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# Agro-extractivism

The Agrarian Question in the 21st Century

(Henry Veltmeyer and Edgar Zayago Lau, Universidad Autónoma de  
Zacatecas)

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# Agro-extractivism: The Agrarian Question in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

by

Henry Veltmeyer and Edgar Zayago Lau, Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas

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Universidade de Brasília – UnB

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*Website:* <http://www.unb.br/>

International Institute of Social Studies

The Hague, The Netherlands

*E-mail:* [information@iss.nl](mailto:information@iss.nl) *Website:* [www.iss.nl](http://www.iss.nl)

Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul

Porto Alegre, Brazil

*Website:* [www.ufrgs.br/](http://www.ufrgs.br/)

Future Agricultures Consortium

Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, England

*E-mail:* [info@future-agricultures.org](mailto:info@future-agricultures.org) *Website:* <http://www.future-agricultures.org/>

Universidade Estadual Paulista – UNESP

São Paulo, Brazil

*Website:* [www.unesp.br](http://www.unesp.br)

The Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and  
Public Administration – RANEPA

Moscow, Russian Federation

*E-mail:* [information@ranepa.ru](mailto:information@ranepa.ru) *Website:* [www.ranepa.ru](http://www.ranepa.ru)

College of Humanities and Development Studies

China Agricultural University, Beijing, China

*E-mail:* [yejz@cau.edu.cn](mailto:yejz@cau.edu.cn)

*Website:* <http://cohdc.cau.edu.cn/>

Transnational Institute

The Netherlands

*E-mail:* [tni@tni.org](mailto:tni@tni.org) *Website:* [www.tni.org](http://www.tni.org)

Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS)

University of the Western Cape

Cape Town, South Africa

*E-mail:* [info@plaas.org.za](mailto:info@plaas.org.za)

*Website:* [www.plaas.org.za](http://www.plaas.org.za)

Terra de Direitos

Curitiba, Brazil

*E-mail:* [terradedireitos@terradedireitos.org.br](mailto:terradedireitos@terradedireitos.org.br)

*Website:* [terradedireitos.org.br](http://terradedireitos.org.br)

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## Abstract

(300 – 500 words)

This paper examines the contemporary dynamics of the agrarian question in the Latin American context. The paper reviews the dynamics of capitalist development and agrarian change over the past six decades, with emphasis on the latest cycle of development and resistance associated with the advance of resource-seeking ‘extractive capital’. The paper establishes that each advance of capital in the development process generates a corresponding change in the form taken by the popular resistance. The argument advanced is that in the context of the new geoeconomics of capital in the region the popular resistance in the countryside has taken, and is taking, the form of a socio-territorial struggle by communities on the extractive frontier. At issue in this struggle are an enclosure of the global commons resulting from a neoliberal policy agenda, the destructive impacts of extractive operations, and the violation of the communities’ territorial rights.

## Keywords

5 keywords;

The agrarian question; agro-extraction; accumulation by dispossession; territorial struggle and resistance.

### 1. Introduction

A salient feature of global capitalism over the past decade has been the emergence of a trend towards the rapid expansion of foreign investment in the acquisition of land, dubbed ‘landgrabbing’ by the exponents of ‘critical agrarian studies’ (Borras Jr. S., J. Franco, S. Gomez, C. Kay and M. Spoor, 2012), who view the trend as part of a broader transition into a new phase of capitalist development and agrarian change. In the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the ‘agrarian question’ involved different national paths of development of capitalism in the countryside and its contributions to industrialization. Later in the decade the transition took the form of a world market/economy with a centre and periphery, while in the current context the agrarian question is taking shape as a new form of colonialism and extractive imperialism, viz. the imperial state in its active support of extractive capital in its operations in the global south. This paper examines several dimensions of this contemporary capitalist development process in the context of Argentina and Brazil, with reference to dynamics that are unfolding throughout the

region but that in these two countries, together with Bolivia, Uruguay and Paraguay, is taking form of agro-extraction.

## **2. The global landgrab**

In the current conjuncture of capitalist development many rural communities in Latin America, as well as parts of Asia and Africa, are confronted with forces of change as well as actions and policies, that result in reduced access of the ‘rural poor’ (the masses of dispossessed and proletarianized ‘peasants’) to the commons, the privatization and commodification of their means of production and productive resources, and the loss of their rural livelihoods. In this context a vast acreage of these lands—an estimated 220 million hectares since 2007—has been acquired by foreign investors in a far-reaching land-grabbing process with significant development implications (Borras et al., 2011).

At issue in this capitalist development process is a land rush which is triggered in part by crises in oil and food markets over the last decade, and in part by the opportunities provided by a primary commodities boom to make extraordinary profits by extracting natural resources for which there is strong demand on the world market (Veltmeyer, 2013). In addition, the financialization of these markets has provided lucrative new investment opportunities to sovereign wealth funds, hedge funds and global agribusiness—entrepreneurs with accumulated capital in the search for profitable outlets.

This capitalist development process is based in part on a realignment of global economic power and the demand for natural resources by the industries and middle class consumers associated with the ‘emerging markets’ of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China). While the multinational corporations in the extractive sector are the dominant players in this process, some governments in food-insecure or resource-poor countries are also complicit. China and Malaysia, for example, dominate investments in land acquisition in Asia while South Africa shows signs of future dominance in Africa, and Brazil is emerging as a major sub-imperial power in South America in the context of what has been described as the ‘new extractivism’—the extraction of natural resources (oil and gas, minerals and metals, agrofood products and biofuels) by multinational corporations that are encouraged to invest in the acquisition of land and the extraction of these resources in a resource-sharing deal (profits for the companies, resource rents for the government). What foreign governments such as China and other investors primarily seek

are lands to meet their need for food and energy security, but the large-scale capitalist enterprises involved—the multinational corporations in the extractive sector of the global economy—are primarily concerned to feed the lucrative biofuel market by producing oil palm, sugar cane (for ethanol) and soya, increasingly the crop of choice in Latin America for the conversion of farmland for the production of food into the production of energy to feed the expanding world market for biofuels.

However, the motivation of governments involved in the global land grab is not to accumulate capital or to make a killing in the enormously lucrative commodities market but to produce food crops and livestock for their domestic economies, to bypass unreliable and expensive international food markets. Additionally, some investors seek to launch lucrative carbon credit schemes, trading on the inability or unwillingness of some governments to wean their economies off dirty climate-warming fossil fuels and forego sustainable development practices (Reid, 2014).

The rush for land, and the associated plunder of the host country's wealth of natural resources, is not restricted to the extraction of agrofood and forest products and the mining for gold and industrial minerals. Local banks, communications, infrastructural projects, tourism ventures and local industry are also being bought up in a frenzy of privatization ventures. These ventures are keen to take advantage of the new market liberalization and other 'structural reforms' that the governments of resource rich but poor countries on the periphery of world capitalism have been pushed into by international financial institutions such as the World Bank with the rationale of allowing them to benefit from the resulting 'economic opportunities'. In the discourse of the Bank and collateral financial institutions for host governments in developing societies foreign investment in land and the extraction of natural resources is the new catalyst of 'inclusive economic growth' and sustainable resource development, replacing foreign aid—and, it would seem—international trade. Meanwhile the governments that host these investments in the process collect ground and resource rents, as well as take bribes. The promise of jobs is more or less the only immediate benefit to national populations, and this in exchange for the heavy social and environmental costs.

But what about the world's poor, some estimated two billion mostly living in the 'developing world'—and the global commons of land, water, and productive and subsistence resources? The answer is clear enough. Much of the land being sold or leased to capitalist entrepreneurs or foreign investors are subject to customary use, land that is used by the 'commoners' but to which they

have no title. This is not surprising because lands defined as ‘commons’ in the contemporary development discourse generally exclude permanent farms and settled populations. Governments and investors prefer to avoid privately owned or settled land, as their dispossession is likely to provoke resistance. They would also like to avoid having to pay compensation for dwellings and standing crops, or for relocation of the local inhabitants. Only the unfarmed commons—the forest/woodlands, rangelands and wetlands, etc.—can supply the thousands of hectares that big investors want. But generally, as Borras, et al. (2011) point out, the commons are deemed to be ‘vacant and available’. This is because the laws of most host lessor states still treat all customarily owned lands and unfarmed lands as unowned, unoccupied and idle. As such they remain the property of the state.

As these researchers have emphasized the commons are neither unutilized or idle, nor unowned. In practice, customary ownership is nested in the territory of one community that extends to the boundaries of others in the region, and constitutes a part of the global commons, used for subsistence and support for local production and rural livelihoods. While the exact location of intercommunity boundaries are routinely challenged and contested, Wily (2013: 5) notes that there is little doubt as to which community owns and controls which area, although within each domain property rights are complex. The most usual distinction drawn today regarding these rights, the author adds, ‘is between rights over permanent house and farm plots, and rights over the residual commons’ (p.5). And she continues: ‘[r]ights over the former are increasingly absolute in the hands of families, and increasingly alienable rights over commons are collective, held in undivided shares, and while they exist in perpetuity are generally inalienable’.

The implications of the continuing denial that property ownership exists except as recognized by ‘imported’ European laws are evident. Not just the commons but occupied farms and houses are routinely lost as investors, owners of land or concessions to mine or harvest the natural resources, move in and farmers and other local inhabitants are either dispossessed, forcibly relocated or forced to abandon their land and communities as the result of the negative socioenvironmental impacts of the extractive activities that ensue. In some contexts communities are merely squeezed, retaining houses and farms but losing their woodlands and rangelands—a variation of the ‘classic’ pattern of enclosures described by Marx in his analysis of the dynamics of ‘primitive accumulation’ in England.

Sometimes communities welcome investors or corporations that are licensed by the

government to extract (mine, drill, harvest) sub-soil resources in their territories in the belief that jobs, services and expanded economic opportunities will come their way and compensate them for the loss of traditional lands and livelihoods—or, in the case of drilling for oil and gas, and open pit mining, for the damage done to the environment and water basins, or the health of community members. In such cases the federal government and local government officials and politicians are often facilitators of deals, extracting ground rent in the process (in the form of tax and royalty payments), taking bribes or making money on the side at the expense of the communities. In these cases government officials, politicians and corporate ‘entrepreneurs’ (or, more likely, energy and mining companies) are routinely on hand with the offer of jobs or micro-projects and diverse strategies to pacify the opposition of those that can’t be bought off. Everywhere the story is more or less the same: territorial and communal rights are ignored and disrespected, communities are class divided and farming systems upturned, livelihoods destroyed, and water use and environments changed in ways that undermine the sustainability of both the ecology and livelihoods.

Evidently, possession in the form of customary use is no more a protection or sufficient today than it was for the English villagers of the 17th and 18th centuries with the enclosure of their commons. Only legal recognition of the commons as the communal property of communities can afford real protection. A number of governments (Bolivia, Ecuador) have taken this step, setting aside formal registration as prerequisites to admission as real property as well as enshrining ancestral territorial rights and ownership by the people of the country’s resource wealth in the constitution. But the global land rush reduced the likelihood of such reforms coming to pass but it also raises concern that fragile reformist trends in this direction will not be sustained. Because of the coincidence of economic interests (extraordinary profits for the companies, resource rents/additional fiscal resources for the governments) governing regimes find selling or leasing their citizens’ land too lucrative to themselves and the class and elites aligned with them, and too advantageous to market-friendly routes of growth, to let justice or the benefits of the commons, or the forces of organized resistance, stand in their way.

### **3. Accumulation by dispossession**

From a world-historical standpoint the history of capitalism begins with a process of capital accumulation triggered by the dispossession of the direct smallholding agricultural producers, or

peasants, from the land and thus their means of production. Under conditions of this development, secured by diverse means ranging from enclosure of the commons to forceful eviction or expropriation by legal means or by administrative fiat under colonial rule, the capitalist development of the forces of production proceeded apace, and with it a process of productive and social transformation—historically the conversion of an agrarian society based on a precapitalist relations of production and a traditional communalist culture into a modern industrial capitalist system in which relations of direct production are replaced by the capital-labour relation

Within the framework of development economics this transformation or transition towards capitalism was theorised as a process of structural change—modernization and industrialization—based on the exploitation of the ‘unlimited supply of surplus labour’ generated by the capitalist development of agriculture. But within a materialist or Marxist political economy or a Critical Agrarian Studies framework the transition towards capitalism has been conceptualized as the ‘agrarian question’, in which reference is made to the following processes (Bernstein, 2010):

1. The commodification of land and labour;
2. The concentration of property in landholdings and capital, with fewer and larger landholdings and units of production at one pole and the proletarianization of the small peasant farmers at the other, converting them into a class for hire or proletariat;
3. The internal differentiation of the peasantry, with the conversion of some medium-sized peasant landholders into rich peasants and capitalist farmers, and the impoverishment of large numbers of medium- and small-landholding peasant farmers;
4. The transition, by diverse paths, towards capitalist agriculture based on the exploitation of the countryside by capital in cities;
5. The proletarianization and impoverishment of increasing numbers of small agricultural producers and poor peasant farmers—what Marx in his theory of the General law of Capital Accumulation (GLCA) conceived as the ‘multiplication of the proletariat’; and;
6. A process of industrialization and modernisation based on the exploitation of surplus agricultural labour and its incorporation into the capitalist development process.

This process unfolded with different permutations more or less as theorized from both a development economics and a political economy perspective, leading large numbers of dispossessed peasants—viewed by the agencies of ‘development assistance’ as the ‘rural poor’—to abandon both their rural communities and agriculture, a process that was facilitated by several



pathways out of rural poverty—labour and migration—opened by the agencies of development (World Bank, 2008). While some of the ‘rural poor’, mostly dispossessed peasant farmers and rural landless workers, initially (in the 1960s and 1970s) took up arms in the land struggle and others were cajoled by the agents of ‘development’ to stay on their farms with assistance provided through programs of integrated rural development, others in large numbers migrated to the cities and urban centres in search for work, fuelling a process of rapid urbanization and capitalist development of the forces of production, and with it the depopulation of the rural communities and the capitalist development of agriculture. By the end of the first decade into the new millennium this process had resulted in the urbanization of most of the population—today over 70 percent (UNDESA, 2008).

This entire process unfolded, if not according to the planning models of development theorists, then more or less as theorized by development economists such as Walt Rostow (1960) who saw the end point of the modernization process as the creation of prosperous centres of modern capitalist industry and middle-class societies of high-income earners and mass consumption. But in the 1980s on the periphery of the system—in Latin America, for example—the capitalist development process began to unfold in quite if not an entirely different form. Behind or at the base of this peripheral capitalist development process was the installation of a new world order, a new set of rules used to govern international relations of trade and the flow of investment capital. The new rules required governments to implement a program of ‘structural reforms’ (privatization, deregulation, liberalization, decentralization) designed to open up the economy to the forces of ‘economic freedom’ (the market liberated from regulatory constraint, capitalist enterprise in the private sector, and the flow of private capital), to unleash thereby a process of ‘economic growth’ and ‘prosperity’. However, the outcome was rather different than theorised or expected.

Opening up local and national economies in peripheral regions to the ‘forces of economic freedom’ in the 1980s, under the aegis of the ‘new world order’ of neoliberal globalization, resulted not in the heralded expansion of production (economic growth) but in the destruction of the productive forces in both industry and agriculture—as well as a decade ‘lost to development’ marked by economic stagnation, increased social inequalities in the distribution of wealth and income, new forms of poverty, and the emergence in the urban economies of an informal sector in which landless or displaced rural migrants were forced to work on their own account on the

streets rather than in factories and industrial plants, and offices, for wages (Klein & Tokman, 2000).

As for the rural economy the capitalist development process continued to generate what development economists conceptualized as ‘unlimited supplies of surplus labour’ for the urban labour market, and what Marxists in similar terms viewed as ‘proletarianization’ (the transformation of small-scale impoverished agricultural producers or peasants into an industrial proletariat or working class), with its ‘industrial reserve army’ of proletarianized peasants whose labour is surplus to the requirements of capital.

On this process in the Latin American context see Nun (1969) and Quijano (1974). Regarding the associated process of social transformation there emerged a major debate in Latin America between the ‘peasantists’ (Esteva, 1983) and ‘the proletarianists’ (Bartra, 1976) as to the fate of the peasantry. At issue in this debate was whether the forces of change unleashed by the capitalist development of agriculture would result in the disappearance of the peasantry (Otero, 2009). Bartra and other proletarianists argued that the forces of capitalist development would lead to the disappearance of the peasantry and any form of precapitalist forms of production just as it had in manufacturing and other sectors. On the other hand, ‘peasantists’ argued that there were limits to the capitalist development process in its capacity to subsume the labour of the direct producers and that the economy of small-scale agriculture could survive within the interstices of the capitalist system.

The debate took place in the 1970s, but it would take ‘developments’ in the 1980s to more or less settle it (until the debate was resuscitated in the new millennium under very different conditions). The ‘development’ that advanced if not settled the debate was the emergence of an urban proletariat of informal street workers and a large rural semi-proletariat of near-landless rural workers with one foot as it were in the urban labour market and the other in the rural communities and agriculture.

It was not until well into the 1990s that mainstream development economists took cognizance of this ‘development’—the emergence of a dual two-sector economic structure, each with its own structural features and social conditions—by adapting their development strategy vis-à-vis the rural poor, and adjusting the theory used to inform this strategy. Up to this point the theorists and practitioners of development encouraged the outmigration of the rural poor, encouraging them to abandon agriculture in favour of labour in on one form or the other—to take the labour and

migration pathways out of rural poor. The role assigned to the state, or the government, in this process was to facilitate the process by capacitating the poor to take advantage of the opportunities available to them in the urban labour markets—to provide the services and programs (education, health, social welfare) designed to this end, and to generate or strengthen the human capital of the poor.

By the mid-1990s and the turn into the 21st century it was evident that the operating theory of economic development (modernization, industrialization, capitalism), as well as the associated strategy and policies, had to be ‘adjusted’ to prevailing conditions. For one thing, neoliberal policies based on free market capitalism or the Washington Consensus were simply not working—they neither delivered on the anticipated economic growth, and led to excessive inequalities in the access to productive resources and the distribution of income, and with these inequalities a worsening of poverty and the emergence of social discontent that threatened to undermine and destabilize the system. Also it was evident that both labour and migration had begun to reach if not exhaust their limits in the capacity to expand the forces of production.

With an increasingly restrictive labour market for employment in the private or public sector—up to 80 percent of jobs in the 1980s were generated in the informal sector—and the limited capacity of the informal sector to generate productive forms of self-employment, labour no longer was the pathway out of poverty that it had been theorized to be. Not only did the expanding urban economies generate unsustainable level of employment, but they featured high levels of un- and under-employment, low income, social disorganization and crime, not to mention the ‘planet of have’ that bred these conditions (Davis, 2006).

Under these conditions of modernity and deindustrialization several new social categories of individuals emerged in peripheral social formations: an urban proletariat of street workers and large numbers of youth who neither studied nor worked. The reason for this was the contradictory dynamic of uneven capitalist development based on the town-countryside relation: at some point the system will exhaust its capacity to absorb the masses of surplus workers, the rural proletariat of landless or near-landless rural workers (or from another perspective, the ‘rural poor’), expelled from the countryside and forced to migrate in the search for work. At the same time, even international migration was reaching or had evidently exceeded its capacity to absorb surplus labour.

The result of these contradictory ‘developments’ was a shift in thinking among development economists and policymakers in the direction of seeking to slow down rather than encourage rural outmigration—to look for ways to keep the rural poor in their communities. This led to or played into the ongoing search for a new development paradigm—for a more inclusive and participatory form of development based on what rural sociologists would conceptualize as the ‘new rurality’ (Kay, 2009). This ‘new rurality’ makes reference to the response of the rural semiproletariat and the poor to the forces of capitalist development and social change operating on them, which was to seek to diversify their sources of household income. Other responses included an adjustment to these forces in the form of outmigration in the search for greater opportunities and improved conditions in the world of work. This remained the strategy of a large number of rural households. But another response was to resist rather than adjust to the forces of change by forming or joining a social movement designed and aimed at mobilising the resistance against the policies that released these forces and resulting conditions, and to take direct collective action against them.

This was a major response of the dispossessed peasantry and rural proletariat to the forces of peripheral capitalist development in the 1960s and 1970s, and again in the 1990s, when the indigenous communities in a number of countries joined the rural semiproletariat in the class struggle for land reform. In both contexts the guardians of the prevailing social and economic order turned towards ‘development’ as a way of dampening the fires of revolutionary ferment—to provide the rural poor a less confrontational and alternative agency and form of social change. In the 1990s, however, this development process took a different form. Rather than a program of state-led rural development micro-projects (based on a strategy of ‘integrated rural development’) ‘development’ in the 1990s increasingly took the form of local development in which the active agent was the ‘community’—community-based organisations run by the poor themselves, by those among the poor who were empowered to act for themselves with ‘international cooperation’ and ‘social participation’ (the mediation of NGOs funded by international donors or the government). Development in this form was geared to diverse efforts, and the ‘project’ of ensuring that the inhabitants of rural society are able to subsist and stay in their communities and not forced to migrate. The solution: a strategy of diversifying sources of household income.

Evidently—at least from a World Bank perspective—agriculture is not a development pathway out of rural poverty, given that peasant agriculture is deemed to be the structural source of rural poverty (low productivity) and that very few ‘peasants’ have the capacity or the

wherewithal to be transformed into a capitalist entrepreneur—to access the needed capital, modern technology and markets. However, it behooves the near-landless rural proletariat and semiproletariat to retain access to some agriculture, if only for self-subsistent food production. But the sustainability of rural households is predicated on accessing alternative and additional sources of income, particularly derived from labour—working off-farm or for some household members to migrate week-days, or seasonally, or for longer periods. Sociological studies into household income have determined that today over half of the income available to rural households in the region is derived from one form of labour or the other (Kay, 2009). However, food gardening and labour/migration by themselves would not relieve the pressure on the ‘rural poor’ to migrate and abandon their communities. Additional sources of household income, facilitated by state-supported ‘development’ and international cooperation, today include migrant remittances and conditional direct income transfers to the poor, as well as income- and employment-generating development micro-projects.

This rural household survival strategy and associated conditions of community-based development (the ‘new rurality’) constituted the reality lived by much of the rural proletariat on the periphery of world capitalism at the turn into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But conditions would soon change as these rural communities were swept by the changing tides of capitalist development—with the penetration of resource-seeking foreign investments and the expanded operations of extractive capitalism.

#### **4. The new geoeconomics of capital and the dynamics of agrarian change**

As noted above the 21<sup>st</sup> century opened up with changes in the global economy driven by the growing demand for natural resources, both fossil fuels and other sources of energy, industrial minerals and precious metals, but also agro-food products. This demand not only led to a primary commodities boom, as governments in resource-rich countries responded to this demand by increasing their exports of these commodities, but to a global land- and resource-grab in the search for improved direct access to these resources.

An important but as yet not well-documented by-product of this expansion of foreign investments into land and agribusiness, as well as exploration for and the mining of fossil fuels and industrial minerals, has been the concentration of capital in the natural resource sector (metal

mining, oil and gas, agriculture) as well as increased foreign land ownership (Borras et al., 2011: 9)—what FAO prefers to term ‘large-scale land acquisitions’—and also the rapid expansion of extractive industries that require the capture or control of lands.

By a number of accounts and any measure the scale of these foreign investments in both the acquisition of land and natural resource assets, and the rights to explore and extract these resources, is enormous. At the macro-level it is reflected in a significant shift in the sectoral distribution of foreign investments. While resource-seeking investments (in land and natural resource development) constituted only ten percent of FDI flows into Latin America in 2000 by 2010 it represented over 30 percent (Arellano, 2010).

By some accounts the change in the sectoral distribution of FDI has been even greater in Africa, with a larger proportion of these investments being in the acquisition of land rather than in investing in the extraction of natural resources. In either case, the outcome has been the same—a process described by Harvey (2005) as ‘accumulation by dispossession’.

One outcome and a major feature of this global land grab has been increased foreign ownership of land as well as the concentration of capital in the agricultural sector (UNCTAD, 2011: 110-111), adding another twist to the century-long land struggle. Other dimensions of the landgrabbing process include:

1. The privatization and commodification of land, and with it the transformation of a system of customary rights in regard to land usage into legal and written titles to land ownership;
2. The rationalization of the use of such demarcated landed property as a form of capital (land as a commodity) at the service of ‘original’ and expanded capital accumulation;
3. The proletarianization of the direct agricultural producers in the form of rural outmigration—by reducing nonmarket access to food and self-sustenance and creating a mobile global proletariat concentrated in the urban centres of what has become the world economy (Araghi, 2010); and, more specifically in regard to extractive capitalism,
4. The forced displacement of inhabitants of the rural communities contiguous to the major sources of natural resources by the negative impacts of extractivist operations—damaging the health and destroying the environment and livelihoods of the inhabitants of these rural communities.

Under contemporary conditions of this ‘great transition’—i.e. within the new world order of neoliberal globalization—peasants have been and are, so to speak or write, ‘on the move’ in three

different senses. One is in the form of spatial relocation—migration from diverse rural localities and communities to the urban metropolis and beyond. The dynamics of this well-documented response to the forces of capitalist development are much in evidence, manifest in the uprooting and displacement from the countryside of huge numbers of landless producers, their families and their households. The vast majority of these migrants are absorbed into the urban economy at the level of work or economic activity as a mass of informal workers, working ‘on their own account’ on the streets, rather than for wages in industrial plants and factories, in private and public sector offices, or in transportation or construction. At the level of living and residence, these rural migrants and landless workers are incorporated into what Mike Davis has dubbed ‘a planet of slums’.

Migration is a well-defined response of the rural proletariat to the forces of social change generated in the capitalist development process and the social antagonism between the city and the countryside is present in all societies that have developed under the capitalist mode of production. The World Bank in its 2008 *World Development Report* conceives of this response as a ‘pathway out of rural poverty’. Another option available to the rural proletariat—also conceived by World Bank economists as a ‘pathway out of poverty’—is ‘labour’: an exchange of labour-power for a living wage. Responses along this line, also understood as a matter of individual decision-making, are represented in the resulting process of social transformation, which for the individual small-scale agricultural producer or ‘peasant’ means entry into a relation of work or labour under whatever conditions might be available.

This type of response or pathway out of poverty has resulted in the formation of a sizeable semiproletariat with links to both land and wage-labour, allowing peasants to secure the livelihood of their households; and, at a different level, to constitute what Marx in a different context termed an ‘industrial reserve army’ of workers whose labour is held in reserve without capital having to assume the costs of its reproduction (Veltmeyer, 1983). As for the World Bank’s interpretation of this response it is reflected in the category of ‘labour-oriented household’ that has adopted ‘labour’ (wage-labour in agriculture and industry, self-employment) as a strategic pathway out of rural poverty—from 45 percent of all households in predominantly rural/agriculture-based societies such as Nicaragua to 53 percent of households in societies such as Ecuador considered to be ‘urbanized’ or ‘transforming’ (World Bank, 2008: 76).

The economists behind the 2008 *World Development Report* on Agriculture for Development identify ‘farming’ as the third strategic response of the rural poor to the forces of social change. This pathway out of rural poverty is predicated on the modernization of agriculture and the capitalist development of production. But a more consequential strategic response, not identified by the World Bank given its ideological focus on possible forms of structural adjustment, takes a ‘political’ rather than a ‘structural’ form (the outcome of economic decisions made by countless individuals). It is to organize a social movement as a means of mobilizing the forces of resistance within agrarian society against the processes of primitive accumulation and proletarianization—against the loss of land and the destruction of their livelihoods, against forced migration and the subsumption and subsequent exploitation of labour, against the depredations of global capital and imperialism, against the policies of the neoliberal or neoliberal developmentalist state and its governing body in the global economy (‘the international bourgeoisie’).

In a sense, both sides of the argument regarding the process of the capitalist development and agrarian transformation are supported by some of the ‘facts’ and thus able to explain some of the changes taking place in the Latin American countryside, on the periphery of the expanding capitalist nucleus in the urban centres. This is because, under conditions of what some have conceptualized as ‘peripheral capitalism’, the peasantry is being transformed in part but not completely, emerging as what we have described as a ‘semiproletariat’ of near-landless rural workers or landless ‘peasants’. Under these conditions rather than the ‘disappearance of the peasantry’ what we have is its reproduction in diverse forms. Many self-defined ‘peasants’ or family farmers in these circumstances emerge as a rural semiproletariat of landless workers forced to combine direct production on the land with wage-labour—working off-farm to secure the livelihood of their households and families; and an urban proletariat of workers in the informal sector of the urban economy, to work ‘on their own account’ in the streets and live in the slums formed on the periphery of this economy.

There is little ‘new’ about this process. Its diverse permutations can be traced out in the dynamics of productive and social transformation all over the world in different geographical and historical contexts. But what is new or distinctive about the transition towards capitalism in this context is that the associated process of productive and social transformation process has been arrested or stalled in its tracks as it were, with both modernity and capitalism taking a distinct peripheral form in the formation of a semiproletariat of rural landless workers forced into seasonal



or irregular forms of wage-labour. Under these conditions, together with the politics of resistance against the neoliberal ‘structural reform’ agenda responsible for them, there is no question of the peasantry disappearing into the dustbins of history as predicted by structuralists in both the development economics and Marxist camps. The problem is to determine the particular form taken by the class struggle under these conditions and under the new conditions that have emerged over the past decade of extractive capitalism and extractivist imperialism.

The devastating and painful consequences of this process are reflected in the detritus of grinding poverty left behind in the countryside as well as the negative socioenvironmental impacts of extractive capitalism. As for the issue of poverty the concerted efforts of the international organizations engaged in the fight against ‘global poverty’ and those governments that have embraced the post-Washington Consensus and the ‘new developmentalist’ policy agenda appear to have succeeded in reducing the incidence of poverty—at least in some cases (Brazil, Chile, Venezuela) and in these cases by as much as 40 percent. Nevertheless, notwithstanding these advances on the anti-poverty front, and notwithstanding the emergence in the 1990s of poverty as an urban phenomenon, 75 percent of the world’s poor today still live in the rural areas.

In this connection, the century-long class struggle for land has been transformed into a broader struggle for sustainable livelihoods and for maintaining a ‘traditional’ way of life and culture associated with small-scale agricultural production. This struggle, as well as the struggle by organized labour for improved wages and working condition, has also been broadened and transformed into resistance against the policies of the neoliberal state and the forces of ‘globalization’—integration into a global economy in which the forces of ‘economic freedom’ (investment capital, trade in goods and services) have been liberated from the regulatory constraints of the development-welfare state. And in the new millennium, as discussed below, a new phase in the capitalist development of the forces of production on a global scale—extractivist imperialism—would bring about another major change in both the form taken by the forces of resistance and the correlation of forces in the broader struggle.

### **5. Food versus energy: The political economy of biofuels capitalism**

Agricultural extractivism takes a number of forms, but in the current context what has dominated the debate—apart from the dynamics of landgrabbing—has been what we might term the political economy of biofuels capitalism: the conversion of farmland and agriculture for food production

into the production of biofuels. What set off the debate was the change in land use in Brazil in the use corn from a food and feedlot product into ethanol. However, what sparked the current debate has been the change in the use of farmland to convert it from food production into the production of soy as a biofuel form of energy. It would appear that biofuels production and related financial speculation is a major impetus behind landgrabbing, particularly in Argentina and Brazil, where enormous swathes of farmland have been given over to soy production.

The conversion of agriculture (sugarcane and soya) production of food into energy evidently drives agrarian change in countries such as Argentina and Brazil. However, as emphasized by Novo et al. (2010) regarding Brazil, biofuels production must be understood in the broader context of the new geoeconomics of capital (extractive capitalism), not just than in terms of the recent expanded global demand for energy. Agrarian change in this context includes not only increased large-scale land grabs and a process of accumulation by dispossession, but a process of economic concentration in addition to changes in land use and the destruction of traditional economies that have sustained generations of farming families and local food markets, the destruction of the livelihoods of millions of small landholding producers for local food markets, and, more broadly a sharp rise in the price of food and with it the onset of a global food crisis.

Environmentalists have criticized the massive conversion of forestland and other yet non-arable land into biofuel production, and have called into question its supposed environmental efficiencies and the overall effect of biofuels on reducing greenhouse gas emissions. But development-oriented arguments have suggested that the biofuel agenda in rich countries, supported with heavy government subsidies, were driving up food prices and competing with other forms of land use, and also when biofuel production is planned on supposedly 'marginal' lands, because these are often important for the livelihoods of the poor (OXFAM, 2008). These arguments have shifted views within some decision-making bodies of the EU and the FAO. The FAO (2008), for example, has concluded that the rise of food prices is indeed an effect of the expansion of biofuel production and that whether biofuels will help to reduce or increase greenhouse gas emissions depends on the precise conditions. But to date, there seem to be few empirical studies of competing claims on land use, even though these seem to be central to the biofuel controversy.

In the controversial debate about biofuels, the case of Brazil is pivotal in that it is the second largest liquid biofuel producer in the world with a complete biofuel social-technical configuration

and a full chain from producing sugarcane and ethanol to flex-fuel cars that run on biofuels, supported by government subsidies, a regulatory system, technical research and finance arrangements (Novo et al. 2010). Another such case is Argentina, where the government has actively promoted opening up the country to large-scale investments in the production of soy to fuel both the domestic and the global economy. Next we will briefly explore this case of biofuels capitalism.

*The soy model of extractive capitalism in agriculture<sup>1</sup>*

One of various contradictory features of capitalist development is the expanded capacity of the system for food production and the growing incapacity of the masses of the rural poor, forced to migrate to the urban centres, to access food because of its conversion into a commodity, and the spike in the price of agrofood products, brought on in part by the conversion of agriculture for food production into a source of energy, for which there is a greater demand in the world market. This dynamic has turned out to be a defining feature of world capitalism on the agrarian front in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It implicates the emergence and rapid growth in recent decades of new agribusinesses such as the production of soy for export based on transgenic seeds, that according to the Argentine government, a booster of expanded soy production for exports as a strategy of national development have the potential to grow significantly in the near future.

This strategy, together with the emergence of soy production based on transgenetic seeds as a key sector of the global food regime, relates to and reflects the dramatic expansion in recent years of foreign investment in the acquisition of land, or landgrabbing, and the importance gained by large transnational corporations in controlling key segments of extractivist processes, not to mention the application of new technologies promoted by neoliberal policies implemented throughout the continent.

The soy model implemented in Argentina is based on biotechnology and transgenic seeds that are resistant to glyphosate, an agrochemical that kills off weeds and brushwood remaining in the field after the ‘no tillage’ system is applied, but that does not kill the transgenic seed itself. While the cost of labour and the use of fossil fuels are substantially reduced under the soy model, the system causes enormous environmental and social degradation, leading to the concentration

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<sup>1</sup> This section draws heavily on Giarraca and Tuebal (2004).

of land ownership and massive rural unemployment, particularly in the small cities in the country's interior, as a result of the disappearance of regional crops due in part to the labour-saving technologies involved in soy production (Domínguez & Sabatino, 2006).

Throughout the 20th century, Argentina, as well as countries such as Australia, Canada and even the US, was an important supplier of meat and grain to the world economy. These exports—including beef, wheat, corn and sunflowers—were also basic foods consumed domestically. Production was concentrated in the Pampas while other regions focused on traditional industrial crops for domestic consumption: sugar cane in Tucumán and Salta; cotton and yerba mate in Chaco and Misiones respectively; apples and pears in the Río Negro valley in the Patagonia; and vineyards and wine production in Mendoza and San Juan. Originally oriented towards the domestic market, some of this production was exported (apples, for example). Argentina was historically self-sufficient in food; the bulk of food consumed domestically was produced locally, except for some tropical products such as coffee or palm hearts. Furthermore, the country was considered one of the breadbaskets of the world, capable of providing food for a population several times that of Argentina (Giarracca & Teubal, 2014).

This production potential was based in large part on small and medium-sized family farms that constituted an important component of Argentine agriculture. According to census data 'medium and large multi-family farms' (basically large estates) occupied over half of Argentina's farmland and production back in 1960 (in Brazil, Chile, Ecuador and Guatemala this proportion was higher). At the same time 'family farms', or 'small and medium producers', occupied 45 per cent of agricultural land and accounted for 47 per cent of total output, a larger proportion in both cases than in other Latin American countries where land ownership was even more concentrated but where local food markets were predominantly served by the peasant economy, the *minifundios* or small landholdings of the peasant economy, which occupied only three per cent of the land in Argentina, compared with 17 percent in Ecuador and 14 per cent in Guatemala (Feder, 1975: Table 18, 102).

In the 1970s, new grain and oilseed varieties were introduced in the Pampas. Farmers began harvesting two crops a year instead of alternating crop and livestock production. New crop varieties allowed a 'secondary' crop to be sown in combination with wheat. The boom in soybean production began at this time, with the introduction of a Mexican germplasm in wheat that gave rise to the wheat-soybean dual cropping that spread rapidly throughout the Pampas, especially in

the sub-region where corn was mainly produced. This dual cropping partially supplanted corn and sorghum as well as livestock production, which traditionally formed part of a mixed production system. The essence of this new agriculturization of the Argentine countryside was based on soybeans and the accompanying technological package they required. It expanded largely at the expense of livestock production and other traditional grains and foods.

Neoliberal policies and institutions established in the 1990s under the Menem regime had a significant impact on Argentina's agricultural 'development'. First, the institutions that had traditionally regulated agriculture were eliminated or privatized. The 'structural reform' or 'deregulation decree' of 1991—which compares to similar legislation regarding the 'modernization' of agriculture implemented in Mexico and elsewhere in the region around the same time (from 1991 to 1993)—dissolved the marketing boards that had regulated agricultural production since the 1930s. This included the *Junta Nacional de Carnes* (National Meat Board), the *Junta Nacional de Granos* (National Grain Board) and the *Dirección Nacional del Azúcar* (National Sugar Directorate). The elimination of the National Grain Board gave greater power to the large grain and oilseed exporters, and leverage over key segments of the economy. These measures were combined with the flexibilization of contracts, setting aside the tenancy laws that had been in place since the 1940s.

In the process, large properties were consolidated and the disappearance of medium-sized and small farms intensified. The resulting pressures on small landholding family farmers, and the possibility of losing their lands, led to the wives and women farmers to protest the auctioning of their farms due to their ballooning indebtedness and to organize the *Movimiento de Mujeres Agropecuarias en Lucha* (Farm Women's Agrarian Struggles Movement), which managed to halt the process, stopping the auctioning of more than 500 farms (Giarracca & Teubal, 2001).

The institutional changes that underlie the agribusiness system have permitted large transnational corporations to take control of key sections of the agro-food sector, including the provision of seeds and inputs, purchase of land in certain regions, industrial processing of agricultural produce, and the domestic and international marketing of production. These new agribusinesses engaged a logic that was very different from that of former agro-industries. As Giarracca (2008) has pointed out: "this used to be a country of *chacareros* (family farmers), cooperatives, and national industries, [important agroindustrial complexes formed by local industries based on national capital, all of which] were doing well." While some of these former

industries exported part of their output, food production was mostly oriented to the domestic market. But with the wholesale transfer of local industries to transnational capital, export commodities increased and a new stratum of very large agricultural producers was formed to serve the world market for agrofood products and commodities such as wheat and meat.

These changes can be traced back to the years of the military dictatorship (1976–83), when, within the framework of the ‘new world order’ of neoliberal globalization, finance capital became dominant and there emerged a new regime of accumulation for agriculture and the agro-food system as a whole—what Friedmann (1987) and McMichael (2009) term ‘the global food regime’. As part of this system, large multinational or transnationalized corporations came to determine key aspects of agricultural policy. These processes continued under subsequent democratically elected governments. An important landmark was the deregulation decree of 1991 (mentioned above); suddenly, Argentine agriculture became one of the most deregulated in the world, subject to the vagaries of world markets like no other nation’s agricultural sector. It was transformed into a system that mainly produced commodities for export, based on advanced technologies and dominated by transnational corporations.

Further, during the military dictatorship, the seed banks developed by the National Institute for Agricultural Technology (*Instituto Nacional de Tecnología Agropecuaria*, or INTA) were dismantled and the accumulated knowledge was transferred to transnationals likely to invest in the local economy. Thus, local genetic banks that sustained biodiversity were shared with the transnationals and new technologies, hybrid seeds and transgenics were increasingly dominated by companies such as Monsanto that invested heavily in the acquisition of land for agricultural production, while agricultural producers were induced or obliged to purchase their seeds year after year from the transnational seed corporations.

As Giarracca and Teubal note this did away with a traditional feature of agriculture: the prospect farmers had of using and reproducing their own seeds. These transgenic seeds required new agricultural practices—a system of direct sowing and the spraying of large quantities of agrochemicals to kill off weeds and any agricultural material not required. In 1997, transgenic seeds were ‘liberated’ to the market and farmers began planting Monsanto’s trademark soybean seed, Roundup Ready, a commercial brand of glyphosate and is the herbicide to which the genetically modified soybean seed is resistant. A new technological package combined this seed

with glyphosate in a ‘no tillage’ system that required no plowing of the land, which implied the need for special machinery not generally accessible to local medium- or small-scale farmers.

Within this framework, a handful of large transnational seed corporations such as Monsanto and Novartis induced farmers to incorporate a technological package they controlled by providing them with seeds that are resistant to glyphosate and with the agrochemicals that producers are obliged to purchase when they plant the genetically modified seed. Farmers became increasingly dependent, not only on agro-industry and supplies of agrochemical products, but also on the companies that provide transgenic seeds. At present, more than 95 percent of soybean seeds used by farmers in Argentina are transgenic and are provided by transnational corporations or their licensees.

This process took place alongside the flexibilization of tenant and rental laws, which permitted rental of land for one harvest (renewable ad infinitum). As a consequence, a new social actor, the *contratista* (contractor)—now an important factor in the rental of land—materialized. In addition, ports and silos were privatized and agro-export complexes dominated by large transnational exporters increased in importance. New very large producers emerged as significant social actors on the stage of agricultural development, some of them combining with their own seed pools or financial trusts to dominate a large part of the local agricultural scene. They also took on an important role in the rental of land by contractors, their finance coming from many sources, not only agriculture. The agro-food system as a whole, including local industry, supermarkets and other service industries, was increasingly dominated by transnational corporations.

#### *Production and land use under the soy model*

Soy production began in the 1970s. In 1980, 3.7 million tons were produced, accounting for 10.6 per cent of Argentina’s total grain output. Production increased to 11 million tons in 1996–97, when transgenics were ‘liberated’ to the market, and to 46.6 million tons in 2007–08. The soy harvest of 2012–13 is estimated at 50 million tons, representing more than half of Argentina’s total grain output.

The land area dedicated to soy also increased substantially. In 1996, soy production covered 20 per cent of the total land used for grain. In 2011–12, 18 million hectares were allocated to soy, while in the present crop year (2012–13) more than 19.5 million hectares were used for soy

production, more than half of Argentina's total grainland. These data (Giarracca & Teubal, 2014: 54-55) reflect a trend towards monoculture in soy production and the export of grains, soy and soy oil and biofuels.

In recent years, large companies and landowners have increased their operations in agriculture. As family farmers and rural producers of food for the local market were forced out of business and to sell or rent their land, many of them turned over management of their land to firms or investors, with technological packages that included transgenics (Domínguez & Sabatino, 2008: 21).

### *The socioenvironmental costs and 'external effects' of soy production*

Soy production is very profitable for Argentine farmers. However, this profitability does not take into account what economists view as 'externalities or 'external effects', which can be very pernicious. The first negative impact of this type of agriculture is that it is based almost exclusively on the production of soy, with no regard to other agricultural products. This implies a monoculture, with soy becoming one of Argentina's main exports—a fact that denotes its vulnerability to price and demand changes on international commodity markets.

The trend towards a specialization in soy is fraught with risks and dangers. The emerging monoculture implies a loss of biodiversity and less production of other crops, including those providing for the food needs of the local population. This excessive specialization also inhibits rotation with livestock production, which traditionally contributed to the maintenance and sustainability of agriculture. These factors have led to a debate relating to the government's foreign trade policies, on the one hand, and local production policies on the other.

It is worth considering the views of Vía Campesina, a global movement of peasant and small family farmers, on this matter. Vía Campesina points out that free trade contributes to a worsening of the crisis affecting the rural areas of the world. The liberalization of markets for agricultural produce in third world countries and the corresponding limitless competition to which these countries are subjected are detrimental to the interests of the peasantry throughout the world. Free trade tends to favor agribusiness and damage the interests of the peasantry, as well as of populations inhabiting rural areas. Liberalization of agricultural markets, opening them up to external competition via reductions in tariffs and trade controls, has subjected the peasantry to a



global competitive system whose main beneficiaries are agribusiness multinationals and their stockholders. These trends are also instrumental in the present world food crisis.

As noted above, the share of land used for soy production has increased systematically since the 1970s while the proportion of other crops in the total output has fallen. Furthermore, the number of dairy farms were reduced while the size of those remaining in operation increased; also, livestock and meat production in general, together with agrofood products designed to the needs of the local population, has fallen substantially, raising serious questions about food security, particularly in the context of rising prices, which in some countries (Mexico, for example) have assumed crisis proportions. While Argentina continues to be generally self-sufficient in food, and to date has managed to avert the crisis in the production and marketing of agrofood products—the food crisis—that has beset other countries and regions in recent years, it is evident that the country has not averted the propensity of the capitalist system towards crisis. Indeed, the soy model of agricultural production, and the extractivist strategy pursued by the government guarantees that Argentina will go down this road.

In this connection several ‘external effects’ of the soy model deserve consideration. Throughout the 20th century, deforestation increased, mainly as a consequence of the expansion of agriculture. But deforestation intensified due to soy expansion in the north—Santiago del Estero, Chaco, Salta and Jujuy—which not only led to the violent expulsion of peasant and indigenous communities from the land but an intensification of the trend towards deforestation, which, together with widespread degradation of the environment, can be viewed as one more way of enclosing the commons.

According to Giarracca and Teubal (2014: 58) Soy also expanded over the native woodland and the Yungas, particularly in the north. According to the 1937 Censo Agropecuario Nacional (National Agriculture and Livestock Census), native forests covered 37.5 million hectares, while in 1987 forest areas had been reduced to 33.1 million hectares. From 1998 to 2002 some 230,000 hectares of native forestland were lost every year.

It is also important to note that these forests are part of territories inhabited by thousands of small communities of peasants, indigenous populations and *criollos*, who depend upon the forests for their livelihoods. This is not just a livelihoods issue but also a political issue in that the call for action by some indigenous communities dependent on the forest for their livelihood has

resulted in a new law for the protection of native forests. However, in many situations and cases the law has not been enforced because of powerful interests working against the law.

Another major impact on the indigenous communities in the direct path of extractive capital in the agricultural frontier of capitalist development (the production of biofuels) has to do with the negative impact of the chemicals mobilized in the production process on the health of the inhabitants of the rural communities located near the soy plantation fields where glyphosate fumigations by air are carried out. Wide-scale fumigation with glyphosate causes a variety of conditions, including intoxicification, chronic disease and in not a few cases death (Giarracca & Teubal, 2014).

In August 2010, molecular biologists, geneticists, epidemiologists and endocrinologists, as well as professionals from other branches of medicine, presented their studies during the Conference of Doctors of Crop-sprayed Villages at the National University of Córdoba, the first time that a public university had invited researchers and academics to discuss the use of agrochemicals as part of the current agricultural model. They concluded that ‘there is scientific evidence that is sufficiently strong and consistent to confirm that pesticide exposure increases health risks’. Using national and international research results and records of patients, renowned specialists associated agrochemicals with different types of cancer, miscarriages, malformations and impaired fertility.

For many years, residents of San Jorge in the province of Santa Fe—in the middle of the soy production area—had reported the effects of agrochemicals that caused allergies, poisoning and respiratory problems. In March 2009, a court prohibited these fumigations. The decision was appealed, but in December a precedent-setting verdict was handed down: a civil and commercial court of appeal announced a firm ruling prohibiting fumigations within 800 meters (if by land) and within 1,500 meters (by way of aerial fumigation) near residential areas. With an eye on campaigning by residents of the localities of La Leonesa and Las Palmas against fumigations on a rice farm, and to prevent direct action, the judges invoked the precautionary principle that in view of the possible irremediable environmental damage, protective measures had to be taken. On the same day of the verdict, the Argentine government approved the launching of Monsanto’s new soybean, RR2, which is ‘more productive and resistant to agrochemicals’. The government plans to increase grain production by 60 per cent by 2020 (ibid.).

To sum up the research findings and conclusions reached by Giarracca and Teubal the technological package involved in soy production threatens food sovereignty, produces important health problems via fumigations of all types, has negative effects on the quality of the soil, impacts on the biodiversity of flora and fauna in rural areas, and contributes to the dissemination of toxic residues throughout the environment. Furthermore, the massive use of fertilizers and agrochemicals in general affects lakes, rivers and oceans in vast regions of the world and also has a bearing on global climate change (drought and floods), as has recently been the case in Argentina.

The expulsion of populations from agriculture and from rural areas, mostly small and medium-scale peasant farmers and labourers, is not a minor ‘external effect’ of this activity. While labour is ‘saved’ and huge profits are made, the soyazation process entails the disappearance of farms and the reduction of food production oriented to local needs.

## 6. Conclusion

Our analysis of the contemporary dynamics of agrarian extractivism—landgrabbing for energy, minerals, and metals, and agrofood—leads us to conclude that Henry Bernstein (2010: 82-4) was substantially correct in the propositions that he established regarding the impact of globalization on agriculture and the agrarian question today. Bernstein proposes that:

1. the policy of trade liberalization, implemented within the framework of the Washington Consensus, has led to a shift in global trade patterns of agricultural commodities (increased south-north flows);
2. futures trading in agricultural commodities, i.e. speculation spurred by financialization has resulted in an increase in the price of agrofood products on different markets;
3. the removal of subsidies and other forms of support to small farmers in the south together with the promotion of ‘export platforms’ (especially of animal feeds and high-value commodities) and large-scale foreign investment in the acquisition of land for extractive purposes;
4. the increasing concentration of global corporations in both agri-input and agri-food industries, marked by mergers and acquisitions and the economic power of fewer corporations commanding larger market shares;
5. introduction of new organizational technologies deployed by these corporations along commodity chains from farming (harvesting and feeding) to retail distribution (the ‘supermarket revolution’);

6. the push by these corporations to patent intellectual property rights in genetic material, particularly as regards terminator seeds and other genetically modified products, with a devastating impact on the environment, the health of the population, biodiversity in agricultural production, rural livelihoods based on small-scale production and farming, and access of small family farmers and peasants to seeds, and food security;

7. a new technical frontier of engineering plant and animal genetic material (genetically modified organisms or GMOs), together with specialized monoculture, has contributed to a significant loss of biodiversity;

8. a new profit frontier of agrofuel production, dominated by agribusiness corporations, with a consequent loss of food security and food sovereignty;

9. the negative health consequences of the corporate agribusiness model of agriculture and the rising level of toxic chemicals in ‘industrially grown and processed foods—contributing to a trend toward nutritional diet deficiencies, obesity-related illness, and growing hunger and malnutrition; and

10. the environmental costs of the industrialization of food farming, including increased levels of fossil-fuel use and their carbon emissions.

Another conclusion we draw from our analysis of the dynamics of agricultural extractivism, a conclusion that Bernstein might have but did not reach, is that each twist and turn in the capitalist development process generates different forces of resistance, and that in the current context the dynamics of class struggle have shifted from the demand for land reform and higher wages/improved working conditions, and resistance against the neoliberal policy agenda, towards a defence of the commons (of land, water and natural resources) and an organised resistance against the socioenvironmental impacts of extractive capitalism—including environmental degradation and forced abandonment. The class struggle, in short, has moved away from workplaces to the streets and, on the extractive frontier, to the communities that are directly and negatively affected by these operations.

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(enter the email@email.com of the corresponding author)

## about the author

300 word biography



