ‘peasant wars of the twentieth century’ as interpreted by Wolf (1969).

The inherited concern with peasant movements, and its characteristic analytical approaches, were challenged in other ways. One kind of challenge emanated from subaltern studies. *JPS* published a seminal essay by Ranajit Guha (1974), the progenitor of the subaltern school, as well as contributions by others of its members like Arnold (1979, 1982, 1984) and Hardiman (1981, 1995), together with critical appraisals by Bayly (1988) and Sathyamurthy (1990). The rationale of doing subaltern studies (at the risk of imputing a coherence that it lacks, or even disdains) derives from the division of subaltern and elite, and the desire to write history from the viewpoint of subalterns (peasants and workers) as autonomous agents who create their own forms of oppositional culture and identity, who are not victims and/or followers, and whose ideas and actions are not to be represented (appropriated) by elite agents and discourses that claim to speak on their behalf. The notion of subalternity is taken from Gramsci, who was (at least initially) something of an inspiration for the project of subaltern studies, because of his keen interest in ideology and popular culture (Arnold 1984; see also Davidson’s interesting discussion, 1984, on Gramsci’s shifting views of the peasantry and popular culture).

Another approach, with some of the same concerns as subaltern studies and a shared interest in culture, was ‘everyday forms of resistance’ (Scott and Kerkvliet 1986). This suggested that peasants (and others) subjected to social and cultural subordination create continuous, mundane and hidden ways of resisting oppression (inequality, hierarchy) – in effect, through avoidance, ridicule and acts of petty revenge. Moreover, these ‘weapons of the weak’ (Scott 1985) have a greater cumulative effect in ameliorating their condition than organized collective action and dramatic but intermittent outbursts of rebellion. Thus conceived, ‘everyday forms of resistance’ was applied to the behaviour of workers in colonial plantations, for example, and to peasants in virtually any conceivable historical situation. This approach was criticized in various ways by White (1986), Hart (1991) and Korovkin (2000) who also, interestingly, traced a recent shift in Ecuador from ‘hidden resistance’ to overt oppositional politics and organization in conditions of increasing democratization.<sup>63</sup> A much more comprehensive, and accelerating,

<sup>63</sup> White (1986) appeared in the special issue edited by Scott and Kerkvliet, and took issue with Scott’s influential *Weapons of the Weak* (1985) for its aggregation of a wide range of peasant practices as instances of ‘resistance’. In this case White distinguished strategies rooted in petty commodity production and pursued by peasants whose position had been *strengthened* by successful political

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polemic was launched by Brass (1991, 1997; see also Brass 1994a, 1994b, 1994c, 1996/7) who attacked notions of the middle peasantry, moral economy, everyday resistance, subaltern studies, new social movements, post-modernism, culturalism, relativism, and all forms of agrarian mythology and populism, linked ‘epistemologically’ by peasant essentialism and ideologically by hostility to any project of social emancipation informed by Enlightenment ideals and optimism.

The relative absence in recent times of ‘peasant movements in the traditional sense’ does not indicate an absence of rural class and popular struggles involving different terrains and forms of collective action, in particular the politics of ‘farmers’ (rather than peasant) movements, of the class struggles of agrarian labour, and electoral politics. The largest concentration of analysis in *JPS* of these three types of rural politics was on India in the conjuncture of the 1980s and 1990s, marked, *inter alia*, by an apparently adverse shift in agriculture’s terms of trade from the late 1970s that contributed to a decline in the rate of profit and accumulation of capitalist farmers and rich peasants; the disintegration of Congress Party dominance of the countryside; and the interpenetration of urban and rural commercial capital and growth of rural industrialization, at least in the Green Revolution heartlands of the north, with effects for rural labour markets and practices (see note 47).

These circumstances saw the rapid and massive growth of ‘new farmers’ movements’ in the 1980s in many parts of India (Brass 1994a), campaigning on price supports and subsidies to agriculture under populist banners that claimed to unite and represent all classes of farmers and agricultural wage workers as well. The (analytically distinct) dimensions of the class composition and leadership, and class content of the programmes and practices, of these movements were fiercely disputed between their supporters (notably Omvedt 1994) and their (Marxist) critics, while other contributors to Brass (1994a) raised issues of the complex interplay of class and caste here as in other arenas of rural social existence and politics in India.

The struggles of agricultural workers, of course, have a long history from earlier transitions to capitalism (Wells 1979) and colonial capitalism (above) to current processes of capitalist development/underdevelopment (as well as continuing in mature capitalism, see Howkins 1977). In fact, what are often termed ‘peasant movements’ turn out to be movements of agricultural workers and poor peasants, for example, in Maharashtra (Mies 1976; Upadhyaya 1980) and Bihar (Das 1982; Hauser 1993).<sup>64</sup> The routine violence inflicted on agricultural workers

revolution and subsequent land reform in Vietnam (as in the corresponding stages of the Russian and Chinese revolutions). It is striking that Hobsbawm’s essay inaugurating *JPS* anticipated so many of the characteristic tropes of ‘everyday forms of resistance’ and ‘weapons of the weak’, for example: ‘The refusal to understand is a form of class struggle . . . To be subaltern is not to be powerless. The most submissive peasantry is . . . capable of “working the system” to its advantage’, and so on (1973, 13), none of which he saw as reason for analytical inflation or ideological romance, but rather the opposite, in fact.

<sup>64</sup> As in Mexico (Redclift 1980), Colombia (LeGrand 1984), Bolivia (Gill 1987) and Brazil (Petras 1998).

in areas of peasant capitalism in India, and its frequent escalation to massacre when workers resist, is widely remarked by the authors just cited, and by Banaji (1990), among others. It may be all the more intense because of the caste and ethnic differences that typically distinguish middle and rich peasant farmers and their workers of ‘untouchable’ (*harijan, dalit*) and ‘tribal’ status, even when it is understood as class violence: ‘what is referred to as caste struggle is nothing but a ruthless class struggle in disguise’ (Mies 1976, 472), and ‘class war, not “atrocities against *harijans*”’ (A. Sinha 1982). This has not prevented workers from forming and/or participating in unions and strikes in India (e.g. Lerche 1995; Tanner 1995) as in Latin America (LeGrand 1984; Assies 1987).

The caste question in India also connects with rural politics on the terrain of electoral competition (especially as Congress dominance collapsed), highlighted by the unprecedented participation of the low-caste BSP (*Bahujan Samaj Party*) in the state government of Uttar Pradesh since 1993 (Lerche 1999; Duncan 1999).<sup>65</sup> The story of the BSP may be only the latest twist in that dimension of agrarian politics in India that has seized the opportunities provided by electoral competition and government office (as well as extra-parliamentary mobilization and organization), as charted in the long career of Charan Singh from the late 1930s to the 1980s: an exceptional organic intellectual of the rich peasantry and political leader of agrarian populism, who was briefly Prime Minister of India (Byres 1988). The electoral arena of agrarian politics in the key state of Uttar Pradesh was also explored by Paul Brass (1980a, 1980b) for the late 1960s and 1970s, and by Ian Duncan (1988, 1997) on Charan Singh’s BKD (*Bharatiya Kranti Dal*) in the 1960s and the *Lok Dal* in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>66</sup>

Finally, we note articles on experiences of communist and socialist political engagement with peasantries (other than those of socialist revolutions and states discussed earlier) in a fascinating range of circumstances: from southern Europe – late nineteenth-century Sicily (Schneider 1986), anarchist collectivization and rural women during the Spanish Civil War (Ackelsberg 1993) and Greek ‘folk’ communism in the 1930s and 1940s (van Boeschoten 1993) – to underground and insurrectionary mobilization in the Philippines (Putzel 1995; also Pomeroy 1978), rural organizations in Peru claiming Trotskyist and Maoist credentials (Brass 1989, 1991), a shift from Naxalite class terrorism (or counter-terrorism) to electoral politics in Bihar (Das 1982; Hauser 1993), and communists and socialists in parliamentary government in Chile from 1970 to 1973 (Kay 1975) and in West Bengal for most of the last 30 years (Ranade 1989).

<sup>65</sup> Duncan (1999, 35) suggested that while the BSP ‘represents a significant social and political movement of some Dalit groups . . . it has failed to secure the support of the wider population of the rural poor’.

<sup>66</sup> The influence of the rural vote on policies of rural development in Malaysia in the late 1950s and 1960s was analyzed by Doshi (1988), and V. Martinez-Alier and Junior (1977) provided a rare analysis of the electoral participation of agricultural workers, in the case of the Brazilian general election of 1974.

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### RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT

This summary review of nearly three decades of agrarian political economy, as represented in volumes 1–27 of *JPS*, has been both exhausting and invigorating for us. We remain only too aware that the pace of its exposition has been as brisk as the march was long, and that much has been left out. For example, while we mentioned contributions on methodological issues of identifying and measuring peasant class differentiation, we omitted those on the intellectual and existential challenges of rural fieldwork by P.C. Joshi (1981), Thaxton (1981) and Breman (1985), and of doing oral history, in van Onselen's reflection (1993) on the research for his extraordinary life of the extraordinary South African sharecropper Kas Maine (van Onselen 1996); on the comparative method in agrarian political economy by Byres (1995); and on conceptualizing and measuring agricultural surplus, and international comparisons of real agricultural output and productivity, by Karshenas (1994, 2000). Nor have we cited essays that problematized 'the village community' dear to peasant essentialism (for example, by Breman 1982, and Boomgaard 1991) or mentioned the unique account by our late comrade Arvind Das, a polymath of agrarian studies and much else, of his natal village over the three centuries of its history (Das 1987).

The task has been invigorating because it imposed on us an unusually comprehensive and intensive reflection on our subject area in all its diversity. That reflection has reminded us of the many established scholars in agrarian studies who published their early work in *JPS*, and of the plurality of views, and vitality of exchange, in *JPS*. For example, Roger Wells (1994) reasserted the importance of the work and legacy of E.P. Thompson, and in particular the fruitfulness and continuing relevance of his concept of moral economy (see also Wood 1999); and Gail Omvedt, a longstanding activist intellectual in rural Maharashtra (and member of the Editorial Board of *Journal of Agrarian Change*), continued to take on such trenchant Marxist critics of agrarian populism in India as Jairus Banaji and Tom Brass (Omvedt 1991, 1994). And we were reminded of our intellectual debts to, and respect for, those serious thinkers with whom often fundamental disagreement spurred on the development of creative work in agrarian political economy, and of whom A.V. Chayanov is emblematic (see note 20). Perhaps above all, we were reminded of the intellectual energy of the contributions to *JPS* across the wide range of its concerns, and the intellectual style, as well as standard, of so many of those contributions in their combination of theoretical awareness and empirical rigour, and commitment to the historical and comparative analysis of agrarian change (including structural change over long periods).

While these are qualities we wish to maintain and promote in the *Journal of Agrarian Change*, our presentation of themes, approaches and trajectories also indicated major lacunae and tendentious areas of political economy – its weak spots, and indeed tired spots – that require fresh consideration. Old controversies can be revitalized through new approaches in ways that yield general intellectual benefits, illustrated by reference to historical debate of European feudalism

and transitions to capitalism, of pre-capitalist agrarian formations in Asia and of the agrarian origins of US capitalism. In a different, and broader, intellectual register, certain approaches in feminist scholarship have illuminated the limits of long-held positions and procedures in agrarian political economy, as in political economy more generally, and continue to challenge understanding of the workings of, *inter alia*, household forms, agrarian labour processes, technical change, rural labour markets, patterns of migration and demography (also barely touched on in this essay), processes of class differentiation in the countryside and rural politics.

We noted too the importance of investigation of technology and technical change, on which we encourage and welcome contributions, especially those able to explore its connections with 'new' themes of fundamental significance: the environmental conditions and effects of the productive forces in farming and associated activities (forestry, fishing); and patterns of 'globalization' of the capitalist world economy and their effects for international divisions of labour in agricultural production, markets for agricultural products, and forms of production in both mature and transitional capitalist societies, not least as globalization affects the prospects and problems of economic and social development in the latter.

The importance of culture has become clearer, and indeed is too important to be abandoned to culturalist approaches of older and more recent provenance (post-modernism), or restricted to the study of subalterns or so-called 'under-classes'. Accordingly, we welcome contributions to the *Journal of Agrarian Change* on relevant aspects of culture (see note 27). We would also like to publish more on Japan (see note 15), and on North Africa and Arabic-speaking western Asia, which likewise received very little attention in *JPS* (gaps highlighted by the abundance of material on sub-Saharan Africa, Iran and Turkey).

And, of course, we want to encourage as strongly as we can the work of younger scholars who desire to carry forward the agenda of agrarian political economy, and whose preoccupations and conceptions of that agenda will not simply replicate those of the intellectual generations before them. We are pleased that they are represented in this first issue by Carlos Oya, and that they are making a major contribution to our forthcoming special issue on the politics of land in Zimbabwe (note 59).

What we have surveyed is indeed far broader than the usual associations of 'peasant studies' but then *JPS*, in effect, started to evolve as a medium of a broader agrarian political economy from its early days, a process we have charted in this essay and that, as editors of this new journal, we are committed to advancing. We appreciate the support in this project of the 31 former members of the Editorial Board of *JPS* (of a total of 33) who have joined us in the *Journal of Agrarian Change* and are pleased to welcome new members to their number. We trust that our contributors and readers will share with us the challenges of the issues, the excitement of the ideas and the pursuit of contemporary relevance, that a developing agrarian political economy promises.

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