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ARTICLE

The Global Enclosure and the Remaking of Peasantries, 1870–1950

Eric Vanhaute[1] and Claudia Bernardi[2]

[1]History Department, Ghent University, Ghent, Belgium and [2]Political Science Department, University of Perugia, Perugia, Italy
Corresponding author: Eric Vanhaute; Email: eric.vanhaute@ugent.be

Abstract

Peasant transformation has often been framed in dichotomous, linear, and predominantly a-historical models. This article adopts a dynamic perspective and shows how the developments that have often been regarded as constituent to the long-term process of the decline of agriculture and peasant worlds were in fact part of the spread of more diversified labour and income strategies of the peasantries. In the movement towards a worldwide enclosure of the rural worlds after 1870, a global peasantry emerged through a wide range of regional trajectories and narratives. By the first half of the twentieth century, peasant households all over the world had become heavily involved in the capitalist market economy. In this article, we argue that the (re)creation of peasantries as a social group is part of a diverse complex of reciprocal exchanges, regional and extra-regional market transactions, actions of public forces, and social conflict. Also we stress that social class formation should be understood in its specific world-historical co-ordinates using a particular set of transhistorical concepts like (re)peasantization, peasant frontiers, and peasant regimes.

I

Peasant transformation has been at the heart of Western social sciences and social history since their inception. Most often, debates about social change were framed in dichotomous and predominantly a-historical models of modernization and development. Market versus non-market relations, economic versus cultural forms of exchange, modern versus traditional societal arrangements, a long tradition of rural sociology is grafted upon these dichotomies. We argue that the (re)creation of peasantries as a social group is directly related to reciprocal exchanges, regional and extra-regional market transactions, actions of public forces, and social conflict. The condition of being a peasant is rooted in particular spaces and distinctive histories. At the same time, being part of a peasantry is ingrained in transregional and, since the nineteenth century, global class formation.

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Around the middle of the nineteenth century, about three-quarters of the world's active population still lived off the land. However, the world in which they made their living was changing rapidly in two inter-related ways. Market relationships in land and labour revolutionized the countryside starting in the preceding century. Commodification, or the transformation through market exchange of goods, services, and people into items of trade, set in, transforming the relationship between peasants, village societies, landlords, and states. At the same time, the rise of modern states fundamentally reshaped the notion of territory and human belonging. State-controlled territories governed and taxed people by virtue of their shared spatial location.[1] They aspired to a more pervasive control of people and the resources they needed. After 1870, this movement towards a global enclosure accelerated, requiring a more direct intervention in peasant institutions and practices of allocation and use of land and labour. Intensified frontier expansion necessitated a permanent restructuring of peasant land and labour regimes and generated significant differences over space and time.[2] These processes have never been absolute or complete. As we will see, capitalism's tendency towards generalized commodity production created immense disparities on a global and a local level. The remaking of the global countryside between 1870 and 1950 was a worldwide process constituted by a wide variety of regional stories of change.

This period was the arena for the first global food regime, rooted in the expansion of a globalizing food trade system and a network of transnational production chains. The rise of the first food regime was made possible by the global expansion of export production, a massive peasantization of the world's rural labour force, the self-exploitation of settler families, and relentless and unsustainable soil mining. This agricultural expansion signalled the final wave of worldwide frontier expansion, and simultaneously announced the closing of spatial frontiers, the global enclosure, and the end of 'free', non-commodified land. New regimes of land and labour relations emerged everywhere. Encroaching processes of de-peasantization in Europe were matched by the emergence of a variety of new land–labour relations in other parts of the world: the rise of large-scale settler agriculture, the creation of agro-industrial plantations, and the massive commodification of peasant farming. The same crop could be produced with divergent labour regimes. A good example was cotton: peasant production systems flourished in India, Central Asia, and Western Africa while plantation production was common in Algeria, German East Africa, Mexico, and Argentina. Different systems of coercion and bondage, such as sharecropping, debt bondage, and mandatory

[1] Charles S. Maier, *Once within borders: territories of power, wealth, and belonging since 1500* (Cambridge, MA, 2016); Henri Bernstein, *Class dynamics of agrarian change* (Halifax and Winnipeg, 2010), p. 43.

[2] Philip McMichael, 'Peasant prospects in the neoliberal age', *New Political Economy*, 11 (2006), pp. 407–18; Farshad Araghi, 'The great global enclosure of our times: peasants and the agrarian question at the end of the twentieth century', in Fred Magdoff, John Bellamy Foster, and Frederick H. Buttel, eds., *Hungry for profit: the agribusiness threat to farmers, food and the environment* (New York, NY, 1999), pp. 145–60; Immanuel Wallerstein, *Historical capitalism with capitalist civilization* (London and New York, NY, 1995), pp. 13–43.

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harvests, had to overcome imminent constraints in mobilizing peasant labour. As a rule, wage labour was extremely difficult to institutionalize also due to persistent peasant resistance, forcing colonial and business powers to adopt other ways of extracting peasant labour. The colonial projects of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries directly intervened in their institutions and practices of land allocation and land use.

In this article, we focus on the age of the global enclosure between 1870 and 1950, and describe the diverse transformations of the countryside and the peasant populations using non-linear, transhistorical concepts such as (re)peasantization, peasant frontiers, and peasant regimes. We investigate how in this period the worldwide redefinition and regional diversification of peasantries materialized. We organize our argument as follows. We first explain how we construct a world-historical understanding of peasants as a social group and peasant transformation as a set of frontier-making processes. In the next section, we discuss how the enclosure of the global countryside after 1870 redefined both the position of peasantries as a social formation and peasant transformation as a world-historical process of social change. Finally, we emphasize that this worldwide process took place through a remarkable variety of regional trajectories of change, resistance, and adaptation.

II

Peasants and peasant transformation are core protagonists of world history. Throughout our history, peasants have been workers of the land, organized in family bonds, village communities, and social groups that we call peasantries.[3] Most of the time, peasantries have been ruled by other social groups that extract a surplus either via rents, via market transfers, or through control of public power (taxation). Differences between peasants, market-driven farmers, and industrial or entrepreneurial farming must be understood as co-existing conditions, with subsistence production, household labour, and local community relations as the main discriminating variables. Peasantries have never been undifferentiated social entities; they include middle and small peasant farmers, and self-employment and waged labour in combination with subsistence farming. Peasantries have been the largest and most important social group in human history. Until the end of the twentieth century, agricultural work was the main profession around the world. Today, still more than 30 per cent of the world population, about 2.5 billion people, is economically dependent on agricultural production as a source of income.[4] Peasant and

[3] Eric Wolf, *Peasants* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1966); Eric Vanhaute, *Peasants in world history* (London and New York, NY, 2021); Eric Vanhaute, 'Peasants, peasantries and (de)peasantization in the capitalist world-system', in Salvatore J. Babones and Christopher Chase-Dunn, eds., *Routledge handbook of world-systems analysis* (London and New York, NY, 2012), pp. 313–21.

[4] Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), *State of food and agriculture 2015*; www.fao.org/publications/sofa/2015/en; FAO, *Towards stronger family farms, 2014*; www.fao.org/3/a-i4171e.pdf; Sarah K. Lowder, Marco V. Sánchez, and Raffaele Bertini, *Farms, family farms, farmland distribution and farm labour: what do we know today?* (Rome, 2019).

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family farms remain by far the most prevalent, and most productive form of agriculture in the contemporary world.[5]

Like every social formation, peasantries developed as sets of social relationship; peasantries created societies, and societies created peasantries. In world history, surplus production from the land has been a precondition for large-scale societal change; societal change was necessary to group the agricultural producers into peasantries. Agricultural-based economic systems facilitated vaster communal units and extended village networks. This provoked profound changes in the structure of social relations, population growth, and village and supra-village institutions.[6] Capitalist expansion induced a highly divergent range of labour regimes and systems of recruiting, organizing, controlling, and reproducing labour.[7] These labour regimes included so-called free (waged, unbound) labour, forced labour (by tribute, taxation, and forced labour service), and slavery and semi-proletarian labour (wage labour plus subsistence production). Many researchers have stressed the centrality of coercion in the massive group of subaltern workers, including peasant populations.[8]

The expansion of civilizations, states, and global capitalism triggered distinct peasant transformation paths, which have often been labelled as processes of peasantization, de-peasantization, and re-peasantization. Peasant transformation has neither been unilinear nor has it taken fixed forms of social differentiation over time and space. In a world-historical context, peasantry refers to a set of open processes that interact within multiple forms and scales of conflict and interaction and leave room for different levels of autonomy. The concepts of peasantization, de-peasantization, and re-peasantization aim to grasp the ongoing processes of creation, decline, adaptation, and resistance. Throughout history, peasantries have been the historical outcome of labour and income processes that constantly adjust to surrounding conditions, such as market fluctuations, state control, technical innovations, demographic trends, and environmental changes.[9] However, the combined processes of overburdening, restricting, controlling, and reducing peasant spaces have considerably weakened their material basis in the last few centuries. The notions of de- and re-peasantization aim to understand these multilayered processes of adaptation and often erosion of an agrarian and rural way of life. This has triggered a further diversification of rural coping mechanisms, including petty

[5] Vincent Ricciardi et al., 'Higher yields and more biodiversity on smaller farms', *Nature Sustainability*, 4 (2021); Paul Hebinck, 'De-/re-agrarianisation: global perspectives', *Journal of Rural Studies*, 61 (2018), pp. 227–35.

[6] Vanhaute, *Peasants in world history*; Paul Brassley and Richard Soffe, *Agriculture: a very short introduction* (Oxford, 2016); Marcel Mazoyer and Laurence Roudart, *A history of world agriculture: from the Neolithic Age to the current crisis* (London and Sterling, VA, 2006).

[7] Eric Vanhaute, 'Agriculture', in Karen Hofmeester and Marcel Van der Linden, eds., *Handbook: global history of work* (Berlin, 2017), pp. 217–35; Marcel Van der Linden, *Workers of the world: essays toward a global labour history* (Leiden and Boston, MA, 2008), pp. 291–2.

[8] Van der Linden, *Workers of the world*, pp. 33–5.

[9] Vanhaute, 'Agriculture'; Hebinck, 'De-/re-agrarianisation: global perspectives'; Deborah Fahy Bryceson, Cristobal Kay, and Jos Mooij, eds., *Disappearing peasantries? Rural labour in Africa, Asia and Latin America* (London, 2000).

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commodity production, rural wage labour, seasonal migration, subcontracting to national and multinational corporations, self-employment, remittances, and transregional and transnational income transfers.[10]

To understand peasant change within a world-historical view, we combine different scales of time and space, expressed in the concepts of peasant frontiers and peasant regimes. First and foremost, peasant history is the history of the struggle for the fruits of their labour and the social relations built on the returns of the land. As social formations, peasantries supported the expansion of civilizations, empires, states, and economies and fuelled their social and ecological resilience. We argue that peasantries were their social and ecological frontiers.[11] The history of peasants can only be understood within the societal systems that incorporated and generated them. Peasantries developed strategies for survival and resistance in response to the expanding impact of state power, market relations, class struggles, and ethnocultural identity conflicts. Over time, the scales upon which these social power relations have been expressed have not only widened and multiplied, they have also become increasingly interdependent. The notion of peasant frontiers emphasizes that the incorporation in broader societal systems has always been uneven and often incomplete and that their mutual history has never been linear. The analysis of frontiers maps processes of incorporation, adaptation, and opposition. It help us understand and explain the widely different strategies that peasant populations have developed to defend and secure access to their essential means of production, nature, land, and labour, throughout history.[12] The incorporation of rural zones and the creation of new peasantries have been central to the expansion of global capitalism. Capitalist incorporation and expansion is fuelled by the opening of new frontiers of nature, land, and labour whose 'free gifts' have been systematically identified, mapped, secured, and appropriated.[13] The massive process of creating new frontiers and the gradual commodification of the global countryside have opened up an unseen bounty of nature, land, and labour's rewards, fuelling globalizing capitalism.

The incorporation of peasants as producers of ever-new surpluses instigated mixed, complex, and often opposing processes of social and spatial change that

[10] Frank Ellis, 'Agrarian change and rising vulnerability in rural Sub-Saharan Africa', *New Political Economy*, 11 (2006), pp. 387–97, at p. 393; Jan Douwe Van der Ploeg, 'From de-to repeasantization: the modernization of agriculture revisited', *Journal of Rural Studies*, 61 (2018), pp. 236–43; Deborah Fahy Bryceson, *African rural labour, income diversification and livelihood approaches: a long-term development perspective* (Leiden, 1999), p. 175.

[11] Vanhaute, *Peasants in world history*, pp. 6–8.

[12] Jason W. Moore, 'Cheap food and bad money: food, frontiers, and financialization in the rise and demise of neoliberalism', *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)*, 33 (2010), pp. 225–61, at p. 245; Edward B. Barbier, *Scarcity and frontiers: how economies have developed through natural resource exploitation* (Cambridge, 2011); Hanne Cottyn, 'A world-systems frontier perspective to land: exploring the uneven trajectory of land rights standardization in the Andes', *Journal of World-Systems Research*, 23 (2017), pp. 515–39; John F. Richards, *The unending frontier: an environmental history of the early modern world* (Berkeley, CA, 2003).

[13] Jason W. Moore, *Capitalism in the web of life: ecology and the accumulation of capital* (London, 2015), pp. 144–58; Sven Beckert et al., 'Commodity frontiers and the transformation of the global countryside: a research agenda', *Journal of Global History*, 26 (2021), pp. 435–50.

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we frame in a set of moving peasant frontiers and a genealogy of evolving and changing peasant regimes. The notion of peasant regimes aims to integrate in a holistic way systems of production and reproduction, the organization of access to land, nature, and commonly pooled resources, social differentiation, the relationship between farming and non-farming populations, and the types of market exchange.[14] In a comparative-historical understanding of peasantries, peasant regimes relate to each other, often in co-existent forms: from strong to weak subsistence regimes and from weak to strong market-oriented regimes. This approach avoids fixed categories and a prescribed historical trajectory. Subsistence farming and market production have never been exclusive and, in many cases, were mutually supporting.

Peasant frontiers and peasant regimes are tools to contextualize and understand how peasantries were internally organized and externally embedded. The analysis of frontiers and the genealogy of regimes provide a genuine, global comparative-historical lens to look at the social, economic, political, and ecological relations of village-systems, agrarian empires, and global capitalism. The aim is a non-hierarchical, non-evolutionary, and non-deterministic interpretation of global social change, thus avoiding new myths that underpin power relations and dominant discourses both in academic knowledge and in applied fields such as development work.[15] Despite huge differences in time and space, peasant frontiers and peasant regimes are defined by peasant incorporation into wider social systems, indirect political control, and coerced extraction of land and labour surpluses via taxes, tributes, rents, and confiscations. The spread of private property and the commodification of the countryside marked the beginning of capitalist expansion, accelerating in the long sixteenth century. Within capitalism, peasant regimes were premised on new, more direct forms of enclosure of nature, land, and labour. This thoroughly altered ecological relations and changed the rules of the game, resulting in diverging systems of access to nature, land, and labour, arrangements of production and reproduction, and mechanisms of coping and survival.

III

The global countryside and its peasantries were deeply remodelled. In fact, we have argued that surplus production from nature and the land was foundational for large-scale societal change and for the making of peasantries as a social group. This world-historical relationship transformed with the advent of capitalism.[16] The global enclosure was preceded by a social revolution in the European countryside starting in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. This was in the first place a revolution in land relations, driven by a double

[14] Philip McMichael, *Food regimes and agrarian questions* (Halifax and Winnipeg, 2013), pp. 1–12; Guy Robinson, *Geographies of agriculture: globalisation, restructuring and sustainability* (Harlow, 2004); Moore, *Capitalism in the web of life*, pp. 158–65.

[15] Mats Widgren, 'Four myths in global agrarian history', in M. Bondesson, A. Jarrick, and J. Myrdal, eds., *Methods in world history: a critical approach* (Lund, 2016), pp. 85–106.

[16] Vanhaute, *Peasants in world history*, pp. 87–112.

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movement of decline in common lands and common rights, and the rise of private property and private use rights. Attacks against common rights generally coincided with the suppression of fallow lands, the abolition of the right to common grazing lands, and other collective obligations. The massive move towards private property in land changed social relations in a fundamental way. The monopolization of access to land created new claims on the fruits of labour of others. Rights of property included the right of owners to lease their lands without restrictions and on a temporary base to tenant farmers or sharecroppers. Land rent became essentially a market relation, although very asymmetric and unequal. In England, over time the majority of the peasantry dissolved in groups of agricultural wage labourers, industrial wage labourers, or migrants to settler colonies. In the middle of the nineteenth century after a long-term movement of land appropriation and concentration, lands were very much concentrated in the hands of a small number of big landowners. England became the archetypical case where the dissolution of the old peasant order led to the formation of new social classes, large landowners, tenant farmers, and wage labourers.[17]

The proliferation of private property was a major gamechanger; it marked the start of a process of commodification in the countryside and boosted capitalist expansion.[18] Peasant regimes became premised on new, more drastic forms of enclosure of land and labour, thoroughly altering ecological and social relations. Uneven incorporation and uneven commodification caused global conjunction and social and spatial differentiation through mixed processes of de-peasantization and re-peasantization, and a concurrent diversification of peasant livelihoods. Peasant regimes became more interconnected, but not more alike. They diversified also according to their location and timing in the capitalist world system, between capitalist core zones, settler zones, plantation zones, and peasant agriculture zones.

The transformation of the global countryside gained momentum after 1870.[19] It took massive state efforts to integrate remaining peasant labour into the capitalist production system. For example, the expansion of capitalist cotton agriculture from the last third of the nineteenth century was a direct result of powerful interventions of the state, first and foremost through a redefinition of property rights, redistributing land away from village societies and nomadic peoples. The transformation of the countryside through the commodification of land and labour spread capitalist social relations, including privatized credit relations and private ownership of land. This momentous process of remaking peasants into cultivators and eventually consumers of commodities was supported by the spread of a variety of labour regimes, such as sharecropping, family yeoman farming, and proletarian agricultural labour. It was also supported by new forms of coercion through taxation,

[17] Bas van Bavel and Richard Hoyle, eds., *Social relations: property and power* (Turnhout, 2010).

[18] John C. Weaver, *The great land rush and the making of the modern world, 1650–1900* (Montreal and Kingston, 2003); Andro Linklater, *Owning the earth: the transforming history of land ownership* (New York, NY, 2013).

[19] Sven Beckert, *Empire of cotton: a global history* (New York, NY, 2014), pp. 184, 297.

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compulsory crops, debt bondage, etc. By the end of the nineteenth century, sharecropping and tenant farming had become the dominant mode of mobilizing agricultural labour. In many parts of the world, integration into the capitalist world market went hand in hand with widespread re-peasantization, not straightforward proletarianization. Meanwhile, the expansion of grain and meat production in settler economies and the expansion of tropical export crops in colonial Asia and Africa coincided with massive de-agrarianization and de-peasantization and more diversified, capital-intensive farming in Europe.

The global enclosure through the rise of the capitalist world market and modern state power after 1870 significantly increased the pressure on existing peasant societies and the last great empires of Africa and Asia.[20] A prime tool in incorporation of these societies was the redefinition of property rights. This was the era of the great land rush, in which state authorities enforced new methods for framing legal rights to new properties. Individualized property rights were spelled out, secured, and guaranteed as prime assets in the economies of newly colonized places. Despite huge differences in the social organization of rural economies, the European yeoman and physiocratic models became leading ideological frameworks for transforming the global countryside. The first rule was to fix lands and peoples; nomads of all kinds had to be disciplined. Land registration demarcated property and assured the geographical stability of rural dwellers and land profitability. The second rule was to register lands and peoples. The land cadastres and population registers that proliferated throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries listed both quantities and qualities of properties and the peoples that inhabited them. The rule was to differentiate between lands and peoples because this made it possible to distinguish between physical and social geographies of distinctive characteristics and opportunities. Both in Europe and its former colonies, the goal of the model of individual family farmer was to strengthen the rural middle class and to raise overall agricultural productivity. Pastoralism based on sheep and cattle holding did not fit into this picture; peasant emancipation had to yield a much more orderly landscape. As territory became the ultimate resource that produced surpluses for bordering nations, it required demarcated villages, farms, and families. However, the ideal of the emancipated peasant often remained rhetoric. For example,

[20] The next paragraphs are inspired by, amongst others, Barbier, *Scarcity and frontiers*; Beckert, *Empire of cotton*; Bernstein, *Class dynamics of agrarian change*; Christopher Isett and Stephen Miller, *The social history of agriculture: from the origins to the current crisis* (Lanham, MD, 2017); Robert B. Marks, *The origins of the modern world: a global and ecological narrative from the fifteenth to the twenty-first century* (Lanham, MD, 2007); Mazoyer and Roudart, *A history of world agriculture*; Richards, *The unending frontier*; Mark B. Tauger, *Agriculture in world history* (London and New York, NY, 2011). Regional studies include Jan Breman, *Of peasants, migrants and workers: rural labour circulation and capitalist production in West India* (Oxford, 1985); Jan Breman, *Labour migration and rural transformation in colonial India* (Amsterdam, 1990); Fred Cooper et al., *Confronting historical paradigms: peasants, labour, and the capitalist world system in Africa and Latin America* (Madison, WI, 1993); Gareth Austin, *Labour, land and capital in Ghana: from slavery to free labour in Asante, 1807–1956* (Woodbridge, 2005).

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emancipated peasants in Prussia mostly became landless labourers, emancipated slaves in the American South became indebted sharecroppers, and emancipated serfs in Russia often remained tied to village property. In the European colonies, rules of 'permanent settlement' often impoverished rural populations.

The first truly integrated world market induced an unprecedented wave of commodification of land, labour, and food after 1870. Capital moved ever deeper into the countryside, integrating a wide diversity of resources of nature, land, and labour. Imminent resource constraints in the emerging capitalist world economy were overcome by new frontier expansion and an unprecedented increase in the number of rural workers and agricultural output. The role of the state was crucial in recasting the global countryside. New forms of coercion replaced slave labour. Coercion was endorsed through contracts and taxation and was instituted and carried out by the state. As states extended their sovereignty over a territory, they also increased their sovereignty over labour.

Nineteenth- and twentieth-century processes of peasantization were part of a massive restructuring of agrarian relations within the formation of colonial empires in Asia and Africa, the end of political colonialism in the Americas, and the expansion of global capitalism. The enclosure of the global countryside was supported by new visions regarding the political economy of land, insisting that 'free', non-commodified or unclaimed land was not just a source of surplus, but that it also determined all social relations. In the first half of the twentieth century, frontier land expansion became a less prevalent means of absorbing surplus labour. As the global land frontiers gradually closed down, they were no longer the primary method of attaining economic and military superiority. However, land expansion remained an important mechanism for absorbing the world's rural poor for some decades to come. The remaking of the global peasantry continued through new international divisions of labour and increased trade in agricultural commodities. The commodification and marginalization of peasant subsistence in the Global South coincided with the expansion of export crops like coffee, cocoa, tea, sugar, cotton, and palm oil, the promotion of high value commodities like horticultural products, and the expansion of large-scale production of soy, sugar, and grains. The working poor were increasingly forced to pursue their reproduction through insecure and oppressive wage employment and/or a range of precarious small-scale and so-called informal economy survival activities, including marginal farming. Moreover, livelihoods were pursued across different spaces of the social division of labour: urban and rural, agricultural and non-agricultural, wage employment and marginal self-employment. Coercion remained central in the twentieth-century colonial worlds, permanently recasting social structures, and mobilizing labour in different ways. In many places, constraints to mobilize sufficient workers for large plantations stimulated systems of share-cropping. In some regions, peasants were mobilized through transnational labour regimes for temporary farm work. The recasting of the countryside spread to the Soviet Union, China, and India, making these regions part and parcel of the new geography of global capitalism.

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By the mid-twentieth century, governments and capital had transformed the global countryside. Developmentalist projects integrated peasantries as part of nationalist movements and as citizens of new states. Since they no longer needed the state to turn rural cultivators into commodity growers, from the 1980s capitalists increasingly turned away from state intervention. Neoliberalism created new frontiers of market expansion in the countryside, instigating a new phase in its radical transformation.

IV

The commodification and peasantization of the global countryside after 1870 generated a wide range of regional and national land and labour regimes that reflected both the history of regional agro-systems and their position within the global capitalist division of labour.[21] Resource-based expansion intensified after 1870 and induced a diversity of frontier economies: grain and meat-producing settler economies (such as the United States), plantation-based tropical economies (such as Brazil), peasant-based tropical economies (such as Southeast Asia), mixed peasant and plantation-based economies (such as Colombia, Costa Rica, Ceylon, and Malaya), and mineral-based economies (such as Bolivia). This promoted a further proliferation of sedentary agricultural systems all over the world. Although peasants became a gradually diminishing share of the workforce in many world regions, the actual number of rural workers only started to decline in some Western European countries. Western settlement displaced and killed huge numbers of indigenous peoples in Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Canada, the United States, Australia, and elsewhere in the nineteenth century. In Asia and Africa, there was a considerable switch from native lifeways to sedentary agriculture to grow export crops at the expense of (semi-)nomadic systems of survival. Examples are tea plantations in Assam, coffee estates in Kenya, and tobacco and rubber plantations in Sumatra. In China, there was massive migration into the Manchurian forests from the end of the nineteenth century in order to turn the region into China's breadbasket. The new, global agricultural and food system consisted of different but complementary zones specializing in crop growing, pasturage,

[21] This section is based on Vanhaute, *Peasants in world history*, pp. 87–103. Supporting literature includes: Ulbe Bosma, *The making of a periphery: how Island Southeast Asia became a mass exporter of labour* (New York, NY, 2019); Francesca Bray, *The rice economies: technology and development in Asian societies* (Oxford, 1986); Breman, *Labour, migration and rural transformation in colonial India*; Leslie Dossey, *Peasant and empire in Christian North Africa* (Berkeley, CA, 2010); Penelope Francks, *Rural economic development in Japan: from the nineteenth century to the Pacific War* (Abingdon, 2006); David Ludden, *India and South Asia: a short history* (Oxford, 2002); David Ludden, *Early capitalism and local history in South India* (Oxford, 2005); B. B. Mohanty, *Agrarian transformation in Western India: economic gains and social costs* (London and New York, NY, 2019); James C. McCann, *Green land, brown land, black land: an environmental history of Africa, 1800–1990* (Portsmouth, NH, 1999); Alessandro Stanziani, *Bondage: labour and rights in Eurasia from the sixteenth to the early twentieth centuries* (New York, NY, and London, 2014); Peer Vries, *Averting a Great Divergence: state and economy in Japan, 1868–1937* (London, 2019); Mats Widgren and John E. G. Sutton, *Islands of intensive agriculture in Eastern Africa: past and present* (London and Stockholm, 2004).

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and stockbreeding for dairy and meat products or vegetable and fruit production. In many regions, agricultural producers started to specialize in a few commodities, abandoning systems of mixed plant and animal production. European states deployed immense administrative, judicial, military, and infrastructural capacities that revolutionized the global countryside. The expansion of export crops was a direct result of powerful state interventions through a massive appropriation and redistribution of land and the redefinition of property rights and credit relations. Rural societies around the world became an integral part of the new geography of global capitalism through a massive wave of commodification of nature, land, and labour.

The remaking of the global countryside between 1870 and 1950 was a worldwide process consisting of a long chain of regional stories of change. Contrary to Western Europe, most parts of the world experienced a long wave of agricultural expansion and massive peasantization. Russia was still able to expand its agricultural frontiers towards new croplands. The empire further extended its territorial reach to the East, incorporating the more fertile soils of the forest-steppe. In settler societies with a temperate climate, railroad expansion opened up immense frontiers for agricultural colonization after 1870. In the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, North Africa, Argentina, and southern Brazil, immigrant farmers profited from the abundance of space and the absence of servile relations and heavy burdens on the use of land and labour. These farmers generally used better farm equipment and were more productive than most European farmers. Populist politics attempted to democratize land distribution by conceding legal rights of occupation to squatters. From the 1860s, the process of granting land to homesteaders became formalized in the United States, while in Australia and New Zealand smallholder settlers were authorized by law to pick land on pastoral leaseholds. An end to slavery in the southern states of the United States made capitalist plantations unfeasible and caused planters to resort to sharecropping. By 1900, many white and most black farmers had become sharecroppers. The sharecropping system assured the farmers employment and control of the labour of their households, and it guaranteed the landlords access to a massive labour supply. Cotton production boomed again after the 1860s, but left sharecroppers poor and often indebted. Sharecroppers organized themselves, which often prompted violent reactions from planters and their business allies. Farm sizes in the US South persistently diminished until the 1930s, as the landed classes divided the holdings and pushed land intensification to its limits.

In Latin America, land reforms seldom favoured smallholders. Late nineteenth-century liberal reforms in former Spanish colonies and Brazil facilitated the conveyance of church and public lands to large landowners. Liberal regimes made formerly inalienable lands subject to private ownership and sale. Some large estates were broken up, but major pastoralists conserved their domains. In former Portuguese colonies, plantation holders were able to secure legal titles. The planters in Brazil delayed the abolition of slavery and enacted land legislation that confirmed and protected their property rights. In tropical economies, commercial agriculture and mining gained access to

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abundant, cheap, and virtually unlimited supplies of labour. Mass internal as well as overseas migration added to the surplus of labour and was critical to the expansion of export-led agricultural frontiers in Latin America but also in India, Southeast Asia, and Africa. Both in peasant and plantation economies, cheap and unskilled labour was combined with abundant land resources. The exploitation of agricultural frontiers was very labour-intensive and did not require much capital, equipment, or other durable goods. Financing was primarily required for hiring a permanent labour force and for transporting, marketing, and exporting commodities.

Frontier-based growth in tropical colonial regions with abundant land and natural resources was mostly based on labour mobilization in smallholder peasant economies. As peasants were forced to switch from subsistence to commercial export crops, they accumulated debts to finance market-oriented operations. This increased the need for higher returns and often led to a deterioration in labour and living conditions. Population growth and migration stimulated the dependence on subsistence agriculture and perpetuated surplus labour supplies. Coerced crop production became the main feature of colonial agriculture. For example, manufacturers and governments in Europe and Japan assured access to inexpensive cotton after the end of slavery in the American South by taking control over foreign lands: Japan in northern China, Germany in Togo, and Belgium in Congo. Colonial authorities used various means to induce peasants to farm for companies. In the Dutch East Indies, colonizers increased profits through the extraction of cash-crop surpluses for export by levying taxes on villages. Village land was secured, indigenous land titles were recognized, and land was made inalienable. The unclaimed tracts were opened to long-term leasing by plantation operators. In other regions, like Kenya, Rhodesia, and southern Africa, colonial authorities expropriated the indigenous peasantry for the benefit of European settlers. To acquire a public domain, French colonizers in Algeria resorted to a combination of conquest, expropriation, and biased laws that freed up land held by local populations. They were moved from the best lands and land was expropriated or sold under heavy pressure for low prices. Under the rules of the Ottoman empire, social differentiations were limited and land was passed from one generation to the next without becoming private property. By contrast, French colonizers regarded land as a source of exchange value, turning pastoral and common lands into individual property. In New Caledonia, which France annexed in 1853, the colonial administration bought land for nominal amounts from Melanesian populations, expropriated more land, and claimed what they regarded as unoccupied territory. The techniques of acquisition, property definition, and appropriation practised in Algeria and New Caledonia resembled those used by British and American colonizers, including systems of recording land titles. The same was true in German East Africa, where concepts and schemes of freehold and private property titles were adopted. The colonial tax system made Africans dependent on labour outside the subsistence economy. French colonization in Algeria from 1830 coincided with the mass migration of French settlers. Africans had to rent land from them and work for wages on the settlers' lands. Later on, colonial tax laws forced Algerians to

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be taxed in money rather than in kind, forcing more of them to sell their land and labour force. By the early twentieth century, the number of Algerian farmers had diminished sharply and they were squeezed onto ever-smaller and heavily taxed parcels of land. The number of nomads relying on grazing animals was also decimated. Poverty forced them to take up fixed residence and wage occupations.

British India was a prime example of massive peasantization as a vehicle for transforming rural society into a cash-crop economy. This transformation curtailed village economies and local systems of exchange and redistribution, and strengthened social differentiation in the countryside, including a growing landless population. Agricultural frontiers increasingly closed down after 1850, and the agricultural economy diversified. The spread of private land ownership transformed social relations; peasantries were redefined as groups of individual households and landowners were made responsible for tax collection in cash. This multiplied systems of debt bondage and encouraged the production of commercial crops. From the 1870s, national and local governments enforced their claims on forest and public land, and private properties were surveyed, demarcated, and recorded. Agrarian citizenship was no longer limited to household, group, or place; it became part of the agrarian polities of British India. New land tenures were introduced to standardize the methods of protecting property rights and the collection of land revenue. Peasants were compelled to become increasingly involved with markets. The British used taxation to force them to grow wheat and commercial crops like sugarcane, cotton, and indigo. Peasants abandoned the production of traditional food for local consumption and switched to export crops for the world market. After the 1850s, research stations, massive irrigation works, and expanded railway and road transport systems promoted the massive expansion of cash cropping, which transformed India into a mass producer and exporter of agricultural products. The swift process of commercialization of land and agriculture resulted in exploitative credit systems by private moneylenders who charged exorbitant interest rates. Village-based and collective arrangements for survival became redundant and were replaced with private family control over land and labour. Most common land and land used by pastoral peoples in India was privatized by 1900. This destroyed former subsistence resources for a wide range of land users, including labourers and pastoralists. The number of peasants who earned a living by farming tiny holdings that were too small to support a family or by working for others for a wage increased very rapidly. This social transformation changed the arena of social conflict from the village to the state, where new rural movements campaigned for recognition and improvements in group status and entitlements. These movements became involved in regional social conflicts that predated various forms of nationalism.

The intensification of rice production in East and Southeast Asia was sustained by the predominance of family smallholdings and a general expansion of the rural economy. The redistributive aspects of Asian rice economies kept the social and economic differences in village society low. Although there were considerable gaps between the highest and lowest income groups, and commercialization increased the number of landless people, large farmer units

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remained scarce. Since in these regions the basic unit of production remained the peasant family farm, land reforms had positive effects. They reduced tenancy to very low levels, increased peasants' incomes, and encouraged saving and reinvesting in agriculture as well as the diversification of agricultural production. Unlike many other farming systems, wet-rice cultivation was not subject to economies of scale. The labour-intensive rice cultivation guaranteed direct access to land and direct control of production, whether as owners or tenants, to a large majority of peasants. In Tokugawa Japan, village land was customarily managed and farmed by local households. Land remained subordinated to the authority of administratively autonomous village communities. Although the Meiji reforms in the 1870s broke up this system, Japan remained a country of small peasant farms. The basic unit of production remained the individual household, responsible for the management of its landholding and supplementing its income by earnings from cottage industries such as weaving of silk or cotton. The rapid expansion of textile and other commodity production was based on the increased participation of peasant families in manufacturing on a household scale. Labour surpluses within the peasant society supported highly developed putting-out systems and commercial manufacturing. The Meiji state's policies on landed property and taxation subjected peasants to new market forces, gradually making the agrarian society more commercial. Market expansion of the rural economy absorbed more labour in the multifunctional household for the production of agricultural and non-agricultural goods and improved the social and legal status of the peasantries. The gradual improvement of tenant status continued in Japan through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This path of change was based on a process of profound peasantization and small-scale cultivation, dividing household labour over agricultural and non-agricultural production.

Colonial regimes in East and Southeast Asia protected peasant rights in order to draw them into export-oriented production. The Japanese colonial state forced Taiwanese peasants into export-oriented rice and sugarcane production, controlled by Japanese food processors and trading companies. These politics entailed a combination of incentives and coercion, allowing Taiwanese peasants to maintain a degree of independence. The model of state-guided expansion was exported to Korea and Manchuria. In the Malay States, the British introduced a system of land registration that protected peasant rights. As the Malayan population grew and the supply of new arable land diminished and tenancy rates increased, relations between landlords and tenants remained more redistributive than exploitative. The Dutch government in the East Indies introduced a system of land registration that gave peasants legal possession of the land they cultivated. This made them registered taxpayers and land became a commodity that could be freely bought, pawned, or sold. Although certain forms of tenancy and wage labour expanded, most peasants kept hereditary production rights. Even in regions like Java, where export crops like sugar and coffee were grown on capitalist plantations alongside rice fields, large consolidated farms using cheap wage labour remained exceptions. In rice-growing regions, where the population was extremely dense, landlessness became an increasingly severe problem from the end of the nineteenth century. Despite steady and long-term

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growth in landlessness, Java remained a striking example of smallholder farming in rice agriculture. In Siam and the Philippines, peasant farming co-existed with capitalist exploitation. The Spanish government transferred large grants of land to religious foundations and wealthy entrepreneurs. The haciendas that produced export crops were run with hired labour, while farms that grew rice were operated either through peasant leaseholds or through a system of sharecropping.

The remaking of peasantries included the transformation of class, family, and gender relations. Starting in the nineteenth century, states fixed peasant families, reinforced gender roles, and consolidated peasant populations. Frontier expansion was often followed by state-led enclosure movements, aiming at integrating, mapping, codifying, and commodifying humans, land, and resources. It involved the fixation of patriarchal relations and the reduction of communal organizations. Both in coercive peasant and plantation regimes, labour relations became more hierarchical along class and gender lines. Women became increasingly and often solely responsible for subsistence activities, in combination with labour tasks on commercial fields, and reproductive labour within the households. Colonial regimes, including missionaries and concessionary companies, privileged male chiefs and heads of households, and paid them higher cash earnings. The exploitation of women and children allowed the peasants to hang on to their subsistence plots. Although most the time their involvement in agricultural work was invisible in government statistics, women and children were vital to peasant families' reproduction all over the world.[22]

At the same time, unpaid and underpaid work, mostly female, was the bedrock of capitalist agriculture expansion. This included household labour and low-cost labour in commercial agriculture such as coffee plantations. Since the plantation production was often connected to existing food crop cycles, the gendered labour division could be reproduced and reinforced.[23] Although very often invisible in colonial statistics, women's labour also became vital in the colonial coffee economy, combining plantation labour with producing food and selling surpluses on local markets. The introduction of a cash economy tightened social and gender relations, and put a greater pressure on subsistence and local commercial activities.

Plantation agriculture developed within clear geographical and social boundaries, in combination with a strict hierarchy in labour relations. Patronage and patriarchy were reinforced at all levels of production, as in the case of coffee plantations in different world regions shows.[24] In general,

[22] Bosma, *The making of a periphery*, p. 142; Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and accumulation on a world scale: women in the international division of labour* (London, 1986).

[23] Sven Van Melkebeke, 'Divergence in rural development: the curious case of coffee production in the Lake Kivu region (first half twentieth century)', *African Economic History*, 46 (2018), pp. 117–46, at p. 134; Patrick Mbataru, 'Women in the coffee society: the case of Nyeri, Kenya', *Études Rurales*, 180 (2007), pp. 101–16.

[24] Rachel Kurian, 'Labour, race, and gender on the coffee plantations in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), 1834–1880', in William Gervase, Clarence-Smith, and Steven Topik, eds., *The global coffee economy in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, 1500–1989* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 181–2.

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the position of women deteriorated due to discriminatory and patriarchal attitudes inside and outside the plantation. Unpaid family labour subsidized capitalist production, but also became the locus of a double subordination. First, agricultural labour regimes became characterized by a strict differentiation and hierarchy, based on colour, race, ethnicity, and gender. Second, rules of subordination were reproduced within peasant families. Women as workers and as family members were under the command of men at every level.[25] Class ideology and class power was reproduced within families, resulting in a loss of freedom for women within their communities. New peasant labour systems, especially in colonial settings, were based on extreme exploitation of family labour and the forging of more hierarchical and gendered authority structures. Even with the redefinition of the family members' roles in more individual terms, they had to pool their paid and unpaid resources to survive.[26]

V

In conclusion, the global enclosure after 1870 revolutionized the countryside and created a global peasantry through a variety of regional paths of change, resistance, and adaptation. By the first half of the twentieth century, peasant households all over the world had become heavily involved in the capitalist market economy. Peasantization went hand in hand with commodification, requiring the peasants to supplement subsistence production with forms of cash income. This included producing and selling export crops, selling labour for wages in plantations and mines and to other peasant farmers in the export sector, and selling food crops at local and regional markets. This global wave of peasantization was fuelled by a double frontier expansion. First, mass migration to the settler and tropical economies ensured that export-oriented commercial agriculture and mining activities had unceasing access to abundant and cheap supplies of mainly rural labour. The exploitation of new labour frontiers ensured the growth of global export economies, making them more dependent on exporting a small number of primary-product commodities for global markets. Second, cropland expansion in settler and tropical economies absorbed the remaining fertile lands and indigenous populations. The frontier lands became a major outlet for the rural poor, while land policies restricted access to good-quality land in much of these peripheries.

Within the imperialist context of the first global food regime, peasantries developed new capacities for collective actions that influenced and constrained the policies of state and business powers. Exemplary are the rural rebellions in southern and Eastern Europe at the end of the nineteenth century, regions dominated by large latifundia estates. Most strategies of resistance aimed to lessen full-blown market dependency and to preserve niches for independent and subsistence agriculture. In this movement of global enclosure, peasant protest seldom gave rise to large social movements. In colonial states,

[25] Ibid., p. 185.

[26] Verena Stolcke, 'Coffee planters, workers and wives: class conflict and gender relations on São Paulo plantations, 1850–1980' (New York, NY, 1988), pp. 231, 239.

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peasantries managed to survive thanks to partial autonomy from the colonial state and capitalist businessmen. State power was mediated through local political institutions, and peasants generally retained their own language, historical memories, and forms of expressive culture. Besides major revolutions like the Mexican one in the early twentieth century, peasant protests mostly remained local, small-scale, and grassroots, and they mainly concentrated on preserving the contested spaces of physical and discursive autonomy. That is why peasant responses to increasing external stress were multiple, ambiguous, and even contradictory. They reveal, in all their complexity, that peasants were social and political actors making their own history. The best but also most dramatic example is probably the massive wave of peasant resistance after Stalin's collectivization in the 1930s. Peasant protest was instant, widespread, but also dispersed and often covert. The techniques they employed were usually small scale and hidden, including so-called everyday forms of resistance. Peasants switched to active and open resistance only in times of great crisis, as during the early months of collectivization when the Soviet Union encountered a real wave of violent resistance.

In the movement towards a worldwide enclosure of the rural worlds after 1870, a global peasantry emerged through a wide range of regional trajectories and narratives. This social transformation of the world's countryside can only be understood within its complex of regional narratives, spatial inequalities, and global entanglements. In this article we have argued that this social class formation should be understood in its specific world-historical co-ordinates using a particular set of transhistorical concepts, (re)peasantization, peasant frontiers, and peasant regimes. We have learned that developments that have often been regarded as constituent to the long-term process of the decline of agriculture and peasant worlds were in fact part of the spread of more diversified labour and income strategies of the peasantries. Due to intensifying economic and social uprooting in the twentieth century, for an important portion of the world's population these survival strategies have become more important than ever. These intensified multilevel strategies of survival, autonomy, and resistance are redefining contemporary peasant strategies. This approach has unlocked and revived the classic peasant question, which has been raised to query the role and fate of peasantries within the process of capitalist transition.[27] In a world-historical context, this socio-economic peasant question (peasantry as a class) has become complexly entangled with the sociocultural indigenous question (indigenousness as a cultural identity). The labels peasant and indigenous increasingly refer to a set of claims that coincide or overlap with various other identities (gender, class, race, language; local, national, and global). Peasant, subaltern, and indigenous identities have become overlapping categories of peripherality and exclusion, and have created new subjectivities, social conflicts, and forms of consciousness.[28] As part of a global

[27] William Roseberry, 'Beyond the agrarian question in Latin America', in Cooper et al., eds., *Confronting historical paradigms*, pp. 321–3.

[28] Eduardo Devés-Valdés, 'The world from Latin America and the peripheries', in D. Northrop, ed., *A companion to world history* (Chichester, 2012), pp. 466–74; James V. Fenelon and Thomas

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positioning, local, community, and gender identities are reinforced, and sometimes reinvented as a basic framework of a renewed peasant consciousness. All over the world, communal battles related to the peasant, subaltern, and indigenous claims to land, territory, and resources have been a central instigator in this process. For peasantries, land continues to be the main basis of identification, negotiation, and interaction with other groups and sectors of society. The communal level remains a central space for self-determination, dialogue, and resistance, and increasingly serves as the crucial gateway to interact with incorporative and global systems.

D. Hall, *Indigenous peoples and globalization* (Boulder, CO, 2009); Walter D. Mignolo, *The darker side of Western modernity: global futures, decolonial options* (Durham, NC, 2011); María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, *Indian given: racial geographies across Mexico and the United States* (Durham, NC, 2016).

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