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Authoritarianism, populism, nationalism and resistance in the agrarian South

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ABSTRACT

This special section contributes to the vibrant debates concerning the “new political moment” underway with regards to “authoritarian populism” and nationalism in the agrarian South. With neoliberal globalisation in crisis, nationalist-populist and authoritarian movements are gaining ground, often transforming state and class configurations in ways that appease landed, agro-industrial and political elites, while simultaneously seeking to neutralise forms of resistance. Rather than starting from an ambiguous concept that submerges these class conflicts and contradictions, we argue that re-centering class struggles that frame the new political moment offers a more useful framework for understanding agrarian transformation in the contemporary period.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette section spéciale contribue aux débats dynamiques concernant le «nouveau moment politique» en cours pour le «populisme autoritaire» et le nationalisme dans le secteur agricole du Sud global. Alors que la mondialisation néolibérale est en crise, les mouvements nationalistes-populistes et autoritaires gagnent du terrain, transformant souvent les configurations de classe et étatiques d'une manière à apaiser les élites politiques, foncières, et de l'agro-industrie, tout en cherchant simultanément à neutraliser différentes formes de résistance. Plutôt que de partir d'un concept ambigu noyant ces contradictions et conflits de classe, nous soutenons que le recentrage des luttes de classes qui structurent le nouveau moment politique offre un cadre plus utile pour comprendre les transformations agraires dans la période contemporaine.

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Introduction

Since the 2000s, and especially after the 2007 spike in global food prices and the 2008 global financial crisis, rural societies and agrarian economies have been undergoing profound changes. A global land grab has been unleashed, financialisation of land, food, and farming has restructured global agrarian capitalism, and we now witness new forms of

agroindustrial control, commodification, and dispossession. Agribusiness oligopolies continue to consolidate their control over land and agroindustrial value chains, but leading corporations from the Global South are increasingly becoming major players and key vehicles of agribusiness consolidation. The dominant model of agricultural production based on large-scale, genetically modified monoculture plantations continues its expansion into new frontiers, often with very negative implications for the locales in which they operate. Yet much of this takes place under the auspices of the very same political actors in the Global South who had previously opposed the incursion of agribusiness from the Global North as a new form of imperialism. Emerging economies like China, Brazil, and South Africa have further exacerbated these dynamics of agrarian change, representing new hubs of global capital that reinforce old and create new forms and sites of capital accumulation by both national and foreign elites (Oliveira and McKay 2021).

These agrarian dynamics cannot be examined on their own, divorced from the epochal shift we witness with the ongoing crisis of neoliberalism around the world, not only as an ideology and political economic project, but also as a coalition of forces and institutions. These transformations in the agrarian South¹ are converging with the recent rise of nationalist, populist, and authoritarian political projects, which gain traction through critiques of neoliberal globalisation and its “development project”, and paradoxically reassert elite power and the domination of market-based and market-oriented proposals for rural development. This special section explores the emergence of diverse forms of nationalist, authoritarian, and populist projects around the world, and the involvement in and reactions to such projects by peasants and other rural classes. The current context is one of rising global inequalities even as neoliberal globalisation faces its most intense and widespread crisis of legitimacy, exacerbated by the breakdown of global value chains in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing global economic depression (Aschoff 2020). Thus, understanding the politics of agrarian transformations is imperative – both in terms of authoritarian political projects “from above” and political responses “from below”.

This collection

This special section contributes to the vibrant and ongoing debates on the “new political moment” underway with regards to “authoritarian populism” and nationalism in the agrarian South (Akram-Lodhi 2018; Scoones et al. 2018; Bello 2019; Borras 2020). It builds on the literature on the “global land grab” (Borras et al. 2012; Oliveira, McKay, and Liu 2020) as well as the “political reactions from below” (Hall et al. 2015), particularly those articulations that transcend a simplistic embrace or dismissal of Marxism, anarchism, and leftist populism (O’Hearn and Grubačić 2016; Levien, Watts, and Yan 2018; McCarthy 2019; Roman-Alcalá 2020). The collection itself emerges from the 5th international conference on “New Extractivism, Peasantries and Social Dynamics” organised by the BRICS Initiative in Critical Agrarian Studies (BICAS) and held in Moscow at the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration (RANEP) in October 2017. BICAS is a collective of (mainly) BRICS-based researchers concerned with understanding emerging economies and their implications for agrarian transformations. This particular conference engaged with three main subthemes – all

informed by perspectives derived from agrarian political economy, political ecology, geography, anthropology, sociology, and agro-ecology:

- (a) The rise of – and current troubles within – the BRICS countries² and middle-income countries (MICs), and the implications for agrarian/rural transformations as key aspects of broader social changes, inside these countries and regionally/internationally.
- (b) The renewed interest in what some call “new extractivism” and/or “agro-extractivism” – in and in relation to the BRICS, MICs and beyond – and the role of the state as part of broader agrarian and environmental transformations, and the implications for food sovereignty.
- (c) The rise of diverse forms of nationalist, authoritarian, and populist movements and governments, within and outside the BRICS and MICs, and the involvement in and reactions to such authoritarian, nationalist, and populist projects by peasants and other rural classes.

This collection engages, only partially, with all three subthemes. The primary focus is on the third subtheme, that is, the new political moment characterised by forms of nationalist, populist and increasingly authoritarian movements and governments that are emerging from the crisis of neoliberal globalisation, and what this means for the agrarian South. Across the left-right political spectrum, we see ongoing state-capital alliances facilitating dispossession and exclusion while using nationalist and populist discourses to maintain legitimacy and establish or entrench authoritarianism. While the collection examines various degrees and forms of nationalism and authoritarianism emerging around the world, it also points to the diverse forms of resistance and counter-movements as struggles over land and livelihoods continue to unfold.

This collection consists of four articles³ and our own introduction. Mark Tilzey explores the dynamics of “radical” food sovereignty in the context of neo-extractivist development models in Ecuador and Bolivia, and within the broader context of the world capitalist system. This contribution points to the political and ecological constraints and contradictions inherent in this model as extractivist rents are used to impede radicalism through welfarism, hindering a structural transformation of the political economy, and further deepening a reliance on extractivism. Rather than a radical, counter-hegemonic movement, Tilzey argues that Latin America’s “pink tide” states – the erstwhile paragons of leftist populism – have formed alliances with classes of capital at the expense of agrarian classes struggling for radical food sovereignty. As contradictions abound, Tilzey identifies a turn towards authoritarian populism, both among those vying for state power on the left and the right. While the theorisation of authoritarian populism is thus grounded in specific case studies of Latin America, it also provokes us to pay greater attention to the Gramscian notion of *transformism* that might explain how populism appeases the oligarchy while, simultaneously, seeking to neutralise counter-hegemonic forces.

Evert Waeterloos analyzes South Africa’s state-led land reform in order to shed light on the persistent problems of clientelism, elite capture and exclusion. This contribution questions whether such failures are due to a conscious political strategy of authoritarian populism, or if they are better explained by examining specific configurations of policy and implementation that, in turn, open up spaces for authoritarianism and corruption. Rather

than as an overt political strategy or project (as per Evo Morales in Bolivia or Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil), Waeterloos finds that the lack of clarity and coherence in the state's centralised and majoritarian managerialist approach to land reform facilitates corruption, exclusion and elite bias and can ultimately create conditions for authoritarian populism to emerge. Rather than utilising authoritarian populism to explain the dismal state of agrarian reform in South Africa, therefore, Waeterloos suggests we move from careful analysis of local state-capital alliances to explain the appearance of authoritarian populism itself.

Phillip Hirsch provides a highly nuanced and historical analysis of the dynamics of land capitalisation in Thailand, revealing how populist approaches are used as forms of legitimisation by both those benefitting from and those opposing the capitalisation of land. This contribution suggests that a lens of legitimisation is necessary in order to understand the complexities of Thailand's quasi-populist land politics in the context of an authoritarian regime, which Hirsch prefers to describe as neoliberal rather than populist itself. Despite strong state-capital alliances and the rolling back of counter-movements, Hirsch argues that there remain important limitations to land dispossession in Thailand, and theoretically we are invited to consider the imbrications of nationalism and populism with neoliberalism itself, rather than against it (pace Browne, Rohac, and Kenney 2018).

The final article reveals the persistence of rural poverty in Tajikistan, as the country's cotton economy has been largely controlled by domestic elites, leading to deep inequalities and systematic marginalisation among the rural majority. In the context of widespread rural inequalities and rampant food insecurity, many farmers are caught in relations of debt and dependency within the cotton complex, or what the author refers to as "chains of exploitation". Furthermore, in recent years Chinese farm enterprises have invested in Tajikistan, receiving preferential treatment over Tajik rural dwellers when it comes to state relations. The author argues that Chinese enterprises benefit from, rather than propel, dispossession, which, combined with authoritarianism, the legacy of war, and migration, helps explain why protest against Chinese land grabs are relatively insignificant. In the context of a deepening authoritarian regime, the author shows the many nuances involved in contemporary land deals and the diverse responses "from below", and how specific constellations of state-capital alliances may, and *may not*, configure themselves into populist projects from the left or the right. Evidently, not all marginalisation plays into authoritarian populist or neoliberal framings.

Finally, here in our introduction we discuss the new political moment in which this research is contextualised, then turn to a brief analysis of recent dynamics of land dispossession and state-capital alliances that undergirds this moment, and some of the major forms of resistance and counter-movements that we witness in the agrarian South. We conclude with a brief discussion of the diversity of theoretical frameworks and the multiplicity of political directions that may be pursued against neoliberal globalisation, and the various forms of nationalism, populism, authoritarianism and resistance that have emerged in this new moment of crisis.

A new political moment

Neoliberal globalisation is in crisis (Calhoun 2011). Whether it nears collapse, or may continue to "fall forward" in new iterations, is subject of great debate. "While neoliberalism's last act has been predicted far too many times over the years", suggest

Peck and Theodore (2019, 263), “what can at least be said of this moment of actually existing nihilism is that the project seems increasingly to have given up on its own future, as the horizons of even nominally free-market action and imagination seem to be collapsing.”

Unlike the deep faith in market-solutions that has characterised the previous decades, rising socio-economic inequalities, a climate in crisis and the demise of the mainstream political parties and institutions of the late twentieth century have given way to a new political moment characterised by various forms of nationalism, populism, and authoritarianism. Anti-establishment politics have gained ground, as discontent with the *status quo* grows among the masses. The various forms of emergency public health measures, lock-down of entire populations, and deep economic crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic are certainly exacerbating the crisis of neoliberalism, polarising and radicalising the masses, and hastening an epochal transformation. Despite common perceptions in the Global North, this new political moment did not begin with populist xenophobia in the beacons of liberal democracies in the Global North, epitomised by Brexit and Donald Trump’s trade wars. As Bello (2019) and Hart (2019) demonstrate, the resurgence of nationalism and authoritarianism has been brewing in the Global South as a response to the limitations of Keynesian developmentalism and the ravages of neoliberalism many years before. And as many others have argued, this populist counter-movement to neoliberal globalisation has deep roots in rural areas and among the “floating populations” of landless peasants and precarious workers all around the world: from the rise of Recep Erdoğan’s Justice and Development Party in Turkey (Gürel, Küçük, and Taş 2019), Narendra Modi’s Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party in India (Chacko 2020), and Vladimir Putin’s authoritarian nationalism in Russia (Mamonova 2019), to the retrenchment of right-wing violence and authoritarianism across much of Latin America (Coronado 2019; Middeldorp and Le Billon 2019; Rojas, de Azevedo Olival, and Olival 2019; Tilzey 2020, this volume), Asia (Hirsch 2019, this volume) and Africa (Hart 2019; Monjane and Bruna 2020; Waeterloos 2020, this volume).

This analysis of the new political moment in terms of resurgent nationalism, authoritarianism, and various forms of populism has become a pillar of critical agrarian and development studies. Of particular importance has been the re-emergence of the term “authoritarian populism”. In a recent Forum on Authoritarian Populism and the Rural World, published in the *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Scoones et al. (2018) begin from a basic understanding of “populism” as a movement that necessarily pits itself (the people) against others, often based on race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, etc. Scoones et al. (2018) then continue to explain this new political moment in the context of the rise of distinct forms of authoritarianism, which leverages populism in ways that

frequently circumvents, eviscerates or captures democratic institutions, even as it uses them to legitimate its dominance, centralise power and crush or severely limit dissent. Charismatic leaders, personality cults and nepotistic, familial or kleptocratic rule combined with impunity are common, though not essential, features of authoritarian populism. (Scoones et al. 2018, 3)

According to this framework, which appears to have quickly become dominant in critical agrarian and development studies, authoritarian populism spans the left-right political spectrum, and may thus characterise such diverse political figures as Donald Trump in the US, Evo Morales in Bolivia, and Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, among several

others. Evidently, such ambiguity and flexibility of the term can lead to “complete conceptual chaos” (Müller 2016, 22) if not further defined.

One of the best efforts to do so has been undertaken by Jun Borrás, who refers to populism as “the deliberate political act of aggregating disparate and even competing and contradictory class and group interests and demands into a relatively homogenised voice, that is, ‘we, the people’, against an ‘adversarial them’ for tactical or strategic purposes” (2020, 5). Acknowledging its open-endedness and ideological flexibility, Borrás engages with two types of populism. The first is right-wing populism, defined as “a regressive, conservative, or reactionary type of populism that promotes or defends capitalism in the name of the ‘people’; in its current manifestation, it is also xenophobic, nationalist, racist, and/or misogynistic” (2020, 5). The second is agrarian populism, defined as

that political bundling of various rural-based or rural-oriented social groups and class interests and issues into a homogenised category, ‘the people of the land’; many variants of agrarian populism are anti-capitalist and try to advance a ‘peasant way’, or alternative development. (2020, 5)

Borrás further puts forth a number of features which provide a more nuanced account of populism as a relational, shifting and fluid concept. They also set the stage for a leftist and/or progressive attempt to seize upon the elements of populism towards a more emancipatory, egalitarian, just, and sustainable political-economic and agrarian transformation in the face of the current crisis of neoliberal globalisation (cf. Mouffe 2018).

But even when thus refined, this framework may not always provide clear explanations for the diversity of agrarian politics we currently witness in the Global South, nor does it necessarily enable us to advance the plurality of critiques needed for successful confrontation against capitalism and authoritarianism in all its forms. After all, authoritarian currents effectively run through all populist movements around the world, including those with a leftist, progressive, and environmentalist orientation (McCarthy 2019). Moreover, right-wing authoritarians have seized power in many instances by exploiting the contradictions and ambiguities of leftist populists themselves (Andrade 2019; Bello 2019; Gürel, Küçük, and Taş 2019), and even when nominally seeking to assert a leftist politics, populists have often resorted to authoritarian crackdowns on many of their erstwhile supporters to safeguard their own power (Tilzey, this volume). As Akram-Lodhi (2018, 2–3) has argued, therefore, “the use of authoritarian populism as a framing for contemporary emancipatory rural politics could be, in many contexts, at best politically misleading and at worst politically dangerous”.

The contributions to this collection echo Akram-Lodhi (2018), Hart (2019), and others in a constructive critique of the terms with which recent debates have taken place in critical agrarian and development studies regarding the resurgence of nationalism, authoritarianism, and resistance in the agrarian South. In order to do so, it is useful to revisit the origins of the term “authoritarian populism” itself. It was coined by Stuart Hall, in dialogue with Nicos Poulantza’s concept of “authoritarian statism”, to describe “a movement towards a dominative and ‘authoritarian’ form of democratic class politics – paradoxically, apparently rooted in the ‘transformism’ (Gramsci’s term) of populist discontent” (1985, 118) which resulted in popular support for Margaret Thatcher’s neoliberal counter-revolution (1985, 116). It is particularly ironic, therefore, that contemporary discussions of “authoritarian populism” in the new political moment emerge from a reaction to, and

rejection of, the kind of “authoritarian populism” that Hall was originally referring to, namely neoliberalism. This matters. As Akram-Lodhi (2018, 6) puts it, “[t]his current crisis is a crisis of the authoritarian populism that legitimated neoliberalism”. Continuing along Hall’s original interpretation, Hart (2019, 308) has shown that concern over “authoritarian populism” has now “morph[ed] into a trope of liberal anxiety”. The neoliberal *status quo* takes offense at right-wing populism, and fears the counter-movement of left-wing populism alike, if not more so. Obfuscated by this mainstream (and, usually, neoliberal) narrative is the way that this new debate about populism effectively and problematically severs the political from the economic: populism becomes an empty tactical vessel, which appears to be filled at one moment with right-wing prejudices and policies, and at another with left-wing hopes and aspirations, seeking to melt class contradictions into the imagined community of “the people” (cf. Anderson 2006). After all, as Borrás (2020) puts it, populism is defined by the ambiguous and contradictory aggregation of disparate class interests into a supposedly homogenised voice and identity, hence the preeminence of nationalism as the ideology to fill this role. In Hall’s original articulation, however, class analysis need not be sacrificed for a critique of authoritarian populism – rather, the leftist critique emerges precisely through careful attention to the imbrication of class with race, ethnicity, and other supposed markers of national identity (Hall 1985; Hart 2019).⁴

Consequently, as Akram-Lodhi (2018) suggests, the current moment is better understood not as one of “authoritarian populism”, but as a regressive counter-movement to neoliberal globalisation, which largely manifests as right-wing nationalist populism due to the class contradictions of neoliberalism itself, and the limitations of the leftist projects that became accommodated to it in recent decades (cf. Andrade 2019; Gürel, Küçük, and Taş 2019; McCarthy 2019; Peck and Theodore 2019; Chacko 2020). But our intention is not to stoke debates pitting leftist or agrarian populism against different currents of agrarian Marxism, or even against anarchist and other anti-authoritarian currents of critical agrarian studies and politics (cf. O’Hearn and Grubačić 2016; Levien, Watts, and Yan 2018; Roman-Alcalá 2020). Rather, this collection echoes the sentiment that the empirical conditions of the agrarian South itself call for a reframing of the debate. Perhaps the pressing issue is not so much “whether or not left populism is adequate to confront and counter increasingly virulent and racist forms of right-wing populism”, but rather “the more salient and politically useful questions turn around *how* to produce deeper critical understandings of the forces generating intensifying nationalisms, racisms, and populist politics in the neoliberal era” (Hart 2019, 308, 3010). After all, whether framed as authoritarian populism (Scoones et al. 2018), right-wing nationalism (Akram-Lodhi 2018), authoritarian neoliberalism (Saad-Filho and Boffo 2020), or more simply as fascism and counterrevolution (Bello 2019), all of these conceptualisations point to important commonalities based on a disregard for democratic institutions, often nepotistic and kleptocratic, and the violent reassertion of capitalist relations and elite power over peasants, workers, and other subaltern classes across cities and the countryside.

In this collection, most contributions set the framework by Scoones et al. (2018) as their point of reference. Without being polemical and contestational (cf. Akram-Lodhi 2018, footnote 2), however, each of the contributions expands the debate in new directions. Waeterloos (this volume), for example, examines South Africa’s politics around land reform in light of Scoones et al.’s (2018) framework, but finds that “the concept of authoritarian populism ... adds little to explain (neo-patrimonial) clientelism, elite capture, and

exclusion of poor segments of the black rural and urban population”. Hirsch (this volume) explicitly situates his contribution in light of Scoones et al.’s (2018) argument and the way their framework has been developed in the *Journal of Peasant Studies*, nonetheless he turns instead to the term “neoliberal authoritarianism” in his analysis of the political dynamics around land relations in Thailand (much like Saad-Filho and Boffo 2020, in the context of Brazil). In the case of Bolivia and Ecuador, Tilzey (this volume) indicates how the “two variants of authoritarian populism”, on the left and right, ultimately depend on extractivism and curtail democratic movements for food sovereignty. While in reference to Tajikistan, there is no mention of authoritarian populism at all, but rather the deepening of authoritarianism and what this means for agrarian change and contestation. In these cases, we may conclude, the framework of “populism”, authoritarian or otherwise, is better understood as a mere “symptom, within the representative structures of the capitalist state, of repressed class antagonisms” (Bray 2015, 40–41), rather than a useful political category in its own right.

In order to understand contemporary transformations in the agrarian South during this unfolding crisis of neoliberal globalisation, therefore, it might be more useful to re-center the class struggles that frame the new political moment, rather than start from an ambiguous concept that submerges these class conflicts and contradictions into the very spectacle it seeks to analyze. Indeed, the ubiquity of class relations and dynamics in capitalism remains a guiding thread in our analyses, even in this new political moment (Peck and Theodore 2019; Bernstein 2020, 11–12). This entails engaging with forms and processes of accumulation, class dynamics, and the nature and role of the state, in order to trace out what Bello (2019) has called the dialectics of revolution and counterrevolution. While fully unpacking all these dynamics goes well beyond the scope of our essay, the following sections point to some common themes discussed in this collection that cut through these important aspects of agrarian political economy and can help us understand the new political moment and its implications for agrarian transformation.

Land dispossession and state-capital alliances

Processes of land control, access and dispossession are central to understanding capitalism and agrarian change, both historical and contemporary. Marx’s “primitive accumulation” (1976) and Harvey’s notion of “accumulation by dispossession” (2005) provide classic and useful frameworks to understand the dynamics of capitalist accumulation, where dispossession, accompanied by enclosure, privatisation, commodification and financialisation, makes assets available to surplus capital at low costs and facilitates the further expansion and reproduction of capitalist relations.⁵ At the same time, extra-economic power – the widespread use of violence and coercive measures – and state-capital alliances are considered as a key condition to deploy forces to expropriate land for capital accumulation (Glassman 2006; Levien 2011; Sargeson 2013), despite states having to maintain legitimacy by appearing to be outside society and working to reconcile conflicting class interests (Poulantzas 1978; Fox 1993). Often as a result, direct producers are separated from the means of production and/or adversely incorporated into the new rural economy as wage workers or contracted small farmers, common property rights are privatised, non-capitalist modes of production are either harnessed or destroyed, and the rural power dynamics are reconfigured (Wolford et al. 2013).

The diverse ways in which capital has penetrated, or commodified, the various facets of agrarian life and livelihoods have also led to different forms of dispossession practices which do not necessarily entail physical displacement or dispossession such as “control grabbing”, “value grabbing”, “virtual grabs”, or “silent dispossession” (Borras et al. 2012; McKay 2018; Kan 2019; Roohi 2020). Such diversified and complicated realities over land and dispossession cannot be simply reduced to a driver or consequence of authoritarian populism but have rather emerged with the relatively unfettered capitalist penetration of the countryside. Rather than resulting from the (re)assertion of authoritarian varieties of populism, therefore, dispossession in many cases still results precisely through the deepening of neoliberalism itself. Moreover, resistance itself often shuns agrarian populist tropes (e.g. opposition to neoliberal globalisation) to fully embrace neoliberal terms and aspirations.

In Tajikistan, it is not foreign investors who are driving land dispossession, but rather it is they who are benefitting from the steady dispossession by the Tajik state through authoritarian market controls that continuously hinder Tajik rural dwellers from pursuing farming as a viable livelihood. This is particularly important, given the fact that dominant discourses of land grabbing tend to be associated with rural dwellers’ loss of land, and with leftist and liberal concerns about the goals and effects of right-wing populism (cf. Coronado 2019; Middeldorp and Le Billon 2019; Rojas, de Azevedo Olival, and Olival 2019; Monjane and Bruna 2020). It bears repeating, then, as Mark Tilzey (this volume) and Waeterloos (this volume) point out, that land dispossession has resulted from state-capital alliances that undergird leftist varieties of populism as well, not only in Ecuador, Bolivia, and South Africa, but across various other parts of the world (McCarthy 2019).

Right-wing and nationalist populism, particularly when it becomes more authoritarian, is certainly leading to, and often exacerbates, forms of dispossession, but overly broad frameworks do not necessarily enable us to capture precisely the class interests and how particular state-capital alliances are reconfigured in each local and regional context to produce various combinations of land dispossession and adverse integration into the faltering neoliberal global order (Akram-Lodhi 2018; Coronado 2019; Hart 2019). Rather, this requires going beyond the discourse to a serious engagement with the role and nature of the state, and thus, an analysis into the nature of the class and intra-class relationships in society and in agrarian formations. As Bernstein puts it, “authoritarian populism, for all its diverse manifestations, should always be interrogated first through the questions: what class interests does it serve? By what means? And with what effects?” (2020, 14). Otherwise, analysing authoritarian populism in a solely discursive manner or as a broad catch-all concept can obscure the more diverse terrain of coercion and consent upon which resistance and counter-movements emerge.

Resistance and counter-movements

While the alliances or coalitions among state and capitalist actors draw on both soft and hard techniques to enforce their control over land and resources, smallholders or local residents do not automatically submit to the pressures of power and exploitation; they are active agents who can mobilise “political reactions from below” (Hall et al. 2015). These actions or reactions range from various forms of social and class-based struggles over property relations, the distribution of values, or the compensation for people’s

expulsion from their land to demands to be inserted into land deals as workers or contract farmers, to contestations or counter-mobilisations against land deal resisters (e.g. poor versus poor). Further operations, strategies, and tactics of corporations, states, societies or state-capital alliances in response to or in anticipation of protest both at the local level or going beyond the local to national or international levels – political (re)actions “from above” – are also nonnegligible components of the agrarian politics and constitute trajectories of agrarian change especially in authoritarian contexts.

Scholarly works in critical agrarian and development studies are continuing their discussions on the existence or absence of resistance in different contexts (e.g. Hall et al. 2015), the drivers and sources of contentious politics, mobilisation groups and their interactions with opponents, including a deeper understanding of popular support for authoritarian or right-wing politics among rural dwellers – or what Mamonova calls the “silent majority” in the context of popular support for Putin in rural Russia (Mamonova 2019; Mamonova and Franquesa 2020). In reference to Tajikistan, the author offers explanations for the apparent absence of protest among rural dwellers who are marginalised and excluded. Rather than framing these dynamics as authoritarian populism, the author turns to a careful analysis of state-capital alliances, and the manner in which the specific nature of cotton production shapes the “escape or survival strategies” (Scott 2009, 22) and the daily life of rural Tajikistan. The author clusters the rural responses in three different forms: exit (migration); voice (petition writing and everyday forms of resistance through jokes and rumours, as well as concealed crop diversification); and loyalty (adverse incorporation). These are indeed forms of counter-movement, however the author does not attribute the absence of rebellion or revolt to the lack of consciousness of exploitation, but more to suppression from the authoritarian regime, the fear of new conflicts, and the recognition of adverse incorporation as an effective way to secure their fragile livelihood. This is particularly significant given the entrance of new investors from China in recent years, a phenomenon that has sparked strong opposition and nationalist-populist rhetoric around the world (Hofman and Ho 2012; Oliveira 2018), including in neighbouring Kazakhstan.

Thus, resistance is not only articulated through overt struggles, or everyday forms of defiance summarised by Scott (1985) as “weapons of the weak”; resistance resides in the multitude of responses or alterations continued and/or created anew in order to confront the modes of ordering that currently dominate our societies (van der Ploeg 2008, 265). This has been particularly the case in post-socialist contexts where authoritarianism forecloses more confrontational forms of struggle over land and food sovereignty, such as in Russia (Visser et al. 2015) and China (Zhang and Qi 2019; Zhang 2020). On the other hand, perhaps the most prominent and overt forms of resistance to the onslaughts of neoliberal globalisation and authoritarian populist reactions at present lies in Rojava, where an eclectic coalition of Kurds, Arabs, Turks, and various internationalist allies have joined under the banner of eco-socialism, food sovereignty, and feminism to defeat the emergence of the Islamic State to their south, while under constant attack from the increasingly authoritarian Turkish nationalists across the border to their north (Cemgil and Hoffmann 2016; Leyesa 2019). While both challengers to the success of the Rojava revolution may be described as varieties of authoritarian populism, the radical inclusivity of Rojava itself is the opposite of a populist movement of “the people” against an “Other”. In fact, as a struggle framed by “democratic confederalism”, the Rojava revolution cultivates an

alternative to the nation-state politics that defines populism and populist strategy in the first place. Ultimately, neither in the case of quiet social movements in post-socialist contexts, nor in the case of overt and armed revolutions, is the struggle for food sovereignty easily encapsulated as a form of agrarian populism.

Where populist currents of food sovereignty do take shape, the aspirational goals of agrarian populism are even harder to uphold. Following Edelman and Borras (2016), Mark Tilzey (this volume) argues that “radical” food sovereignty, as one of the most important contemporary agrarian resistance movements, envisages an abrogation of the imposition of “market dependency” on the “classes of labour” as a prerequisite for social and ecological sustainability. With cases from Bolivia and Ecuador, Tilzey perceives resistance as a broader counter-hegemony notion that could take the form of leftist populist attempts to foment social articulation against neoliberalism and imperialism. Nonetheless, those efforts falter as discourses and interests of leftist social movements become suppressed by the increasingly authoritarian nature of the populist governments in the countries.

How then do we overcome conceptual confusion around agrarian populism as a form of resistance to authoritarian populism? Whether resistance movements are unable to coalesce around a leftist populism to oppose neoliberal globalisation and the entrenchment of authoritarianism (as in Tajikistan), or these movements become undermined by the manner that leftist populist leaders re-legitimize capitalism by widening the scope of its beneficiaries (as Tilzey shows in the cases of Ecuador and Bolivia), the specific manners in which such counter-movements advance – and fail to advance – emerge from the particular constellations of state-capital relations at hand, and how they articulate with specific ideologies rooted in race/ethnicity, gender/sexuality, and national identity.

Moreover, previous victories and domestic power established by peasants and other subaltern rural classes may transform into bureaucratic clientelism (as Waeterloos shows in the case of South Africa), and even protect land tenure for peasants domestically by projecting neoliberal agribusiness outwards into neighbouring countries (as Hirsch shows in the case of Thailand). In none of these cases do we find a clear articulation of conflicts in terms of authoritarian populism versus more emancipatory forms of populism. Rather, we witness the various class contradictions engendered by neoliberalism coming undone in the face of crisis, sometimes through populist movements, at other times against them, and yet on other occasions in ways that completely bypass this framework entirely. As such, our investigation of how resistance and counter-movements are taking place in the agrarian South in this new political moment needs to progress from the empirical realities we may find on the ground, and “theorise up” from them rather than impose against them frameworks that may or may not suitably capture the dynamics at hand.

Conclusion

We are currently living through a new political moment, which may very well be an epochal shift unlike anything we have seen in the past fifty years. Neoliberal globalisation is faltering, yet the agrarian dynamics that we have witnessed over the neoliberal era are not necessarily giving way to more democratic and sustainable forms of rural livelihood and agro-ecological development. Instead, nationalist and authoritarian movements are gaining ground, often transforming state and class configurations in ways that appease landed and political elites, agroindustrialists, financiers, and transnational traders, while simultaneously

seeking to neutralise counter-hegemonic forces. While it has quickly become commonplace to examine this new political moment in terms of authoritarian populism, resulting in an aspiration for leftist varieties of populism that may counteract this right-wing onslaught, our collection gives reason to pause and reexamine the terms of this debate.

In line with Stuart Hall's original articulation of authoritarian populism as the Gramscian transformism that propelled the neoliberal counter-revolution, we echo Hart's (2019, 321) contemporary analysis of "how nationalisms and neoliberal forms of capitalism have worked in and through one another to generate populist politics in specific but always interconnected national settings". This means that, rather than placing authoritarian populism as our subject of analysis, and conjuring populist alternatives for emancipatory projects, we must delve more carefully instead into the conjunctural analysis of the specific ways in which the ravages of neoliberalism have reconfigured class alliances, at times dispossessing and at other moments adversely integrating the peasantry and other subaltern rural classes of labour into circuits of capital accumulation, and just as often triggering reactionary, xenophobic, and authoritarian sentiments as quiet social movements of daily life resistance and democratic aspiration. In the face of the likely demise of neoliberal globalisation, let's also struggle to bury alongside it the authoritarian populism that has sustained neoliberal hegemony for the past fifty years, exposing the class contradictions of nationalist and authoritarian projects that seek to drown our awareness of class struggle in the murky waters of nationalism and the empty signifiers of populism.

Notes

1. The term "agrarian South" emphasises rural areas, peoples, and agrarian change in the "Global South". As Dirlik (2007) points out, the term "Global South" has limitations, but it succinctly captures ongoing socio-economic inequalities between countries with opposing histories as colonisers/colonised, and early/late industrialisation. This North/South distinction became particularly useful since the downfall of the Soviet Union, and the geopolitical reorganisation away from the "capitalist West / socialist East / and Third World non-alignment". Including Tajikistan in the "agrarian South" reflects how it has more in common with countries that remain more agrarian than industrialised, and in a relatively subordinate position in histories of imperialism/colonialism. The fact we include Tajikistan in the "agrarian South", however, does not suggest all post-Soviet countries would be included in this category as well. Russia, for example, might not fit adequately in this regard.
2. Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.
3. The article on Tajikistan will be released at a later date and will be kept anonymous throughout this introduction at the request of the author.
4. Similar approaches are witnessed in leftist critiques of right-wing populism and authoritarianism in the Global North as well (Mamonova and Franquesa 2020; Roman-Alcalá 2020), which call attention to the convergences and continuities, as much as the transformations, of the class and racial configurations of right-wing populism, authoritarianism, and nationalism in the US and Europe.
5. But see Hall (2013) for an overview and critique of "primitive accumulation" and "accumulation by dispossession" frameworks with regards to the global land grab.

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