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Agribusiness, peasants, left-wing governments, and the state in Latin America: An overview and theoretical reflections

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Abstract

This paper provides an introduction to this special issue by presenting a general picture of the economic and political situation of the Latin American countryside at the dawn of this millennium, when a wave of left-wing parties and leaders assumed power in several countries of the region. We argue that after more than a decade in power, few of the promises to reform the agrarian sector in favour of peasant and family producers were fulfilled. This situation constitutes a paradox, because these governments came to power partly on the back of a wave of social mobilization in which peasant and indigenous movements had been key actors. However, rural social movements were incapable of pressuring the state to change this situation. At the heart of this paradox lies a contradiction, which is that in their political proposals rural social movements called for an interventionist state, but they did not have the ability to control it through their alliance with political parties and politicians. This introduction offers a theoretical framework to better comprehend the struggles of the peasantry and the rentier nature of the state in Latin America, in order to contribute to the discussion on agrarian class reconfiguration under neoliberalism.

KEYWORDS

ground rent, left-wing governments, peasant autonomy, politically constituted property, rentier state

1 | INTRODUCTION

Left-wing parties or politicians supported by rural or indigenous movements have been elected to government in Venezuela (1998), Brazil (2003), Argentina (2003), Uruguay (2004), Bolivia (2005), Ecuador (2006), Nicaragua (2006), Paraguay (2008), and El Salvador (2009). In many of these cases, they were re-elected several times before seeing an electoral backlash or being brought down by conservative forces, as happened to President Fernando Lugo in Paraguay in June 2012 and President Dilma Rousseff in Brazil in August 2016. This is a phenomenon that

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has no parallel in any other regions of the developing world. The peasant movements in most of these countries have been active members of *La Vía Campesina* and have been crucial in the development of its ideology, policy alternative, and organizational form and strategy (Borras, 2008; Desmarais, 2007; Martínez-Torres & Rosset, 2010). What the national peasant movements have achieved in each of these countries is thus certainly of interest to many activists and scholars of agrarian studies in and outside the region. In most cases, enough time has passed to allow for a serious assessment of the agrarian policies that these states have implemented and how the movements have reacted. Several excellent national studies have already been published, some of which are mentioned in this paper and others in the country studies of the contributors to this special issue of the *Journal of Agrarian Change* (*JAC*). However, there has not been, until this issue, a systematic attempt to comparatively assess the achievements, limitations, and contradictions of the agrarian and agricultural policies of the left-wing governments.[1]

In several Latin American countries, peasant movements have been at the forefront of resistance to neoliberalism (Deere & Royce, 2009; Petras & Veltmeyer, 2003; Vergara-Camus, 2009, 2013). They have been important allies of left-wing parties, helping them politically and electorally. In Brazil, the Landless Rural Workers Movement (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra*, MST) has had a long-standing alliance with the Workers Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*, PT). In Bolivia, the *Cocalero* (coca growers) movement was led by Evo Morales and was one of the founders of the *Movimiento al Socialismo* (Movement for Socialism, MAS), and many other indigenous movements, social movements, and labour unions also supported and participated within the MAS. In Ecuador, the indigenous movement through several of its organizations, notably the *Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas de Ecuador* (National Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities, CONAIE) and the *Federación Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinas, Indígenas y Negras*, (National Federation of Peasants, Indigenous and Black Organizations, FENOCIN), was instrumental in Rafael Correa's successful electoral bid in 2005, although its members never joined his party, the *Alianza PAIS*. In both Bolivia and Ecuador, peasant and indigenous movements participated actively in the Constituent Assembly that adopted food sovereignty and *buen vivir* as guiding principles of state policies.[2] Finally, in Nicaragua, the *Sandinistas*' return to power was not accompanied by a mobilization of peasant and popular movement, but the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* (Sandinista Front of National Liberation, FSLN) continued to have strong ties with the leading movements representing peasants and family farmers.

Hence, for this special issue, we have decided to focus on countries where broadly defined left-wing parties or coalitions have been elected with the support of, or in alliance with, independent peasant movements, or in the aftermath of many years of popular movement mobilization. These left-wing parties or coalitions presented themselves with a clearly anti-neoliberal discourse, and offered to reverse some of the main neoliberal policies and implement policies in favour of popular classes. The cases that meet these criteria are those of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Uruguay, and Venezuela, with Paraguay representing a counter-case of a conservative coup. Chile was not considered to fall within these criteria, as the critique of neoliberalism or a class-based discourse did not form part of the core of the *Concertación* government platform.

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[1] There exists an abundant literature on the "left-turn" or "pink tide" in Latin America, which started in the late 1990s with the electoral victory of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela: see Barrett, Chávez, and Rodríguez-Garavito (2008), Cameron and Hershberg (2010), Castañeda and Morales (2008), Ellner (2014), Panizza (2009), Petras and Veltmeyer (2009), Sader (2011), Webber and Carr (2013), and Weyland, Madrid, and Hunter (2010), among others. However, hardly any of these books explore the agrarian issues to any significant extent. The only book that does this is an excellent book published in Spanish by Gascón and Montagut (2010).

[2] *buen vivir* (*sumak kawsay* in Quechua, *sumak qamaña* in Aymara, or "good living" in English) has emerged through the work of indigenous and non-indigenous scholars and is presented as a critique of the Western conception of development and as an alternative and indigenous way of conceiving well-being, human relations, and human relationships with nature (Acosta, 2013a). We are aware that these are disputed concepts and that their meaning may vary in particular contexts. These concepts will be discussed further on in this paper, as well as by some of the country studies in this special issue of *JAC*.

2 | AN APPARENT PARADOX: FROM MOBILIZATIONS TO PROPOSAL, FROM PROPOSAL TO RHETORIC

Most of these governing parties or coalitions have promised substantial reforms in agrarian policies, including redistributive land reform and support policies for small-scale producers, during their contest for power. However, it will be argued that most of them, if not all, have not significantly managed or even attempted to alter the model of rural development inherited from the process of neoliberal globalization. While rural poverty has declined, notably because of cash transfer payments by left-wing governments, inequality is still high, although in some instances it has declined slightly. All of these governments, to different extents, use food sovereignty, *buen vivir*, or other pro-peasant agendas in their public discourse, but not many of their most important policies are geared at building a new post-neoliberal model of rural development. Why has this been the case? What have the different responses of the peasantry been to this lack of change? In certain countries, notably Ecuador and Brazil, peasant movements have increasingly criticized and even entered into open conflict with these new governments and demanded policies more aligned with the original promises. Why have they not been able to pressure governments into implementing more radical policies? How can we explain this latest less successful and more difficult phase of struggle of peasant movements in Latin America?

The situation is not one of simple co-optation of the agenda of peasant and indigenous movements by unscrupulous politicians and governments. It is also not one of complete abandonment of peasant farmers and rural labourers by left-wing governments. Several policies and additional funding to help small-family producers have been put in place by most of these governments and a plethora of micro-projects reach into indigenous and peasant communities (for a comparative study of these policies, see our concluding paper of this special issue). Some policies attempt to link small-scale family producers with agribusiness through fiscal incentives and other indirect means, in the belief that there is room for both large capitalist farming and small-scale producers to prosper in the agricultural sector (Córdoba & Jansen, 2014). The question is thus more whether or not these policies are sufficient to improve the livelihood of peasant producers and rural workers, strengthen their organizational and political capacity, and implement the objectives of food sovereignty and *buen vivir*, thereby beginning to radically transform the current state of the countryside.

At the source of this apparent paradox lies a contradiction: while emerging from social movements, the achievements of food sovereignty and *buen vivir* require and depend on the intervention of the state (McKay, Nehring, & Walsh-Dilley, 2014). However, the developmental state was dismantled by neoliberalism with its minimalist conception of the state and its policy of decentralization, thereby establishing new frameworks for policy interaction with civil-society organizations. Therefore, the state needs to be reorganized once more if the objectives of food sovereignty and *buen vivir* are to be achieved (Clark, 2016). Even in the cases where the state has begun to regain some of its institutional capacities, its policies have not always been oriented towards fulfilling these objectives (Henderson, 2016), and have even taken familiar “assistencialist” or clientelist forms. Moreover, the social movements most closely aligned with these concepts have not been able to substantially influence the state. Exploring the reasons for this apparent lack of capacity of social movements and the unwillingness or incapacity of the state to take the required action is thus also an important question.

This contradiction requires both empirical and analytical explanation, through case study and comparisons of state policies, the relationship between peasant movements and the state, and between the state and the national and transnational dominant classes. However, it also requires a theoretical explanation, through a specific focus on the class configurations, the nature of the state, and its role within the economy, as well as its development strategy. Why have left-wing governments been unwilling or unable to challenge more radically the neoliberal order? Do the objectives of food sovereignty and *buen vivir* (or “21st century socialism”) really inspire the policies of these governments, or were they simply instrumentalized by the new regimes for electoral or legitimization purposes?

Empirically, the central focus of our enquiry is to assess *to what extent these governments have continued to support large-scale capitalist farming and agribusiness, and to what extent they have supported peasant agriculture and improved rural labour conditions*.

The starting point is an evaluation of the class reconfiguration that the neoliberal restructuring of the countryside has triggered in the different countries covered by the papers. Particular attention will be paid to analysing which type of large-scale farming and agribusiness has been benefiting from this restructuring, and how the different class fractions within the peasantries have been affected and have reacted to this restructuring. Building on this, the contributions to this *JAC* special issue analyse the policies of current left-wing governments by, among others, attempting to find out which policies, such as land distribution, subsidies, credits, and the creation of markets, have favoured particular economic and social groups in the rural sector. The papers also explore the ways in which peasant producers have been integrated and subordinated to the new agribusiness-led model or have been able to carve out a space for themselves within it. One objective is to determine if left-wing governments are in continuity or in rupture with previous governments.

The contributions to this *JAC* special issue directly address these central questions, while this introduction offers a theoretical framework to understand the historical significance of these changes from a critical agrarian political economy approach, which emphasizes the centrality of the state in agriculture. This introduction also provides an overview of the broad changes that neoliberalism and the rise of agribusiness have triggered since the 1990s, to understand what kind of countryside the left-wing governments inherited and were expected to radically transform to the benefit of the subaltern groups in the countryside and beyond.

3 | THE STATE, CAPITALIST DEVELOPMENT OF AGRICULTURE, AND CLASS FORMATION IN LATIN AMERICA

An exploration of why social movements were not able to influence left-wing governments to implement more radical policies in favour of small-scale producers and their continued support for agribusiness requires a theoretical class-based analysis of the state. In his recent contribution to the special issue on food sovereignty (FS) in *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, Henry Bernstein (2014, p. 1054) mentions that the state is “the elephant in the room” in the programmatic aspiration of FS. He is right, but the state is also the “elephant in the room” of the recent wave of agrarian studies. The recent literature on agrarian transitions and questions, land grabbing, green grabbing, and the rise of agribusiness have all highlighted the central role that the state plays in processes of agrarian change. However, very few studies have attempted to re-examine the ways in which we understand the state or have scrutinized the underlying assumptions about the nature of the state that agrarian scholars reproduce. Even fewer studies are dedicated to theorizing the current nature of the state within the countryside or in respect to agriculture. The recent contributions on the new agrarian question in the book edited by Akram-Lodhi and Kay (2009), from Byres to Bernstein, from Akram-Lodhi and Kay to McMichael, have not theorized the state, even though their analysis point to the state in many ways. A great deal of the scholarship reviewed on rural movements in Latin America has focused on state policies or the strategies of rural movements towards the state. However, very few scholars work explicitly with a particular conception of the state or refer to the theoretical discussions around state theory. Only a few scholars (Wolford, Borras, Hall, Scoones, & White, 2013) have attempted to theorize what is specific or peculiar about the form that the state takes in the countryside, or the role that it plays in social conflict over resources. Because of this centrality of the state, there seems to be a need to bring the state back in (once again), not only thematically but also through a theoretical discussions on the nature and role of the state in the ongoing process of neoliberal globalization of the countryside, or the possible emergence of alternative models of development. Thus, there is in our view an *important gap* in the literature on the agrarian question that this introduction seeks to begin to address.

Five approaches to the state can be identified in the different studies that focus on the state in the literature on agrarian studies and natural resources: a Neo-Weberian, a Schumpeterian, a Marxist, a Foucaultian, and an Eclectic approach. The *Neo-Weberian* perspective is the one in which the state is characterized as having relative autonomy and as being either developmental or predatory (Evans, 1995; Karl, 1997; Minns, 2001; Perraton, 2005). This view is taken, in a certain way, by those authors who identify the return of the state as one of the key features of the pink tide; for example, Grugel and Riggirozzi (2012), Enríquez and Newman (2016), and Clark (this issue). What determines the character of the state is the nature of its bureaucracy and the linkages between society (mainly capital, but also labour) and the state. The *Schumpeterian* perspective focuses on the source of revenue of the state to determine the character of the state. For this approach, resource-rich countries tend to produce rentier states and a rent-seeking behaviour throughout society, because instead of raising taxes (as a fiscal state does) from a class of innovative entrepreneurs, they depend mainly on natural resource rent that in turn dis-incentivizes entrepreneurship (Moore, 2004; Weyland, 2009). The *Marxist* approach draws on several theorists, notably from Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Gramsci, Poulantzas, and Miliband. In the recent literature, there is a return to Poulantzas' conceptualization of the state as the manager of the long-term interests of capital and his concept of the internationalization of the state, where transnational interests structurally permeate the state apparatus and determine state policies (Brand & Görg, 2008; Glassman, 1999; Poulantzas, 1978; Wissen, 2009). Gramsci's concept of the extended state, which includes political and civil society, has also been used by several theorists to analyse the ways in which different classes build and challenge the hegemonic neoliberal order (Vergara-Camus, 2014, ch. 5; see also Lapegna, this issue; Webber, this issue). The *Foucaultian* perspective falls back on Foucault's idea of governmentality (Foucault, 1982) in which state power works through the expansion of state-like mentalities among all social subjects that are involved with the state or policy-making (Escobar, 1995; Watts, 2004; Zibechi, 2010). Finally an *Eclectic* approach, which combines several of the insights from the others, has been proposed by Wolford et al. (2013), in which, following Jessop (1990, 2007), the state is conceptualized as a contradictory space of conflicts of interests where actors deploy their strategies at multiple levels. The strategies of the different actors combine a variety of tactics, such as locating themselves in strategic positions within the state, pressuring actors in these strategic positions across different scales, and using hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses to convince or force political authorities into taking certain decisions.

The purpose of this paper does not allow us to expand on the particular strengths, limitations, and contradictions of these different schools, but we want to point to one common dilemma that all these schools share. Within all of these perspectives, there is a tension between the need to produce a general theory of the state, that is applicable to capitalist development in general, or to the developing world, or more specifically to all rural settings, and the need to develop a methodology or a framework that is adaptable to the diversity of cases, processes, and the balance of classes forces. The first objective tends to privilege structural determinations for the sake of generalization, while the second objective tends to recognize a stronger agency on the part of different actors within the structure of the state and leaves room for contingent results. The challenge of this theoretical contribution of the *JAC* special issue will be to tackle this tension by developing a framework that is specific to the class nature and role of the state in the historical development of capitalist agriculture in Latin American countries at the dawn of the 21st century, *at the same time* as allowing us to understand this historical development as the result of class choices, strategies, and the balance of forces. We contend that categories such as politically constituted property, absolute private property, accumulation by dispossession, extended capital accumulation, and ground rent provide a coherent framework to explore the agrarian transformations triggered by neoliberal globalization, as well as the paradox and contradiction identified in this *JAC* special issue.

4 | THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN “POLITICALLY CONSTITUTED PROPERTY” AND “ABSOLUTE PRIVATE PROPERTY”, AND THE MARKET “AS AN OPPORTUNITY” AND “AS AN IMPERATIVE”

In his now famous chapter on the “so-called primitive accumulation” in Volume 1 of *Capital*, Karl Marx clearly identified the separation of the labourers from their means of production—that is, the expropriation of land from the peasants—as an essential moment of the emergence of capitalism (Marx, 1990, pp. 873–940). In this chapter, he examined a series of political measures and laws that allowed for the commoditization of land and forced market discipline upon capitalist tenant farmers first and labourers later in England. Through this examination, he wanted to underline the political and coercive nature of capitalism, which is institutionalized through a particular private property regime and specific forms of class interventions through the state. One of the consequences of the process of primitive accumulation is that by blocking and commodifying the access to land for peasants, it compels labourers to reproduce themselves through the market, by selling their labour power to the owners of the means of production. Drawing inspiration from the work of Karl Marx and Karl Polanyi, Ellen Wood reminds us that this expropriation sets off one of the fundamental specificities of capitalism: the formal separation of the economic from the political (Wood, 1995, ch. 1). This distinguishes capitalist society from previous ones in which economic and political power are fused and exploitation is often enforced through extra-economic means. Wood, referring to Robert Brenner (1985, p. 209), characterizes the form of property relations that corresponds to pre-capitalist societies as “politically constituted property”, because it is political power (or the control of the state) that gives access to property and the appropriation of surplus labour (Wood, 1999, pp. 49–50). In contrast, property owners in a capitalist society rely mainly on economic means to appropriate surplus labour and do not need direct political power to extract surplus value from labourers, making property of the means of production within capitalism an “absolute private property” (Akram-Lodhi & Kay, 2010, pp. 196–198; Wood, 1995, pp. 29–31, 37–39). However, this commodification of land, which means that the main way of getting access to land is through purchase, also may have consequences for capitalist producers, because some of these property owners may require capital to buy or rent land. This process of commodification of land can submit capitalist producers to the disciple of debt and generate a need to increase income to repay their loans, a process that their political power may have little ability to mitigate and, if they rent their land, that sets capitalist producers apart from landowners. Marx thought that this relationship between capital and landed property was the typical capitalist relationship, and he developed his theory of ground rent in Volume 3 of *Capital* on this model (more on this below).

However, other Marxists pointed very early on to the fact that this complete separation of peasants from their means of production was not always the main form that capitalism took in the countryside. Some authors have tackled this issue through the idea of different paths to capitalist agriculture (Akram-Lodhi & Kay, 2010; Byres, 1996). In some regions of the world—as in Prussia, for instance—traditional landlords transformed themselves into capitalist farmers and began forcing peasant families under their subordination off the land and/or into wage work. In other regions—as in the United States, for instance—family-owned farms remained the majority and combined different types of exchange relations with other rural actors, such as wage labour, sharecropping, and independent and simply commodity production—but all under a capitalist logic. Byres (1996) refers to the former transition to agrarian capitalism as “capitalism from above” and to the latter as “capitalism from below”.

What happened very often in most regions of the developing world was that in one single social formation, all of these forms of production coexisted side by side and/or intertwined with non-capitalist forms for several decades and longer. As many scholars have highlighted, Latin American countries have historically been characterized by a great diversity of forms of production since at least the 19th century until well into the first half of the 20th century, and thus fall into this last category. Nevertheless, capitalist social relations generalized much more rapidly in countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay, where the indigenous population was more easily displaced or decimated and private property of land successfully imposed by the ruling elites (Kay, 1974, 1980). But even in these cases, and despite their subordination to landlords, peasant producers—especially when peasants had direct access to *non-commodified land*—exemplified a form of production in which the labourer still had control over his or her labour power, as well as, to some extent, over the degree and form of integration into the market.

Completely autonomous peasant communities are now the minority in Latin America. However, peasant producers today—those who depend on the market for the fulfilment of a substantial amount of their subsistence needs as well as those who are market dependent because the bulk of their production is sold on the market—still have more room for manoeuvre than producers under fully capitalist conditions, because they can adjust production or consumption in accordance to circumstances (Bartra, 2006; Vergara-Camus, 2014, ch. 4). However, in order to evaluate the degree of autonomy that different types of direct producers have, Wood proposes a distinction between “different types of market dependence” associated with different forms of market compulsion. Some producers would be subjected to the "market as an opportunity" that "derives simply from a need to obtain subsistence goods by means of exchange", while others are subjected to the "market as an imperative", which means that they are *obliged* to generate a profit in order to reproduce themselves (Wood, 2002, p. 66). The major distinction is that the former (typically the peasant) is submitted to the need to sell, while the latter (typically the capitalist farmer) is obliged to "attain an average rate of profit in order to survive, irrespective of [his/her] own consumption needs" (ibid., p. 64). Following this distinction, peasant households with access to land thus have the ability to withdraw from the market and take advantage of the use value of land and its products (Wood, 2009). This said, when the land that peasants control is insufficient to meet the needs of the family unit, and the household thus has to go through the market to satisfy its needs, monetization can erode the alternatives open to peasant families. Both situations lead to the commodification of peasant agriculture and accelerate the effects of their particular form of market dependence.

This can also lead to peasant class differentiation, in which a strata of the peasantry (or peasant community) takes advantage of those who find themselves in difficult circumstances. These "rich peasants" may hence accumulate land from poorer peasants and hire them as wage workers or subordinate them under other forms. This is what has been happening in most of Latin America over the decades, but especially since the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s, which liberalized the land markets.[3] However, peasant differentiation on its own, understood as a quasi-natural and internal process in any type of peasant community, cannot explain the rise of capitalist social relations. These do not simply emerge or develop out of the accumulation of wealth of certain families or groups within peasant communities, or from increased commercialization. Substantial peasant class differentiation will only really develop when the market becomes an imperative and land is commodified and inserted into the circuit of capital. When poor peasants feel demographic pressure on their land and begin to experience the market as an alienating imperative, and class differentiation develops in parallel, peasants tackle this situation individually by seeking wage work or by relying on the support of their kinship network. However, often several fractions of the peasantry seek a political solution to their economic problems by trying to re-create communal institutions or by creating social movements (Vergara-Camus, 2009). In other words, in some cases some of the marginalized sectors of the peasantry (poor peasants, landless rural workers) seek to politically re-create peasant autonomy by challenging the formal separation of the economic and the political. We believe that this second option was taken in the 1990s in Brazil, Bolivia, and Ecuador, and to a lesser extent in Argentina and Paraguay, while the first more individualistic option dominated in Nicaragua, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

4.1 | The separation of the economic and the political, accumulation by dispossession, and expanded capital accumulation

As the formal separation of the economic and the political is constantly being challenged by labouring classes, the state is often required to step in to mediate the conflict between capitalist and labourers, but always without jeopardizing bourgeois property rights (Clarke, 1990, p. 45). This separation is also not set in stone for the dominant classes either, as they may use a specific conjuncture that seems in their favour to reorganize this formal separation of what is of the realm of the political (public property) and that of the economic (private property or the market). David Harvey (2003), working from, but also expanding, Marx's concept of primitive accumulation, has coined the term "accumulation by dispossession" to point to these types of situations. For him, neoliberalism involves mechanisms and processes that are very similar to those covered by Marx's concept of so-called primitive accumulation, as the problem of over-accumulation of capital finds its resolution in an expansion or a takeover by capital of previously public-sector services (health, education, pensions) and enterprises through their privatization below their value, as well the enclosure, appropriation, biopiracy, or depletion of the environmental commons such as forests, water, and other natural resources. Harvey prefers to use the term "accumulation by dispossession" because he considers that primitive accumulation refers to the "prehistory" of capitalism, while these new processes of privatization of the common are happening at the heart of advanced capitalist countries. Harvey, however, recognizes that processes of primitive accumulation are also occurring in the global South, but believes that politically there is something to be gained by also placing these processes under the umbrella of the concept of accumulation by dispossession (Harvey, 2006, p. 158).

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[3] With the neoliberal turn several governments introduced land titling programmes, with support from the World Bank and other international agencies, as part of their policy to strengthen property rights and encourage the development of land markets. For their implications on the peasantry from a gender perspective, see Deere and León (2001).

Harvey's analysis of neoliberalism has been criticized by several Marxist scholars.[4] One of the critiques has been that neoliberalism is not simply about accumulation by dispossession. Many new investments and transformations fall under what is typical of expanded reproduction of capital. Processes of "accumulation by dispossession" have been occurring in Latin America at least for the past two centuries and, as several contributions to this *JAC* special issue show, are still ongoing in several regions of Latin America (Cáceres, 2015). However, recent transformations in the countryside, typical of the uneven and combined development of capitalism, suggest that in certain regions and sectors—mainly agribusiness-dominated ones, such as soybeans, livestock, fresh fruits and vegetables, wine and spirits, and cut flowers—we are also witnessing strategies geared at the expanded reproduction of capital (Baraibar, 2014). These changes are having a transforming impact on the forms and relations of production and reproduction of all rural subjects. Most of the contributions to this special issue suggest that strategies typical of primitive accumulation or accumulation by dispossession and strategies typical of expanded capital accumulation coexist and are intertwined with each other.

Apart from Harvey, many other authors have pointed to the fact that the current neoliberal globalization represents another phase in the expansion of the logic of capital to all spheres of life and to human needs that were previously not commoditized, which to a great extent depend on who has access to land (Araghi, 2009; Smith, 2006). Within this movement, property relations play a crucial role. The agenda pushed by business sectors and supported by states since the early 1990s was to pass from national regimes of private property rights, limited by a series of social and political prerogatives, to homogeneous regimes (or even a global regime through trade agreements) of absolute private property rights with little or no restrictions. Obviously, absolute private property rights on land represent a crucial element in this expansion of the logic of capital, for it is the physical basis for any type of natural resource exploitation. Hence, neoliberal globalization should not only be seen as characterized by accumulation by dispossession, but can also be seen as a new attempt to push the formal separation of the economic from the political even further, triggering a variety of strategies on the part of different actors that attempt to benefit from this restructuring. However, since the mid-2000s the peculiar trend, exemplified in the extremely diverse strategies of investors in regard to landownership, has been that private property is not necessarily the preferred form of control over land by capital. In many circumstances, capitalist investors prefer to lease or rent land from private landlords or states instead of privately owning it, as can be witnessed particularly in the soy cultivation areas of Argentina, Uruguay, and Bolivia: see the various papers on these countries in this *JAC* special issue. Determining what the consequences of these strategies are for the livelihoods of peasant producers is of crucial importance.

5 | MARX'S CATEGORY OF GROUND RENT, SURPLUS APPROPRIATION, AND CAPITALIST AGRICULTURE

In chapter 26 of Volume 1 of *Capital*, Marx (1990) observed that the transformation of the countryside in England had unleashed processes that permitted the development of capitalism. In agriculture, the development of capitalism would eventually completely subordinate (or subsume) land to capital—or, better said, the landed class to capitalists (tenant farmers). However, this process is not an automatic or linear one, as landlords hold significant power independent of capital. It depends on the changing balance of forces between landlords and capitalists. In his unfinished

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[4] See the special issue on Harvey's "New Imperialism" in *Historical Materialism*, *14*(4), 2006.

Volume 3 of *Capital*, Marx (1991) spent an important amount of time thinking through what made agriculture different from other productive sectors, and how it was the concept of ground rent and not only profit or interest that allowed us to get a better understanding of the specifics of the appropriate of surplus value in agriculture. The links existing between landownership and the various forms of capital are central to Marx's quest. In this section, Marx shows the contradictory role of ground rent and landed property within the capitalist mode of production and the class contradictions that it generates between capitalists and landowners, who—because of the simple fact of owning land—can charge a levy (rent) on capitalist farmers.

Marx distinguished between three forms of ground rent: *differential rent 1*, which is determined on the basis of the natural fertility and quality of the actual piece of land; *differential rent 2*, which adds to these qualities the capital investment on the land; and *absolute ground rent*, which pertains to the landlords simply because of the fact of having a monopoly over access to land. Of course, these types of rents make a difference in terms of the amount of rent a landlord can demand for the use of his property. However, the two common and most important characteristics of all these forms of ground rent are that they represent a cost, or even sometimes an impediment, for capital accumulation, and that they ultimately stand on a politically enforced monopoly: private ownership of land. Rent should thus not be considered as profit or interest, as if they accrue to capital. They are the income of landed property. Landed property should thus not simply be associated with capital, though it draws income from capital.

Moving beyond the control of land as the singular principle way of understanding rent while building on the idea of absolute ground rent, it is possible to extend the concept of rent and rent extraction to sectors of the economy that benefit from a politically granted monopoly. For instance, the revenues received by transnational seeds companies such as Monsanto through the enforcement of intellectual property rights by nation states (Filomeno, 2014) should be considered a form of absolute rent (see below). The same can apply to the agrofuel sector, inasmuch as the blending mandate and often the price of agrofuels are established by the state, and the industry is heavily dependent on state subsidies and credits (Vergara-Camus, 2015).

Marx's model of landed property being able to extract rent from capitalists is again drawn from capitalist farming in England, where medium-sized and large tenant farmers rented land from traditional landlords (Brenner, 1985), but the category of ground rent does not need to be understood as one that follows the same path and triggers the same dynamics between classes as they did in England. In Latin America, for instance, historically traditional landlords used to extract rent from peasants not in money but in kind, either in product or labour or a combination of both, through pre-capitalist social relations of subordination. Over the past century, some modernizing large landowners (*latifundistas*) began to gradually transform themselves into capitalist producers, with varying speed, extent, and intensity across the various countries, instead of remaining traditional landlords extracting a variety of rents from their tenant labourers, sharecroppers, and surrounding peasant farmers. However, as the contributions to this *JAC* special issue show, new types of rental agreements are emerging: see especially the papers by Lapegna, Piñeiro and Cardeillac, and Marti i Puig and Baumeister. Rural classes adopt a diversity of strategies and some landlords, medium-size, and even small-scale producers or indigenous peasant communities rent out part or all of their land to agribusiness, capitalist farmers, or a group of investors and specialized farm administrators who have the capital, technology, and partial command over the value chain and thus are able to achieve higher productivity and profitability than they could obtain by farming the land themselves (Baraibar, 2014). These rental arrangements tend to happen in soybean cultivation and in the exploitation of forest resources. There are, however, very few studies or data that can give us a clear idea of the magnitude of the phenomenon.

There are at least four advantages of using Marx's category of ground rent for the analysis of agrarian issues. First, it has the advantage of pointing to different ways of accumulating and controlling wealth that, as Fernando Coronil noted, open up the analysis to a variety of actors that the dialectic labour/capital sometimes underestimates. It also highlights the importance of land for accumulation of wealth and power, as well as the creation of value in underdeveloped countries. For Coronil (1997), adding the category of rent to the conventional dialectic labour/capital that sees wages and interests as the main sources of income can represent an alternative to the labour theory of value. It recovers Marx's identification of the three sources of wealth under the capitalist mode of production (the trinity formula), which should be the basis of a *triadic dialectic* structured around capital, ground rent, and labour. The second advantage of the category of ground rent is that it allows us to bring together dynamics that are common to agriculture and extractive industries, such as mining, oil, and gas, because they all require the negotiation of access to the resource with the owners of the land where it is located. The third advantage for using the category of ground rent is that it allows us to examine the contradictory class role of the state in the process of surplus accumulation and appropriation. Indeed, the state is ultimately the guarantor of property relations, but also often plays the role of a landlord for natural resources and is thus able to charge ground rent to capitalists. Finally, the fourth advantage of using the category is that it brings out the political dimension of the process of accumulation and appropriation of wealth and capital, which necessarily needs to include the way in which actors represent themselves and the world around them, and build discourses and projects to further their interests and justify their actions.

A few studies on the political economy of Latin America have been using the concept of rent to explain the emergence and achievements of these regimes. Weyland (2009), for instance, following a Schumpeterian understanding of rent, argues that the rise of the new left in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela coincides not with the failure of neoliberalism but with the discovery or reappearance of large natural resource rents. He argues, concomitantly, that because they depend on rent for their revenues instead of taxes, these states are less responsive to their society and stand on weak grounds for long-term growth. Purcell's (2013 and this issue) work on the agricultural policies of the Bolivarian regime in Venezuela build on a Marxian understanding of ground rent to explain the contradictions that plagued the attempts of building a new agriculture on a rentier capitalist economy that suffers from a chronic over-evaluation of its currency. Grinberg (2010), also using a Marxian understanding of ground rent, offers a classification of Latin America in relation to the regime of accumulation that the various countries have adopted. According to him, South America would have adopted a regime of accumulation mainly centred on the appropriation of ground rent, while Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean would have privileged the extraction of absolute surplus value, particularly super-exploitation of labour. Although his classification captures interesting features of the recent trajectories of certain countries, to propose to organize the immense diversity of forms of accumulation and strategies of surplus appropriation under a single logic seems to be over-simplistic. For us, Grinberg underestimates the dynamism of the agricultural sector that, as the contributions to this *JAC* special issue show, combine in very complex ways strategies of typical of "accumulation by dispossession" with strategies typical of expanded capital accumulation, as well as with rentier strategies.

The starting point of the perspective on the state that we offer in this paper builds on the conflictive separation of the economic from the political, which tends to be more fluid in societies where rent plays an important role. This is self-evident in cases where the state extracts ground rent in exchange for exploitation rights of natural resources. However, this is also true because the importance of capturing rents places the state at the centre of the process of accumulation and shapes the strategies of the different actors. Politically constituted property or gaining access to state positions or officials are still major forms of appropriating surplus value in Latin America. The state should thus also be seen as a space for accumulation of wealth, as private actors attempt to gain access to the rent that accrues to the state, or to gain access to the officials that take political decisions with economic consequences.

This perspective allows for a different conception of the state that goes beyond, first, the generalized assumption that the state in peripheral nations is an incomplete or a truncated version of the capitalist state; second, the Marxist debate around the relative autonomy of the state, where the state plays the role of the general capitalist; and third, the Neo-Weberian perspective that gives it a great deal of autonomy from society, and focuses on the nature of the bureaucracy. From our perspective, the state through its concrete policies can sometimes act autonomously, because it controls certain sectors of the circuit of value production—that is, rent or productive activities—and at other times acts as a subordinated institution; that is, subordinated to national and international actors. In any of these circumstances, state discourse acquires a peculiar importance because it reveals how state officials attempt to shape reality. State discourse is not simply a superstructural reflection of the structural development of the mode of production, but should be understood as a fundamental device necessary for the state to exercise power through policies and programmes, which in turn allows the construction of this discourse. In this way, just as Wolford et al.

(2013) do, we understand the state as a contradictory space around which different class forces confront each other and deploy their strategies.

For the analysis of left-wing governments, an understanding of the Latin American state as a rentier state allows us to examine state policies as the result of class struggles through and within the state, by looking at how state officials allocate resources and how different classes try to occupy the state and seek concessions from the state.

6 | AN OVERVIEW OF THE MAIN TRENDS IN THE LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRYSIDE

Before the neoliberal turn, Latin America's agrarian class structure was dominated by a powerful landlord class, which had its origin in the colonial period and established the *latifundia–minifundia* agrarian structure. Depending on the country, this class had different degrees of involvement with the export sector and different levels of influence and power over other rural classes (capitalist farmers, tenants, peasants, rural proletarians, and indigenous communities) and over national politics. In many countries between the 1960s and the 1980s, the landed classes were one of the main targets of revolutionary and reformist movements that reformed land tenure systems and limited private property in land (Kay, 1998). Bolivia had a significant agrarian reform in the highlands in the 1950s, but allowed the emergence of large landed estates in the lowlands (Bottazzi & Rist, 2012; Urioste & Kay, 2008). Ecuador had mild agrarian reforms in the 1960s and 1970s (Bretón Solo De Zaldívar, 2008). The revolution of 1979 in Nicaragua produced a radical agrarian reform in the 1980s that saw some reversal in the 1990s, but that still allows peasants to control an important proportion of the agricultural land: see Martí i Puig and Baumeister in this issue of *JAC*. In Brazil, the "conservative modernization of agriculture" restructured the countryside along capitalist lines and expelled millions of peasant families, but in the past two decades, in response to movements from below, the Brazilian state has distributed a substantive amount land, more than any time in its previous history. Land distribution is still, however, insufficient to affect the unequal distribution of land considering the size of the country and as a new round of expansion of large properties has taken place. Since Dilma Rousseff became president in 2010, land distribution has largely stalled (Sauer & Mészáros, this issue; see also our concluding paper).

With the neoliberal turn during the 1980s and 1990s in Latin America, the export sector has gained even greater significance in the economy than during the previous period of import-substitution and related industrialization, which focused mainly on the domestic market. After a decade and a half of difficult restructuring, which included reforms to property rights over land, the liberalization of the economy and opening up towards the world market, the 2000s witnessed a new dynamism in the export sector based on the exploitation of the natural resources. This shift to exports of primary products (agriculture, forestry, fisheries and mining) is to a large extent due to the rising demand for raw materials from China, which has emerged as major player in the world market. The new export-led development process has been characterized as "neo-extractivist" (Burchardt & Dietz, 2014; Gudynas, 2009) and signalling a "re-primarization" of the economies of the region (Acosta, 2013b; Cypher, 2010). The growing worldwide demand for primary commodities has enhanced their profitability and thereby attracted more capital investment, both domestic and foreign. Moreover, capital from other economic sectors, such as mining, industry, commerce, and finance, has been investing in agricultural activities to a far greater extent than in the past and furthering agro-extractivism (Petras & Veltmeyer, 2014).

Although some scholars argue that Latin American countries have been re-embarking on the primary product export-oriented development trajectory set out in the late 19th century (Cypher, 2010), this new phase, however, differs from earlier phases in many ways. One of the new phenomena was the major restructuring of agricultural production towards non-traditional agricultural exports (soybean, cut flowers, berries, horticultural products), thereby endangering food security and leading to more precarious labour conditions as temporary labour employment, especially of female labourers, has become more widespread (Kay, 2015). Another important difference from earlier phases of development is that this restructuring process has involved a variety of actors and complex class alliances and configurations that vary greatly in each country, but in which large national capitalist farmers and national and transnational agribusiness have played a leading role. In addition to the traditional foreign investors, recent studies on land grabs in Latin America have highlighted the "Latinization" of capital investment (Borras, Kay, Gómez, & Wilkinson, 2012) to point to the growing dominance of Brazilian and Argentine agrarian capital in the region. This "*translatino*" capital is particularly important in countries bordering Argentina and Brazil, such as Bolivia, Paraguay, and Uruguay, where they have established a dominant position in soybean cultivation (see Piñeiro & Cardeillac, Webber, and Ezquerro-Cañete & Fogel, all in this issue).

Although peasant producers continued to play an important role in the production of food crops nationally, agriculture became more and more dominated by agribusiness and corporate capital. The old landlord class was swept away or transformed itself into capitalist producers. Tenant labour, which was the main source of labour on the *latifundia* and largely resident within the estate, was eliminated by mechanization and/or legal measures and gave way to fully proletarianized wage labour predominantly of a temporary kind and no longer resident within the *latifundia*—now better described as a large capitalist farm. The traditional and labour-intensive technologies of the past were replaced by labour-saving capital-intensive agro-industrial technologies. The use of fossil-fuel technology and chemical inputs has also had important negative environmental impacts, such as ground- and surface-water contamination, health problems of workers due to intensification of the labour process, as well as health problems for the local population due to aerial spraying (Otero & Lapegna, 2016).

These new processes of capital accumulation increased the concentration of land, but above all the concentration of the market and of capital. Meanwhile, only in Brazil were rural unions able to make some gains through collective bargaining (Selwyn, 2012). In most of the countries of the region, with the neoliberal turn in the 1980s and 1990s, rural labour was weakened with the disarticulation of trade unions through new labour legislation favourable to employers, the restructuring of labour relations, subcontracting, and the continuing outmigration of rural labour to the urban centres or to richer countries (Ortiz, Aparicio, & Tadeo, 2013). Peasant and family producers have become much more market-dependent, wage relations have become much more important for the reproduction of rural population, and the semi-proletarianization of smallholders is almost universal. Though they can sometimes retreat into subsistence, the market is becoming an imperative for survival. While being inserted into the national or global circuit of capital through commercialization of produce, the poorest strata of the peasantry (particularly, but not exclusively, in indigenous regions) continue to reproduce themselves through non-capitalist social relations, such as the holding of land under collective tenure, extensive use of unpaid family labour, and non-monetarized exchange. In general, these practices seem to be more often coping mechanisms in the face of marginalization and only rarely part of a conscious strategy to build autonomy from the market (Vergara-Camus, 2014) or actively constructing distantiation from the market (van der Ploeg, 2010). The lack of any significant land redistribution to land-poor peasants and landless rural workers in Latin America after 1970s (except in Nicaragua), the abolishment of state support to smallholders, and the growing demographic pressure inside peasant communities has eroded peasant autonomy but has also increased peasant differentiation. The peasant and indigenous resistance of the 1990s was indeed reacting to these changes and the combined demands for a new agrarian reform, renewed support for small-scale agriculture, and the ideological attack on agribusiness were a way of bringing together landless peasants, rural workers, and landed peasants.

This new class configuration supporting this neo-extractivism has resulted in the increasing commodification of nature, a new process of enclosures and land grabbing that some authors have characterized as akin to Marx's so-called primitive accumulation (Akram-Lodhi, 2007), as cases of "accumulation by dispossession" (Araghi, 2009; Harvey, 2003), and yet others view as signalling the passage from the formal to the real subsumption of labour/land/nature to capital (Moore, 2010; Smith, 2006). Although here there are also a great variety of strategies of wealth accumulation deployed in the extractive sectors, judging by the way in which private property rights over resources and territories are granted, it appears that we are witnessing the emergence of a new capitalist form of politically constituted private property, which sometimes grants the ability to extract rent. In Brazil since 2005, Monsanto's intellectual private (IP) property right over Roundup Ready Soybean seeds allows it to charge 1% royalties on the value of the soybeans sold to processing and trading companies, while in Paraguay, the same mechanism applies but the amount is subject to yearly negotiations (Ezquerro-Cañete, 2016; Filomeno, 2014, pp. 449, 453). As both the concession of rights to exploitation of natural resources and the legal framework for protecting and enforcing IP rights depend to a large extent on the state, how to get access to state officials or how to influence the policy-making process have become crucial questions for capital.

As far as the process of real subsumption of labour and land to capital in Latin America is concerned, it takes on different forms in different places, in part because of the property regime, and leads to different strategies of control of production. On the side of the more market-dependent agricultural producers (Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay), this is leading those who can afford it, or have access to credit, to adopt capital-intensive technologies and forms of production that increase land and labour productivity or improve or accelerate the feeding time of cattle (Lapegna, this issue; Piñeiro & Cardeillac, this issue). On the side of peasant producers, this has triggered another switch towards commercial activities, as soybean in South America or cattle ranching in Nicaragua, but still under extensive low-productivity models. It is difficult, however, to say whether this recent switch to commercial crops was experienced as “an imperative” or “an opportunity” by peasant producers, as this can depend partly on their level of indebtedness and the amount of land that they control. On the side of agribusiness, the strategies have varied greatly at the level of agricultural production per se, from purchase of land and direct involvement in production to a preference for renting or leasing land from capitalist landowners. In Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay, all countries in which the countryside has been capitalist for some time now, the price of land has become an important factor in the decision to buy or rent. The unmistakable general trend is, however, the growing concentration of the commodity chain in upstream activities, such as seeds and inputs, and downstream activities, such as processing, commercialization, and export. At both of these ends of the commodity chains, Archer Daniels Midland (ADM), Bunge, Cargill, Louis Dreyfus, and Monsanto take the lion’s share of the market (see our concluding paper in this *JAC* special issue). Some of the capital accumulation strategies in agriculture have thus involved dispossession by gaining control of public or communal property such as land and forests. But many other cases represent strategies that combine the extraction of absolute rent (such as royalties from seeds), differential rent (such as buying or renting fertile land), absolute surplus value (by intensifying or reorganizing the labour process, extending the working hours, and avoiding salary increases), relative surplus value (by increasing productivity through mechanization and chemical inputs), all these cases with the strong support or involvement of the nation state and transnational capital.

Indeed, the state was central in this movement towards the market-dependence of producers and real subsumption of labour and land to capital, because state policies were often at the origin of this rise of agribusiness. In Brazil during the dictatorship, for instance, it was a generous credit scheme in the late 1960s that increased production of grains and turned Brazil into a new powerful agricultural country (Sauer & Mészáros, this issue). In Bolivia during Hugo Banzer’s dictatorship (1971–1978) and subsequently, the state distributed land to large landowners in the Eastern Lowlands and turned the region into the most dynamic capitalist agricultural sector of the country (Webber, this issue). In most Latin American countries, agricultural ministries were often led by representatives of large landowners or agribusiness, or by people close to them. In this way, they were able to directly influence policies and extract concessions such as institutional reform promoting private property, subsidies and credits, fiscal incentives, and favourable environmental standards.

The onslaught of capital and the increasing commodification of nature spurned a series of counter-movements. In the past two decades, we have been witnessing the emergence of peasant and indigenous movements, ecological movements, anti-mining movements, and so on, which are resisting the forward march of capital and the signing and implementation of free trade agreements. In recent decades, we have also witnessed an increasing dispute between capital and labour over territory or a struggle for autonomy by indigenous peoples. Some of these movements, such as the *Zapatistas* and the MST, have been successful in protecting or gaining access to land and reinventing peasant communities (Vergara-Camus, 2014). Many other movements across the region, especially in Bolivia and Ecuador, have also been able to mobilize their membership against neoliberal governments and propose alternative development patterns such as increased self-reliance and autonomy, organic farming, agro-ecology, local markets, and food sovereignty, as well as for land reform (Brabazon & Webber, 2014). In Bolivia and Ecuador, rural movements were also part of a broad coalition of anti-neoliberal movements that brought down several governments in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The *Confederación Latinamericana de Organizaciones del Campo* (Latin American Confederation of Countryside Organizations, CLOC) and *La Vía Campesina* benefited greatly from the vitality of these rural movements.

All these trends, processes, and developments are the result of important class reconfigurations and the emergence of new class relations, which may or may not be interpreted in class terms by the different rural subjects. By taking a historical perspective on these transformations, some questions concerning class relations emerge. Who are the dominant actors and what kind of class configurations exist in the countryside today? What kind of class alliances existed at the top between national landed classes, agrarian bourgeoisies, and foreign capital until the 2000s, and how have they changed today? And, conversely, what kind of class alliances at the bottom allowed for the mobilization of peasant and indigenous peoples until the 2000s, and how did the attainment of power by the Left transform them?

6.1 | The four interrelated *problématiques* of this special issue

In order to undertake the assessment of the agrarian policies of left-wing governments, the papers of this *JAC* special issue survey four interrelated *problématiques*.

The first one revolves around **the relationship between peasant movements, political parties, and the state**. This is probably the most commented on and least theorized or seriously analysed topic of all. The commentaries generally explain the relationship by falling back on concepts such as co-optation, class treason, or governmentality. We contend that a serious analysis requires a detailed evaluation of the level of political autonomy that the movements have in respect to political parties and politicians, as well as the power and strategies that the different rural classes mobilize in their struggle to influence or occupy the state, and the consequences that these choices have on their ability to represent a counterweight to the current left-wing governments.

The second *problématique* relates to **the prospects for indigenous and peasants autonomy in the midst of the globalization of agriculture and the expansion of agribusiness**. During the struggles of the 1990s, the demands and discourse of the peasantries were about increasing their control over natural resources, notably land, and the territory in the case of indigenous movements, having access to funding, and for fairer and different forms of integration into the market.

The analysis of the prospect for peasant and indigenous autonomy links up with a third *problématique* that has to do with **the legacy of historical patterns of land distribution**, the institutional basis of the allocation of land and tenure systems for smallholders in the policies of the left-wing governments. Broadly speaking, these different legacies have conditioned whether a peasant sector was able to re-emerge and remain an important political player, but have also shaped the type of control that capital and agribusiness have over rural labour and agriculture (Vergara-Camus, 2014; see also Marti i Puig & Baumeister, this issue). For instance, agrarian reforms that modified property regimes in places such as Bolivia (1954), Ecuador (1964, 1973), and Nicaragua (1979) initially strengthened peasant producers and to a certain degree limited class differentiation, while the absence of agrarian reforms and the dominance of private property in land in places such as Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Venezuela had facilitated the expansion of medium-size and large-scale farming. The way in which each of these left-wing governments has tackled this legacy goes a long way towards explaining the degree of continuity and rupture with past governments.

Fourth, and finally, these different *problématiques* raise the broader question of **the prospects for the emergence of an alternative model of agricultural development**, through the adoption of food sovereignty and *buen vivir* as state policy, either rhetorically or in practice. In the case of Bolivia and Ecuador in particular, *buen vivir* and food sovereignty have been presented as a crucial contribution of indigenous peasant movements to framing the development model by way of incorporating them into their respective constitutions. Some critical studies are emerging on the topic, such as those by Gudynas (2009) and Acosta (2013a), but most have fallen into a paradigmatic and normative discussion of this contribution. Yet the question of whether the concepts of food sovereignty and *buen vivir* have formed the basis of an alternative agricultural model—or, more narrowly, of state programmes oriented at small-scale producers—needs to be seriously evaluated. Similarly, the assessment of whether these concept themselves can be the basis of an alternative model of agriculture or of future peasant and indigenous mobilization against these governments also requires critical scrutiny.

The exploration of these four *problématiques* begins with an paper by Carmen Diana Deere that examines the ways in which the left-wing governments of Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela translated the pressure from rural women's movements into policies of land titling to women. While some advances towards securing land rights for women have been achieved, in some countries more than in others, the task is far from being accomplished. It continues with a paper by Arturo Ezquerro-Cañete and Ramón Fogel that analyses the constitutional coup in Paraguay against President Fernando Lugo in 2012, instigated by the landlord class. This coup, although the result of the very specific process of class and state formation in Paraguay, could be seen as the prelude to the civil coup that President Dilma Rousseff would suffer in Brazil in 2016. The next paper is on Venezuela and is written by Tom R. Purcell. He critically analyses how the Venezuelan government poured a substantial amount of financial resources, redistributed land, created new state institutions, and mobilized state officials to build an agriculture based on peasant farming, but dramatically failed to overcome its historical legacy of rentier capitalism. Furthermore, some government economic policies triggered the practice of *Bachaqueo*, which undermined the valuable efforts of creating an alternative agricultural model. The paper by Pablo Lapegna on the Kirchner governments in Argentina moves us from one contradictory process to another, where the weight of the particular history of class and state formation of the country is also palpable. Taking a Gramscian perspective, Lapegna shows how Argentine peasant movements decided once again to place their faith in the hands of Peronist politicians (Néstor Kirchner and later his wife, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner), who rhetorically attacked the "landed oligarchy", taxed it substantially, and built a hegemonic discourse that included popular classes. At the same time, it subsidized agribusiness and drew political support from conservative governors close to the interests of large landowners.

If Paraguay, Venezuela, and Argentina are cases where the peasant movements were not the strongest in the region, the cases of Bolivia and Ecuador seemed to be the opposite. The paper on Bolivia, written by Jeffery R. Webber, shows that peasant and indigenous movements were important in the first phase of the Morales governments, when he was confronting a secessionist movement in the Eastern Lowlands, led by large capitalist farmers. But following a path typical of what Gramsci called a passive revolution, the Morales government established an alliance with the agrarian capitalists of the Lowlands, which translated into a very ambiguous agrarian reform. Patrick Clark's paper on Ecuador also questions the political strength of peasant and indigenous movements and their ability to influence policies under Rafael Correa's government. Through a description of several of Correa's key agricultural policies, Clark demonstrates that it was not food sovereignty or *buen vivir* but neo-developmentalism that guided his policies, and that the movements were unable to influence them in any way.

The paper by Diego E. Piñeiro and Joaquín Cardeillac on Uruguay takes us back to a case where rural movements from subaltern classes are very weak and where history seems to repeat itself, as it shows how the unequal distribution of land in the early 21st century resembles that of the early 20th century. The left-wing government of the *Frente Amplio* hence continued to promote the interests of agribusiness while improving the living and working conditions of rural wage workers because of its ideological commitment. The paper by Salvador Martí i Puig and Eduardo Baumeister on Nicaragua is also a case of weakened peasant movements with little influence on policies. It is also a case where the current ability and efforts of poor peasants to carve a space for themselves in the countryside, and those of middle peasants to integrate themselves into the market, have more to do with the legacy of the agrarian reform of the *Sandinista* regime (1979–1998) than with the current policies of President Daniel Ortega.

This special issue of *JAC* closes with two papers that bring the issue full circle. The paper by Sérgio Sauer and George Mészáros on Brazil is a case where rural movements were strong at the beginning of the government of the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Workers Party, PT), but where agribusiness greatly surpassed rural movements' ability to push their interests in all the different institutions of the state. As mentioned above, it is also the latest case of a constitutional coup against a democratically elected progressive government. Finally, our own concluding paper draws all the cases together so as to identify the common and diverse trends of agrarian change as well as the common and diverse policies of left-wing governments, principally towards agribusiness, peasants, and rural workers, and their aftermaths. Above all, it attempts to provide an explanation for the limited nature of these policies. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the legacy of the 20th century weighs heavily in our analysis of the political economy of agrarian change of the left-wing governments in Latin America.

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