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Book review

Constructing a New Framework for Rural Development, P. Milone, F. Ventura and J. Ye (eds) (2015). 338 pp., Research in Rural Sociology and Development Vol. 22, Emerald UK, ISBN: 978-1-78441-622-5.

1. Introductory remarks: creating space

Tony Fuller

New frameworks for addressing and analyzing rural change have not often appeared in rural studies and it was refreshing for me to introduce the book, *Constructing a New Framework for Rural Development* as a vibrant contribution to scholarship in this regard. It is especially important to have a new framework to consider on the subject of the new/regenerative peasantry and their contribution over three continents to novel ways and means of sustaining and enriching 'the rural'. The context for this double session was set at the outset of the International Rural Sociology conference by two opening plenary sessions on the topic of the peasantry which demonstrated clearly that small holders, their resistances and their innovative ways have persisted for decades of marginalized study and policy neglect.

My own experience is reflective of this familiar journey. In the late 1960s, studying in the north Italian Apennines, I met mostly peasants and peasant workers. I read copiously to explain their continued existence in a land of economic miracles and relied a lot on Chayanov and Kautsky, before succumbing to the predictions of Franklin in his book, *The End of the European Peasantry*. Well, as you know, it didn't happen. Neither were small farms eliminated as promised by Mansholt in the 1980s for all of the European Union as it was then. Academic research during this whole period went in search of the 'optimal' size of farm, the diffusion of innovations, which designated the 'laggards' as mostly peasants who would soon drop out of the race to modernity, and part-time farms which were also assumed to be mostly peasant operations and therefore marginal. With Pluriactivity, operationalized in part by policy as multifunctionality, the various ways of managing land and reproducing adaptive livelihoods became legitimised as topics for policy and categories for study. Hence we come to the present generation, led by van der Ploeg, Ye and Schneider and their cohorts who have recognised something different and resilient occurring in the countryside of Europe, China and Brazil.

What follows is a combined Introduction to the main ideas in the book with an emphasis on the theoretical underpinnings of a new form of energy underlying rural development.

2. Constructing a new framework for rural development: a synthesis

P. Milone, F. Ventura, J.D. van der Ploeg, T. Marsden, S. Schneider

J. Ye

This book is the outcome of the third in a series of conferences, held in Roma (2009), Porto Alegre (2011) and Beijing (2013), on a comparative research project on rural development processes in Brazil, China and the European Union.²

The outcomes of the first conference, held in Rome, were published in a special English language issue of *Rivista di Economia Agraria* (2010, vol. 65 issue 2) which contains papers that identify the similarities and dissimilarities in rural development processes in Brazil, China and EU. The outcomes of the second conference are set out in a book edited by Hebinck et al. (2014) which empirically explores different experiences of market development, specifically focusing on new markets with characteristics that are 'structurally' different from 'mainstream markets'. Such markets, wherever they are located, play a key role in rural development processes. The analysis covers a broad range of such markets in Europe, Brazil and China and Africa.

A third book (Milone et al., 2015a,b,c,d) brings together a selection of papers presented at the Beijing conference. This meeting focused identifying the actors who drive rural development processes, their motivations, how they relate to each other and how they structure their practices. It also explored the other side of the coin: how the newly emerging practices, and rural development processes as a whole, shape the actors who are involved in them.

This current publication, the fourth in the series, arises from a panel session held at the Conference of the International Rural Sociology Association (IRSA) held in Toronto in August 2016. In this workshop, convened by Tony Fuller, the content of the third publication (Milone et al., 2015a,b,c,d) was critically reviewed and discussed. This new publication contains articles based on these discussions which make a further contribution to the broader debates around food sovereignty, new markets that link food producers and consumers in novel ways, the significance of agroecology and the emergence and development of new rural development processes. These discussions revived a set of questions that had seemingly been disappeared irretrievably: Who are the peasants? How do they produce? How do they link to wider society and especially to consumers? And, what is their relevance for food security and food sovereignty?

Rural development is a multidimensional, multi-level and multi-actor process that occurs through encounters between different agents and through complex, and often contradictory,

² The groups participating in the comparative research are: the Graduate Programme of Rural Development of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (PGDR/UFRGS), the College of Humanities and Development of China (COHD/CAU, China), the Rural Sociology Group of Wageningen University (RSO/WUR) and the Rural Sociology Group of Perugia University.

practices (Long, 2015). Rural development needs to be understood as a set of responses to market failures. These responses are ways in which a rural area, and the agricultural system embedded in it try to find new solutions to internal and external socio-economic and institutional pressures. These pressures have been leading to the loss of community identity and capacity for autonomous responses to declines in prices for agricultural produce (the ‘income squeeze in agriculture’), the growing disparity between regions, rural depopulation and poverty, and environmental degradation.

These responses assume, and create, new relations between the rural and the urban. Often they occur through (and materialize as) the production of new goods and services that satisfy emerging societal values (Ploeg et al., 2015a,b). At a wider level they translate into the construction of new markets (Ploeg et al., 2012). This often feeds back into the farm level, enhancing multi-functionality (Milone, and Ventura, 2015).

The third book (Milone et al., 2015a,b,c,d) contained a range of studies which investigate the actors involved in creating the space needed for maneuver, in initiating and developing new practices and shaping them to the local situation. The ability to regain and enlarge the autonomy of rural activities in relation to external, global and homogenizing tendencies emerged as being of strategic importance.

The empirical research in these books shows that rural development processes can be initiated by a very different groups of actors. In Europe, rural development is mostly driven by farmers’ ongoing search for new possibilities that allow for the continuity of their farms. Thus, new rural development practices are first born as individual initiatives and then, often, tied together into new networks. In Brazil, social movements play a central role in triggering rural development processes, whilst in China the state clearly plays the leading role. This does not imply that the state does not play a role in Brazilian and European rural development processes, or that there is an absence of individual initiatives in Brazil or China. Far from it. The point is that the engine of rural development processes clearly differs between China, Brazil and Europe.

In comparing these experiences, peasants emerged as playing a central and pivotal role: they are the main protagonists of the ‘social struggles’ that aim to protect and/or mobilize the resources needed for new products, services and markets. In Brazil and China, as much as in Europe, peasants play a central role in constructing and developing newly-opened spaces (Ye and Fu, 2015a,b). Their agency, defined by Long as “the ability of an actor to process social experience and to devise ways of coping with social life, even under the most extreme forms of coercion” (Long, 1985: p 172), is decisive. Through agency, new practices, new initiatives, new networks and new forms of production, distribution and consumption are designed, tried and implemented. These, in turn reshape the actors involved and their practices.

The renewed importance of agricultural production in no food sectors and, consequently, of the available natural and social resources as well as their spatial location raises the possible danger that rural areas will become a dumping ground for new biotechnological industries (Ye and Fu, 2015a,b). In rural areas there is an increasing competition in the use of locally available resources (both natural and cultural), which are a common pool of input for different existing and newly emerging activities. When these resources are used in economic processes they can either be reproduced or destroyed according to how they are managed and used. These resources are the foundation from which rural areas can respond to economic, social and environmental challenges and opportunities. As such maintenance and enhancement are crucial aspects of sustainable rural development. It is of utmost importance to recognize and identify the practices, actors and interactions that contribute to the maintenance and reproduction of these

resources and those that do not.

The third book (Milone et al., 2015a,b,c,d) provides a contextual background to this one. Several contributions to this book respond to, and build upon, the previous book. To put the contents of the current book in context we summarize the main points identified as key elements in sustainable rural development practices in the previous book. They fall into four main groupings. These elements emerge from the different case studies in the last book, albeit at different levels of intensity, in different ways and in different temporal and/or spatial terms. The contributors to the previous book emphasized that these four elements not only have to be present, but they must be mutually consistent with each other and interrelated if sustainable rural development is to be triggered and to endure.

2.1. Peasants play a central role in creating original novelties that respond to newly emerging demands

The first theme to emerge from the comparative analysis is the importance of novelties that are produced by peasants. These novelties stem from peasants’ initiatives that change their production practices and/or products in ways that effectively respond to new societal and economic demands.

Peasant’s initiatives can be widely found in all agrarian sectors and all rural communities and they are intrinsic drivers of local development and social change (Ye, 2002). Milone et al. (2015a,b,c,d) extensively documented these novelties in Europe, China and Brazil. In Europe, the novelties are closely linked to the new multifunctional role of farms (Milone and Ventura, 2015). Many novelties at first sight appear to be just minor changes in production, cooperation or the way resources are combined. Sometimes they are introduced purposively, other times unintentionally: either way their success and subsequent diffusion can increase the competitiveness of the local economy and enhance the quality of the countryside and the lives of local inhabitants. These changes may consist of, and result in, new insights, practices, artefacts, and/or combinations (of resources, of technological procedures, of different bodies of knowledge) that enable specific constellations (a process of production, a network, the integration of two different activities) to function better (van Broekhuizen et al., 2015a,b).

In Brazil, the novelties mainly consist of new forms of market relations. These make it possible to re-appropriate local and specific skills and to develop technological alternatives for food production and distribution in small and family farms. These novelties (“hidden treasures” as Petersen, 2015a,b calls them) are mainly the sprouts of new social organizations (Schneider and Gazzolla, 2015) and involve radical changes in productive practices or in the on-farm processing resulting in new food marketing activities and new markets. Novelties in Brazil are often a form of resistance to the dominant agro-food system from marginalized family farms. New cooperatives and other forms of farmers’ association and political organizations have emerged to inspire the development of novelties and facilitate their spread.

China’s novelties are not limited to peasants’ rapport with the market, but typically also include new tools to renew villages and rural communities, many of which have been hard-hit by ‘hollowing-out’ (Wu and Ye, 2014). These new tools allows for reproduction and continuity at a time when rural villages and communities are threatened on many fronts. They are also a response to the institutional marginalization of the peasantry and arise as a result of the peasantry’s ability to identify the weakest elements in the socio-economic and institutional structures. These are innovations that have led to substantial rural reform. It is not overstatement to say that the peasantry are at the heart of rural

communities and that without them and their innovative capacities, these rural communities, would surely vanish (Ye and Fu, 2015a,b).

2.2. The importance of interfaces that enable multi-dimensional, multi-level and multi-actor processes of development

While rural development initiatives are generally initiated by individual actors, they are developed within heterogeneous rural systems where many actors have different views and different interests to develop or maintain. These actors (whether individual or institutional) have different life histories and objectives that will influence the positions they take towards these development initiatives. Sometimes there is a convergence about the goals and strategies that should be pursued. At other times there is disagreement. Even when there is a shared strategic goal that converges around 'sustainable development', the preferred routes and short-term goals can be very different.

To establish a truly collective process it is not sufficient to just identify and manage elements where synergies can be developed. Rather it is necessary that the different actors involved seek to truly align and integrate their objectives and behavior. This process should be based on 'collective co-production' which recognizes and develops the complementarity between the resources (natural and social) being mobilized and their use. This often means going beyond individual interests and identifying and accepting broader shared interests. One of the themes in Milone et al.,'s 2015a,b,c,d book was to examine the interfaces (the places/spaces and points at the local, territorial and community level) where new values and knowledge are commonly constructed.

These interfaces can differ as a result of specific local patterns and dynamics that are shaped by local history and their social-institutional context (Long, 2015). This explains why some European LEADER Local Action Plans have been very successful and have become real engines of development, while in other areas/regions they have not achieved very much at all (de Poele, 2015). One reason why many Local Action Plans have been unsuccessful is because they lacked a suitable interface, a *locus* for aligning individual behavior with common goals and interests. The interface is also where the seeds of change are nurtured so they can sprout. These interfaces and the new networks of consensus and trust that they engender allow different actors to negotiate and resolve conflicting opinions about resources, reputation, and the likelihood of success of a practice/initiative. They offer a new operating space where the power of the peasantry can be increased and developed. They can also lead the community to recognize its own ability to reproduce common resources and to become more conscious of its own agency, which in turn increases people's confidence as social actors (Milone and Ventura, 2015).

2.3. The main characteristics of the new peasantry are strategically relevant for rural development

The innovative practices and novelties, documented in Milone et al.,'s (2015a,b,c,d,) represent new pathways that are effective responses to the newly-emerging and very heterogenous complexities that exist in different rural contexts. These practices are implemented by actors/farmers whose mode of farming has specific characteristics that revolve around their ongoing search to regain and expand their autonomy. This 'new peasantry' may be heterogenous and scattered around the globe but they share in common the ability to continually restructure and rearrange their internal and external farm relations in response to changes in biological cycles and socio-economic demand, doing so in ways that seek to reduce their dependency on markets for inputs

(technologies and industrial inputs) and outputs (standardized products sold as anonymous commodities).

This capability, while shared by many entrepreneurs has a specificity when applied in the agricultural sector which faces far more constraints as it involves working with nature, in a socio-political environment that is tightly regulated by political institutions and highly concentrated supply chains (both up and down stream) that influence and change the traditional environments in which the farmers live and work (Ye and Fu, 2015a,b).

We can identify at least four main characteristics of the new peasantry.

- Peasants use their creativity to minimize their reliance on external dynamics (particularly market based ones) and have an innate risk-averse attitude. Their experience of managing biological and natural resources gives them the ability to read and interpret external contexts and redefine how they interact with them in order to maintain and enhance the family's livelihood. These can include agro-ecology, diversification, care farming, direct selling, on-farm processing, agritourism, energy production, water retention and many more. Through increasing their autonomy the new peasants can better manage the interfaces with other actors and valorize the cultural and social values on which their farming activities are based. But the search for autonomy is also an expression of their stubbornness, pride and of the desire to not be victims of circumstance but to make a difference, to actively find new perspectives, and solutions and even if necessary to resist.
- The new peasants have a 'social instinct' that allows them to creatively and innovatively manage the unknown and to survive adversity and challenges. This characteristic comes from their working relationship with nature. Managing coproduction with nature requires specific knowledge and enables peasants to acquire creative skills that are enhanced over time and strengthened by their own and their colleagues' experiences. They have a strong capacity to react to the unknown and to develop more resilient practices. Peasants' choices are not based on 'rational' or linear ways of thinking, but through an interactive and iterative learning-by-doing process that evolves through their continued attempts to manage new and unpredictable events.
- The new peasantry has a sense of responsibility and solidarity toward their 'own' social groups and communities. Peasants are keenly aware that farming and agricultural innovation can have great ecological and social consequences since they are based on the use of common pool resources (both social and natural). This attitude underlies the new relationships between consumers and peasants that have helped to create new short food chains. These create a new form of co-production, based on peasants' and consumers' social responsibility and sense of belonging. Values such as reciprocity and reputation are driving forces in peasant behavior.
- The new peasants have the ability to negotiate and create new alliances with different and sometimes new actors who have connections and an influence on their activities. They have repeatedly shown themselves able to develop relationships with consumers and other social actors (NGOs, researchers, etc.) in order to valorize their multifunctional approach (whether commercially or intellectually). The creation and development of nested markets is one good example of this capacity. The same capacity is also a crucial element of bottom-up and participatory development processes which are generally recognized as the governance model most suited to heterogeneity and are widely used in rural development programmes, such as LEADER in the EU.

2.4. Peasants and their distinctive practices help drive rural and regional development and to create the conditions for a flourishing eco-economy

Rural economies are based on micro-economic processes that make up the value chains that link production to consumption and, at the same time, strengthen (or weaken) local and regional ecosystems. At the origin of these chains are agricultural products, with their diverse and multi-functional uses. As new and diverse uses are found for these resources new networks are created that link entrepreneurs engaged in viable economic activities to the region and its ecological resources.

One important implication is the need to find the way to harmonize the different aspects of these post-carbon rural economies and landscapes in which they are embedded. The various segments of this economy (energy, tourism, agriculture, creative industries) need to be in synergy with one another if they are to thrive (Paddock and Marsden, 2015). Sustainable rural development requires practices that reproduce and improve ecological resources. The new peasant model of agriculture is characterized by the reproduction and improvement of ecological resources through economic processes and has a strong capacity to reuse waste from agriculture and other sectors as inputs for other activities. The transfer of this peasant production model to other sectors of rural economies is an essential pre-requisite for developing an eco-economy. This is a new model of regional development where the economic activities of many diverse micro businesses are linked together by the sustainable and ecologically efficient use of natural resources and the landscape. In this model, which could be seen as a modern-day extension of the Italian industrial district (Becattini, 1987, 1989; Dei Ottati, 1995), the economic activities are strongly embedded in their social and environmental context. The entrepreneurs are interconnected by providing each other with inputs and/or outputs and the community is aware of the importance of individual behavior for the creation of the common reputation (Ventura, 2001; Bagnasco, 1988). The new twist in the eco-economy is actors' awareness of the importance of the agro-ecological system for the common reputation/competitiveness of the area.

New networks allow local actors to gain (some) control over development processes as part of a continuous struggle to respond to the pressures imposed by the external environment. As the economic activities of these networks are based on ecological resources, there is a common interest in maintaining and developing peasant agriculture precisely because it reproduces ecological resources instead of simply draining them.

The role of agriculture as the engine for a sustainable, multifunctional, inclusive and participatory development (i.e. the eco-economy model) is recognized in rural areas (and elsewhere). The peasantry's capacity for adaptation and innovation allows it to engage with increasingly differentiated consumer demands: new nested markets are created that link agriculture with other, sometimes new, activities. Two case studies in the last book (on the Shetland Islands and Devon, both in the UK) showed how approaches to rural revitalization that place reliance on the bio-economy and non-agricultural activities have led to the further marginalization of the agricultural and food sectors. This has led to a chaotic new governance squeeze which is likely to reduce the massive but latent adaptive capacity embedded in rural areas (Paddock and Marsden, 2015). There is a risk that the new food security question that is emerging at global level will have little social or political traction in rural areas that lack social or economic cohesion and where actors feel disempowered. The central role that peasants play in animating rural areas and contributing to their development is linked to their ability to develop new and promising practices

and to reinvigorate the values that have historically inspired them. These values are today recognized as fundamental for the sustainable development of rural areas.

This publication, then, is a response to the critical reviews of Milone et al.'s 2015a,b,c,d book. It elaborates on the four key elements described above and furthers the debate about the role that they play in rural development. This introductory chapter is followed by three chapters that expand on each of these four core themes, discussed at the panel session in Toronto, followed by a final chapter containing the author's responses to the reviews.

3. Weak theory, stronger communities, and vibrant agro-ecosystems

Michael S. Carolan

Constructing a New Framework for Rural Development (Milone et al., 2015a) is both empirically rich and conceptually diverse. It is also good to think with, as it forces readers away from the safety of grand narratives as they confront the rough and tumble realities of experimentation, difference, and change. For those reasons, I had a very difficult time deciding how precisely I wanted to structure my comments. During multiple passes through the text I took copious notes, which left me with various threads of different shapes and colors. Setting out to organize those threads into a coherent patchwork proved difficult, however. So: I decided to approach my task from a different angle. Rather than speaking exclusively about specific passages, I will take the remaining time to discuss themes. The chapters are gloriously diverse, in terms of their empirical material, which is, actually, a very important argument of the book—that there is no one way (no magic bullet) to do rural development. But this diversity makes summarizing difficult. Having said that, there are some distinct throughlines that can be pulled out of the text. In no particular order, those themes are:

- the value of what is known as weak theorizing (see e.g., Barry, 2001; Gibson-Graham, 2014);
- what elsewhere I call the politics of addition versus politics of subtraction distinction (e.g., Carolan, 2016a, 2016b);
- autonomy as interdependence versus autonomy as individualism (e.g., Emery, 2015);
- and the role of co-experimentation for enacting novelty and prompting deep social change (e.g., Carolan, 2013).
- I will now briefly discuss each theme in turn, in terms of not only its role in the book but how it might allow us to rethink conventional understandings of rural development.

3.1. How we do theory

First, there is the issue of the role and importance of weak theory when theorizing rural social change and rural development. Clifford Geertz (1973: 23) famously wrote about how “small facts speak to large issues, winks to epistemology, or sheep raids to revolution, because they are made to.” Geertz was critiquing strong theory - what Foucault (2003: 30) likened to “fascisms in our heads”. Geertz's worry was that once we start letting theory overtly guide our investigations and name events we risk missing grainy details that can help us grasp what is really going on, which is necessary if we are to avoid mistaking the abstract for the concrete. As opposed to employing strong theory, with its, in the words of Gibson-Graham (2006: 4), “embracing reach” and “reduced, clarified field of meaning”, this text engages playfully in weak theory - a style of scholarship that does not elaborate and confirm what we already know but instead “observes, interprets, and yields to emerging knowledge” (Gibson-Graham, 2014: S149).

The theory of modernization is an excellent example of strong theory, and we all know the problems that have arose by indiscriminately applying the approach to grasp the empirics of the world. The contributors of *Constructing a New Framework ...*, however, are also careful not to substitute one fascism in our head with another. Thus, in addition to critiquing modernization theory, I read the book as offering an air of caution to our own critical theories, especially applications that manifest themselves by way of all-hope-is-lost narratives; about how Capitalism (capital C) or Neoliberalism (capital N) have ensnared us in logics and practices from which there are no escape.

This text belies both narratives. Multi-functionality; rural webs; peasant innovation: each chapter explicitly dismantles conventional assumptions toward rural development held by theories of modernization. But they also, implicitly, show us that actors are still making real differences, creating novelty and enacting different worlds, even in the face of those seemingly immutable forces ascribed to capital and the unbearable weightiness of history. In that sense this is a book of hope.

3.2. *Multiplying doings, and not just yields*

This brings me to my second point, that this text helps us better understand spaces engaging in what I call a politics of addition, versus a politics of subtraction.

Critiques of agrifood are wide-ranging, touching on the erosion of bio-cultural diversity, monocultures of the mind, monopoly-pricing structures, narrowing of food imaginaries, flattening of tastes, structural dependences, and the eradication of rural livelihoods. When taken together, the aforementioned laundry list of what is wrong with today's (dominant) foodscapes share the following thread: they reduce - not perhaps in terms of yields, capital concentration, and opportunities for creative (monolithic) destruction but certainly in terms of futures imagined. They practice, in other words, a politics of subtraction. Against this, we can likewise point to numerous cases of resistance, where what is being added to the world is more than just economic value or market share. Each chapter offers up examples of these disjunctures, between weighty social structures and those spaces of lightness where transgressions occur thus giving rise to the additions that make life worth living.

To quote the editors in their concluding chapter:

"Peasants play a key role in the processes of growth and development of rural areas. But the practices and the organizational forms of arrangements can be very different in relation to the context or territory of origin. This has resulted in a multiplicity of solutions unlikely to be repeated in other sectorial or scientific context." (Milone et al., 2015b:325)

This text is an exploration into those cracks - whether we are talking about paradigms, rural imaginaries, or food regime - where differences arise. Whether discussing, for instance, "farmers' ingenuity" (Chapter 6; Schneider and Gazolla, 2015a,b), the "social instinct" of peasants (Chapter 5; Milone and Ventura, 2015), or the peasantry's propensity for "methodological pragmatism" (from Chapter 13; Milone et al., 2015b), the reader is taken on a varied journey were they are given different tools to think with for understanding how novelty not only arises but ripples outward.

3.3. *Not all autonomy is the same*

The text also attributes significance to peasant autonomy, as evidenced by the subtitle in the concluding chapter, "The Tendency Toward Autonomy" (Milone et al., 2015b: 328). Let us not forget, however, that the aforementioned politics of subtraction also valorizes autonomy, though the autonomy such practices embrace are

premised on the "ideology of individualism" (Emery, 2015), where sovereign individuals - and consumers - are created at the expense of interdependent citizens (Carolan, 2017).

The foodscapes detailed in each chapter are therefore political. This is not to suggest that they each assume to direct participants toward political solutions; a narrowing of outcomes that aligns with the aforementioned politics of subtraction. Rather, the practices and relationships detailed open up the very meaning of politics - and of what it means to be a political subject - to public scrutiny and debate, such as by challenging convention as it pertains to the (moral) economy. In these spaces, peasants succeed because of others, versus choosing to see others as natural competitors. This text offers a rich challenge to the conventional separation of morality and markets, which leads to an equally rich understanding of peasant autonomy premised on collaboration as opposed to competition and elimination.

3.4. *In conclusion: Co-experimentation - towards a pre-figurative politics*

This leads to my last point, about how this book offers details accounts of what I call co-experimentation (Carolan, 2013). Rather than analytically focusing exclusively on how ideology, policies, and practices attempt to make only certain thoughts thinkable and certain practices routine - as already suggested, this text practices a type of scholarship that could be likened to critical optimism - the book provides rich examples where people, households and communities are engaging in productive transgressions, thus enhancing their ability to make conceptual and analytic sense of how as citizens we make worlds and not just reproduce them.

4. Spaces for a new generation of peasantry

Neus Monllor I Rico³

The book "Constructing a new Framework for Rural Development" (Milone et al., 2015a,b,c,d) makes it clear that rural development is what peasants do (Ye and Fu, 2015a,b:89), part of the time characterised as much by conflicts as by cooperation (Rudolf van Broekhuizen et al., 2015a,b:218) and actively shaped by the many actors, social movements and state interventions that are involved in rural livelihood maintenance (Ploeg et al., 2015a,b:18). Rural development could also be defined as a set of responses to market failures (Ploeg et al., 2000 in Ploeg et al., 2015a,b: 18), and even as a series of victories by peasants over their predicaments (Ye and Fu, 2015a,b:119). Most of those responses are constructed by actors at the grassroots level (Oostindie et al., 2015a,b:239) as an active drive to find their way in an agricultural market economy, that is globalized and dominant.

As it is difficult to define who peasants are, it seems more useful to describe what peasants do. What is the peasant model that drives rural development practices all over the world? Peasants

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articulate their practices as a means of production and co-production with nature. Some of the characteristics that define these practices are based on the diversification of food crops, sale to local markets, and pluriactivity (Peterson, 2015a,b:166; Fuller, 2015). For many years, and even today, there are scholars and policy makers visualizing the end of the peasantries. But what this book shows is the opposite. Peasants are unlikely to disappear (Milone et al., 2015a,b,c,d:3) and they are consolidating and becoming a highly effective alternative to mainstream agriculture (Milone and Ventura, 2015:59). It seems that they are not being dispersed and isolated (Ye and Fu, 2015a,b:116), because they are strongly connected to other actors in rural and urban areas. The peasant model represents a real revolution of modern agriculture (Milone et al., 2015a,b,c,d:4) and, as most chapters in the book show, smallholders are reclaiming market and political power. The new peasantry of the 21st century is a key part of revitalizing rural areas and offering a more sustainable food system to society.

It is in this regard that my own work experience resonates with many of the themes and examples in the book. As a food and rural development consultant, I am engaged with many novel food-related practices and with new agencies and actors in Catalonia, Spain. I work with farmers and shepherds who are seeking connections with cooks and chefs to market what often become their specialty products. I assist in schools and hospitals to bring about the consumption of more local foods. I am advising local administrations about creating small urban gardens and systems of marketing local foods. I liaise with consumers on 'committed cooking', the dedicated effort to consume local products in everyday life. I connect new associates to unlikely sources of knowledge and supply and build networks in this new and dizzying panoply of actors, all mentioned in the book and operating in different parts of the world. I can confirm that from my experience there is indeed an ongoing resorting of motives, relationships and products at the local level.

One of the ways that peasants have stepped forward in a socio-technical food regime is by producing novelties as processes of creativity and inventiveness (Schneider and Gazolla, 2015a,b:132). The book carefully explains the difference between innovations and novelties, pointing out that both often emerge outside of formally established norms and regulations (Schneider and Gazolla, 2015a,b:133) and that they mostly come from the creativity of the peasants (Milone et al., 2015a,b,c,d:326). This means that, most of the time, novelties are resolving difficulties in everyday life rather than being used for profit making, as Ye and Fu (2015a,b:95) show for China.

Most of the chapters in the book illustrate a paradigm change, moving from a modernization paradigm to a new paradigm of rural development based on the multi-functionality of the peasant farms that endlessly try to combine the sustainability of environmental, social and economic dimensions of rural life (Milone et al., 2015a,b,c,d:8). This new framework is a more appropriate way to describe how the peasant model is creating new examples of rural development practice.

In my work, I have identified eight different dimensions that combine in various ways to account for such a paradigm shift: 1) Local scale, 2) Diversity, 3) Environment, 4) Cooperation, 5) Innovation, 6) Autonomy, 7) Social Commitment and 8) Slowpace. These dimensions drive a new way of thinking about the relations between agricultural areas and urban centers. My research focus is on questioning who is going to be the next generation of farmers and how are they going to farm. Some answers lie in this book. It depends on what approach to farming the next generation will take. To achieve this objective, I considered two different groups of farm entrants: 1) continuers and 2) newcomers. The main difference between them is their farm origin: continuers are from

farming backgrounds and generally inherit a farm; newcomers have no farm background. Most of the practices of the newcomers are close to an agro-social paradigm change, while most of the continuers are still operating in a path-dependent conventional way. That means that most newcomers bring novelties to agriculture and rural areas while only a few of continuers are implementing new strategies (Monllor and Fuller, 2016).

In this regard, reading Chapter 10 of the book, it is interesting to note how the authors identify five different categories for the early adopters of rural development practices: 1) Urban background, 2) Larger farmers with vested markets, 3) Specific landowners, 4) Farm women and 5) Disadvantage farms. This classification has strong similarities with my assessment of who the innovators are and where their innovations and novelties come from. Examples in the book clearly point out that newcomers have a stronger set of social and environmental attitudes to drive a paradigm change than continuers.

Related to where the seeds for innovation are derived, Schneider and Gazolla (2015:129) argue that the motivations for rural development practices can emerge from two different places: 1) expressions of farmers' creativity or 2) responses and reactions from those who cannot afford to follow the hegemonic model. Following this rationale, the way to implement new and creative rural development practices can be motivated from both ideological and structural sources. Here we can identify an open question related to the role of the pioneer in ecological agriculture and what it means when some of the new practices are followed by more and more people looking to make a decent living from decent farming. There is a sense that the purity of motivation and endeavour that pioneers implemented in the recent past, which was rooted in ideological beliefs, could, over time, be diluted as their practices become a *new normal*.

Are we witnessing a *new normal* for rural development practices? What does it mean that some of the ideas that some years ago seemed to be innovative and radical are now being seen and practiced in many different places globally? Are farmers adopting alternative practices for ideological reasons or for structural and pragmatic ones? Are the two paradigms sharing the same space? What does it mean that a big supermarket has local and organic food? Does it make sense that a farm has some conventional and some alternative practices at the same time? Are we witnessing a transition stage of a paradigm shift? Who or what is determining its direction?

These are some of the questions that the book raises in my mind. Answers to such questions might bring clarity about future practices for a new generation of peasants. The book makes clear that the spaces for a new peasantry are in a new framework of rural development, always taking into account that many rural development practices adopt a remarkably long-term perspective (Ploeg et al., 2015a,b:27). At the same time it is necessary to take into account that actors may spend part of their time engaged in conventional farming and another part being involved in creating new ways and patterns (Ploeg et al., 2015a,b: 20).

In this context, there is an imbrication of the two main paradigms where alternative agri-food networks develop interfaces with the conventional agri-food systems (Schneider and Gazolla, 2015a,b: 148). Rural development practices such as making and selling products on the farm, crop diversification, organic farming, new forms of commercialization, new cheese production techniques, on-farm processing, labour ethics, and renewable energy on the farm are appearing to be the *new normal*. The question is whether this new scenario of rural development will bring enough autonomy and remuneration to the new generations of peasants.

Finally, for me, the book shows how rural development practices are creating new and hopeful opportunities for family farms and

also to new smallholder enterprises working to make a living from producing good and healthy food. At this point, it is crucial to note that the commitment of the consumer is one of the keys to improve existing local food systems and also to create new ones (López-Moreno et al., 2016). It seems that we are at a point of transition moving towards a more pragmatic and blended way of thinking and doing. This change brings new and complex challenges for all the actors in rural and urban areas. Government policies will play a strong role in responding to and stimulating the direction of the change and in supporting the nascent actors in constructing a new framework for rural development.

5. Seeds and sprouts for peasants to regain market and political power

Steffanie Scott

I approached *Constructing a Framework for Rural Development* in terms of reflecting on this book's relevance for understanding the role of peasant farmers in the ecological agriculture sector in China, which has been the focus of my research for the past seven years. I discuss the take-aways and questions that remained for me from reading this edited book by Milone, Ventura and Ye. Overall, the book underscores the importance of the peasant model in the contemporary context of globalization, agro-industrialization, price volatility, and climate change - relevant points for an analysis of ecological farming in China. The book reclaims the concept of rural development as a holistic and peasant-driven model, in contrast to a more mainstream, modernization-focused notion of agricultural development. It highlights the themes of continuity, autonomy, and resilience through innovation and endogenous resources of many family farms around the world. A contribution of the book is the introduction of concepts such as novelty production, synergy, and nested markets to understand the continuity of peasant livelihoods. As is probably clear from my comments so far, the authors of this volume present an optimistic view about the agency of peasant farmers to overcome challenges they face in terms of their own continuity. This optimistic view contrasts sharply with many other analyses of the peasantry or of small farmers around the world today (e.g., Asli et al., 2016). In the review below, I highlight points that resonated with my observations and fieldwork in China, and some that did not.

Given the diversity of authors and perspectives, it's not surprising that there are some contradictions. For instance, rural development is described as both complementary to market-led development, and as a counterfact (Ploeg et al., 2015a,b: 18). Elsewhere, Ye and Fu (2015a,b: 91) described rural development as a form of anti-development (anti-mainstream capitalist development). In the chapter about China, Ye and Fu assert that most rural development initiatives in this country involve cooperation between the state and peasants. From my analysis of China's ecological agriculture sector, there is a long list of state supports for this sector, but it might be a stretch to call this cooperation with peasants. The provincial and local state in many jurisdictions offers support for certification costs, infrastructure, marketing, and more. Yet, nearly all of these supports have gone to medium and large scale operations, not to small scale, long-time farmers who could benefit from converting to organic production and earning good price premiums. Rather than cooperating with peasants, as Ye suggests, local state agencies in China have often acted as brokers by assembling land from peasants and leasing it out to investors to establish (ecological) farms, where after investors can enjoy the various supports just mentioned (Scott et al., 2014). On this point, I appreciated that the Milone et al. book raises the question of whose rural development we are talking about.

In reading this book, I was both inspired and skeptical. I was

inspired by the idea of rural development as a re-socialization of agriculture, featuring new relations and business development (e.g., Chapter 9 by van Brokhuizen et al.), and serving as a basis for farmers to reclaim control over their own resources (Chapter 4 by Milone and Ventura). Moreover, the concepts of nested markets and economies of scope and proximity offer exciting prospects for analyzing the expansion of alternative food markets (AFNs) and the organic food sector in China. However, I was skeptical about the impression that some chapters of the book gave about the straightforward dissemination of peasant innovations. Ye and Fu (2015a,b: 96) note that the "easy to learn features [of peasant innovations] allow for rapid dissemination of the innovation", while the authors overlook the obstacles of fragmentation and lack of knowledge networks. Indeed, some chapters of the book appeared to have been written with rose-coloured glasses. I was skeptical about the ability to effectively build pride, empowerment, trust, organizational capacity, and cooperation. These are huge challenges, in China and elsewhere. China does not even have a national peasant or farmers' organization, let alone a national organic farmers' association. Apart from addressing the lack of knowledge networks and giving more voice to (ecological) peasants farmers, one of the greatest challenges to enact a successful peasant model in contemporary China revolves around how to reconstruct urban-rural solidarity (with peasants) (Si et al., 2015). While it is encouraging to hear about success stories, the reality of most contexts should not be neglected (and they felt barely mentioned in the book). In practice there is widespread competition and undermining of opportunities for others.

Given the focus on peasants and their agency, it seemed odd that there was no mention in the book of food sovereignty or wider social movements connected to peasant struggles and successes for securing their livelihoods. The closest it came was perhaps the discussion of rightful resistance, resistance by law, and everyday resistance (Chapter 5, by Ye and Fu). It seemed odd too there was little discussion in the text about the loss of trust and dignity in being a peasant (i.e., peasant identity) (cf. Schneider, 2014; discussing this issue in China). This can affect many facets of peasant life. One economic element is that it affects a person's confidence in setting decent prices for the fruits of their labour. In our recent fieldwork in China, we heard from peasant women reluctant to set high prices for their ecologically-grown foods, while urban entrepreneurs growing similar products on their farms have no qualms about charging several times more.

In sum, I'm of two minds in evaluating this book. It provides an inspirational vision, grounded in concrete practices across many sites and settings. If offering a vision is the goal, it does this well. If offering a realistic analysis of the prospects for peasant-centred rural development is the goal, time and again I was struck by what seemed to be overly optimistic interpretation. Thus, it works better as a conceptualization of the possible than a characterization of key trends. Although the text did not sufficiently account for the (many) obstacles to rural development and barriers to peasant participation (e.g., in the organic sector in China), and especially the loss of trust towards and among peasant farmers (a key issue in China), this text, for me, affirms a vision - and one that I have been seeking to promote - for a peasant-driven subsector of the ecological agriculture sector in China (for some good examples, see Cook and Buckley). *Constructing a Framework for Rural Development* offers good 'seeds and sprouts' (cf. Chapter 6 by Schneider and Gazolla) for peasants to regain market power and political power.

6. Response to the reviews

P. Milone, J.D. Van Der Ploeg, F. Ventura, T. Marsden, S. Schneider

and J. Ye

The comments raised by Michael Carolan, Neus Monllor and Stefanie Scott are very helpful in specifying the epistemological position that underlies our work.

First, we indeed think that the world is far from being caught in one overall, structurally determined and unavoidable development process that ramifies into the most remote corners of the globe and which imposes its logic in an all-encompassing way that allows for no escape whatsoever. Even when there are strong tendencies towards centralization and ‘systemness’, the world is not necessarily ordered like that. Instead, we are facing multiple, and often highly contrasting developmental processes that relate in different, mostly highly complex ways and which continuously result in contradictions, cracks and spaces allowing for at least some manoeuvre (both materially and symbolically). These different developmental processes already compose richly chequered mosaics – and the cracks and spaces add yet another layer of potential confusion to them in as far as they allow for countertendencies, novel practices and experimentation. If we focus on agriculture and food production it might be argued that there are at least three transitional sub-processes that are simultaneously operative and impacting, in different ways, on the historically delivered rural constellations. Each transitional sub-process has its own drivers, mechanisms and different impacts. The interrelations between the three are constantly changing, are mostly opaque, and are those often difficult to assess. The first of the three sub-processes is the industrialization of agriculture and food processing. This sub-process, already active since the 1960s, is currently accelerating, centralizing and extending over the world as a whole. Entrepreneurial farming closely attached to large-scale food processing and distribution, the artificialization of food and financialization are important components here. Together they indeed materially change landscapes, farms, food and consumption into something new that is steadily being outlined and, at the same time, contested and reshaped. A second transitional sub-process is what we have referred to as rural development (or re-peasantization). Actors, drivers, mechanisms and impact differ significantly from those of the first sub-process – but also include several ‘uneasy’ in-between states. Peasant agriculture, multifunctionality (resulting in new products and new services) and the construction of new, nested markets are important ingredients here. Such rural development processes are as much triggered by industrialization as they are an actively constructed response to it. A third transitional sub-process basically centres on de-activation: it is about farmers being unable to identify any further prospects. It is about losing hope and about farms being de-activated. It is, in short, depeasantization.

Together these three sub-processes create a messy and contradictory world. Past, present and future(s) are tied together in completely different ways. What applies as true in one part of this messy reality is ‘untrue’ in another.

Second, we reject indeed any a-priori definition of hegemony. The issue of hegemony is to be approached as one that is to be empirically studied – the more so since the interrelations (and the quantitative and qualitative ‘weight’ of the different sub-processes) might well change over time – sometimes slowly and hardly visible, sometimes abruptly (due to unexpected events). In the same strand we think that – at least theoretically – no hierarchy can be constructed. There might be unevenness (often considerable) but this is not intrinsic, it is due to the social relations constructed in and existing between the different practices and constellations. In line with this general epistemological point we think that there is neither one comprehensive theory that adequately reflects and explains the three contrasting sub-processes and the differently shaped realities in which they produce. Knowledge about each of the three can only develop as ‘weak theory’ and knowledge that

regards the messy whole can only result from addition (as Michael Carolan rightly argues). However, we recognize also (and at the same time) that there are theories, strongly institutionally embedded, that claim hegemony. This is the case with e.g. modernization theory that currently closely links with industrialization of farming and food production. Such a theory operates de facto through subtraction: everything that differs from industrialization is perceived and defined as marginal – as something that, as yet, has not disappeared but which will unavoidably vanish. The same applies to current versions of marxist-leninist interpretations of rural realities. De-activation (i.e. depeasantization) is understood as a fate that cannot be avoided and everything else (notably forms of re-peasantization) are perceived with suspicion and disbelief. In epistemological terms: these vested views tend to categorize messy realities into clear blocks. Parts of reality are irrelevant and are being studied, other parts are thought to be irrelevant and therefore (mostly) neglected. Thus, there is a clear horizon of relevance that explains why the existing strong theories produce both knowledge and ignorance. They produce knowledge about that what is thought to be relevant and ignorance in as far as the irrelevant is concerned. There is a price to be paid for these: many novelties emerge in the ‘periphery’ of the well-known ‘core’ and thus show up as ‘marginal activities of marginal people’. Nonetheless, it is often there where the ‘new music is being played’. We love to move into such ‘peripheries’. Moving there necessarily implies operating weak theories and grounding them (....) which is more important than systemizing them. It is also more fun: it is dealing with the unexpected, with phenomena not-yet-explained, awaiting a better understanding and sharper comparisons. It is about exploring the dialectics of the real and the potential. Curiosity about how things might unfold is a strategic element here. In more general terms, we think that social scientists have an important responsibility in this regard. They have the tools to make ignored parts of reality visible and – wherever possible and needed – make such parts also accessible to others.

Third: the periphery of the seemingly irrelevant is – indeed – a world of hope. It is a world of agency as well. It is inspiring. Social scientists can have a double role here. Strengthening that which is inspiring (e.g. by exploring potentials for further unfolding) and enabling the inspiration to travel to other people and other localities.

The fourth point brings us back to the messy world where different transitional sub-processes occur and entangle and where different theoretical perspectives are operating. Such a world cannot but generate optimism and pessimism; hope and scepticism; recognition of the heavy weights of tradition, of capital and routine and, at the same time, bear a clear assessment for agency and spaces to manoeuvre. It is all simultaneously true. The opposed elements are empirically co-existing. Therefore the personal views and feelings of the researcher matter less – what social sciences have to do is to empirically document, time and again, the balance of these opposing positions and to reveal how and to what degree such a balance is time-and-space bounded.

Fifth (and building on the previous point): Yes, balances might develop over time. What initially was small, weak, hardly visible but probably highly adventurous might eventually become a new normal (or even the new normal): wide spread, admired, widely publicized, integrated and becoming even a kind of routine. Is that a problem? Of course not. What is to be done in such a situation is to make a good, old-fashioned with-without analysis. What would have happened if no new normal would have arisen? Would there be a difference in terms of number of farms and farmers, different income levels and a different distribution of income, different food qualities, different relations of producers and consumers, different geographical patterns in as far as primary production is concerned, different professional roles, etc.? If there are

substantial differences, then there is no simple conventionalization. Instead, if there are manifold and substantial differences the involved actors, their novel practices and the movements in which they engage have been helpful, to echo John Holloway, in “changing the world”. That such changes are - as yet - not enough (which probably will be always the case) is another issue that points to the need to interlink the different actors, practices and movements in order to make new steps ahead. Again, social scientists can play a (modest) role here. Performativity is not necessarily alien to their practices.

Sixth, additionally, when moving from the seemingly invisible and irrelevant towards a new normal the identities of the drivers will change. Just as the combinations of the new and the old will change. Monstrosities are inherent to processes of transition. Industrialized pig production combined with high quality pig breeding, on farm processing and direct marketing is an example here. It is all part of the game. And often it is a vehicle needed by the involved actors for exploring the possibilities of new balances. The same occurs with the empirical balance of individualism and interdependence. During the process such a balance will change. And it is an important task for social scientists to study how ‘old’ and ‘new’ patterns of interdependence compare and differ and what the role of ‘individualism’ is in the trajectory that interlinks the two.

Highlights

During the last 20 years, the international debates about food sovereignty, agro-ecology, new markets that link producers and consumers of food in novel ways, and new rural development processes have revived a set of questions that seemingly had definitely disappeared: Who are the peasants? How are they producing? How do they link to wider society and especially to consumers? What is their relevance when it comes to food security, food sovereignty and food safety? These questions, constitute the primary focus of the book *Constructing New Framework for Rural Development*. A book that is the object of present review forum. It is important to emphasize the relevance of peasants in modern times, the significance of their production models, and their capacity to create a future for generations to come. Peasants and their seemingly simple production models have been strongly criticized for being stuck in their history and for operating with obsolete and old-fashioned tools. Peasants are thought to be unable to fully meet the needs of modern society, especially when it comes to hunger in the world, the quality of food, the wellbeing in the countryside and the sustainability of resource utilization. What is often neglected is the myriad of new initiatives that alter the way food is produced and marketed. New ‘peasant markets’ are created everywhere and new products and services abound. From our point of view these initiatives and novel practices of peasants represent “seeds of transition”. They are the “sprouts” out of which new socio-technical modes for organizing production and marketing emerge – “sprouts” that, taken together, can be summarized as “rural development”. The book critically discusses these new practices and the actors engaged in them. In doing so, it deals with several countries in three different continents (Asia, South America and Europe). The book proposes new concepts and approaches for a better understanding of the re-emergence of peasants as indispensable part of modern societies.

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