

Peasant movements struggles for the appropriation of the production process

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An approach to the concepts.

This section will not review in depth the concept of peasantry and the categorizations associated with it, but develop a set of starting points to frame in broad terms this approach to the productive character of Mexican peasantry.

It will show through some examples, the way the Mexican peasantry have organised in official or independent movements, in coalitions or isolated efforts, for the appropriation of the productive process, which includes the struggle for equal and fairer conditions of marketing.

According to differentiation of the peasantry along Latin America and Mexico itself, it is convenient to show the way the main actors in agricultural production have been defined and conceptualised, to get for a better understanding of their social problematic.

E. Martinez defines a producers' organization as 'a qualitative social process whose objective and end in itself is peasantry's social and economic development as the basis for rural development'^[1] (1991: 12). In this definition, Martinez tries to stress the notion of peasants' struggle against their domination and exploitation, since this is one of the conceptual characteristics of peasantry. In this sense, peasant organization for production is one of the peasants' movement's fundamental strategies to achieve its own constitution and class consolidation (1991:12).

A typology of peasantry enables the understanding of its internal differences and inequalities, allowing a broader view of its place among the excluded groups of the southern countries. In terms of associated producers, this kind of peasant category, is considered commonly as having high and medium productive potential, and as part of the medium strata. But, within producers, another group of poor peasants has low productivity land, and their job is the growing of export crops; coffee is an example (1991: 43).

One of the first and most influential approaches in the analysis of peasantry is the Marxist one with its main internal differentiation of perspectives. Its main early features were a strong emphasis on class and history. In Maoist terms, it has been associated with the concept of peasant; and in Leninist terms, with the notion of proletarian. Roger Bartra is one of the most representative holders of leninist perspective.

Sometimes orthodox and Bolshevik-inspired (Miller, 1994: 170), Bartra's approach of the 'rural proletariat', considers the peasantry as a simple commodity mode of production, subordinate to capitalist development. This perspective is known as well, as the *descampesinista* theory (Otero, 1999: 191; Edelman, 1999a: 204). On the other hand the *campesinista* approach represented by authors like Armando Bartra, Arturo Warman and Gustavo Esteva rejects unilineal evolutionism and the 'inevitability' of orthodox Marxism in regards to the disappearance of the peasantry. Some of them argued that '...it was primarily through political struggle, rather than through the "logic" of the rural household or the larger economic system, that peasants had historically guaranteed their survival' (Edelman, 1999a: 204). This debate has continued around 20 years, and was recently continuing.

Because of his specific focus on the re-conceptualisation of peasantry in anthropological terms, and his stress on

the transnationalisation of peasants, Michael Kearney's work is relevant. Mainly in reference to migration processes, Kearney highlights the transnational character of the post-peasant subject's identity, in opposition to the nation state's restructuring influence on the construction of peasants. This post-peasant condition differs from the idea of a land-peasant essential connection in terms of its current links with human rights, eco-politics, and ethnicity. There is an 'emergence of multiple identities from the category of peasant, which has been imposed on and assumed by subaltern peoples...' . Although being criticised for generalising his assertions on the disappearance of peasantry from the case of an exclusive region of Mexico (Edelman, 1999a: 205; Otero, 1999: 192), one of Kearney's standpoints is the unsuitability of the term peasant for contemporary social conditions. This is due to the broadening of the range of peasants' activities to areas other than agriculture, the transnationalisation of their condition, and the widening of their cultural participation (Kearney, 1996: 8).

A. Warman's understanding of peasant movements is oriented towards an instrumental vision of them, as 'those that originates, recruit and sustain in the rural environment and establish demands oriented to achieve the persistence and growth of producer groups, which with a territorial basis, have a relative autonomy in the performance of the productive processes'^[i] (1984: 14). This is a classic definition that should be understood in its early context; but it is useful to contrast the classic notions of rural production such as Stavenhagen suggestion of peasant economy with its current developments in the neo-liberal environment . He writes in similar terms as Wolf's 1955 concept, about a form of farm production supported by peasant's own means of production in order to satisfy their basic needs, while complementing their own products through a minimum engagement with the market. Normally these are small production units associated with non-wage labour, and with the principal goal of guaranteeing subsistence, in contrast to any other forms of accumulation (1978: 31).

In the Latin American context, particularly that of Mexico, two more concepts are related to the specific political conditions within the country. Two kinds of peasant movements can be distinguished: the 'official' and the 'independent' movements. The official movement represents the corporativized sector with membership in Peasants' Confederations directly linked with the former party in power (the Institutional Revolutionary Party or PRI^[ii]) or with other organizations with similar characteristics (Flores, Pare and Sarmiento, 1988: 11). The independent movement is generally referred to in opposition to the official movement, and has the particular following aspects: concern to elaborate their own rural development strategy as a common project; autonomy as an organisation; the rejection of any attempt to be joined to corporate structures; looking after their members interests, rather than the unconditional acceptance of private sector-oriented rural policies; and finally, the attempt to develop new forms of collective organization and the democratic participation of the grass-roots. In sum, the type of relationship with the state defines the distinction between the official and the independent movements (Flores, Pare and Sarmiento, 1988: 13-14).

[i] My translation

[ii] My translation

[iii] After being in power for 71 years, the PRI lost Mexico's presidential election last year for the first time, to the right-center National Action Party (or PAN) candidate Vicente Fox.