



On Meaningful Diversity: Past, present and future of Wageningen rural sociology

Joost Jongerden and Han Wiskerke (eds.)



On Meaningful Diversity: Past, present and future of Wageningen rural sociology

Joost Jongerden and Han Wiskerke (eds.)

First published 2022 under Creative Commons license CC BY-NC-ND
Rural Sociology Group, Wageningen University
J. Jongerden & J.S.C. Wiskerke, On meaningful diversity: Past, present and future of
Wageningen rural sociology

Design: Cecile van Wezel, GAW ontwerp+communicatie
Lithography: Hans Dijkstra, GAW ontwerp+communicatie
Print: Tuijtel, Hardinxveld-Giessendam

A special thanks to Wim ter Beest, who helped us navigate through the WUR archives and provided us with relevant pictures from the early years of rural sociology in Wageningen.

ISBN: 978-94-6447-133-5
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18174/565767>

Rural Sociology Group, Wageningen University, 2022

Rural Sociology and Resistance of the Third Kind

Introduction

When it comes to the agrarian question, academia has been deeply divided. At the risk of caricature, there is one school of thought that considers the process of capitalist development a force that moves history progressively forward and another that takes the creative agency of people as the primary force of development. Historically, the Rural Sociology Group belongs to the latter school. The work on farming styles, meaningful diversity, new peasantries and foodscapes gave expression to the idea of this creative agency (Hofstee 1982, Ploeg 2008, Wiskerke 2009). Here, I will explore the importance of the agency concept through Van der Ploeg's concept of resistance.

The Peasant Mode

In his work, Van der Ploeg has referred to one of his main sources of inspiration, Alexander Chayanov, in arguing that peasants are affected by the capitalist context in which they operate but are not governed by it. He emphasized, like the innovative and radical thinker Jose Carlos Mariátegui, the peasant's "effective capacity for development and transformation" (Ploeg 2013: 6). These are themes that are discussed in detail in his considerations of the new peasantries (Ploeg 2008) and his manifesto on peasants and the art of farming (Ploeg 2008). His work has been a major source of inspiration for those exploring the peasant mode of production in

particular and struggles for autonomy in general.

Van der Ploeg has written one paper, however, which perhaps did not receive as much attention as the empirically rich and theoretically challenging books he has published over recent years (Ploeg 2008, 2011, 2013) and yet which has been important in the development of my own thinking. This is a short paper presented at the European Society for Rural Sociology in 2007. In this paper named *Resistance of the Third Kind*, Van der Ploeg (2007) argues that the creative agency of peasants should be considered a form of resistance against the dominant paradigm co-constructed by two modes of ordering, capital and state. This is a resistance, he argues, that resides in working practices and farmers' fields; it is expressed in the way that cows are bred, how manure is made, products are delivered. In short, it is a resistance which intervenes in and reorganizes production, reproduction and markets.

These practices are forms of resistance that challenge a dominant mode of ordering while – and through – producing their own alternatives. This is a resistance that is not merely reaction, a mitigation of the effects of the dominant ordering characterized 'rationalization process' of intensification, scale enlargement, and specialization, but also creation, a development of ways of organizing

production, reproduction, and markets that are distinct from those impelled by capital and the state (Van der Ploeg 2007). At just 5,000 words long, this paper pointed to an interesting bridge between agrarian and peasant studies, and resistance studies.

Resistance studies

Resistance studies refers to of a broad field of studies that looks at struggles against exploitation and domination. The field as a whole is much indebted to the work of anthropologist James C. Scott (Scott 1998). Scott not only showed us how an ideology of scientific rationality and bureaucratic planning has created extensive and normative prescriptions for a societal order but also how the docile subjects that accompany this vision are actually stubborn actors who engage in an array of methods to avoid, evade and otherwise resist control and, moreover, go beyond a practical development of the art of "not being governed" to that of creating potentials and opportunities for different futures (Scott 2009). This is what Gibson-Graham (Gibson-Graham 2008) refers to as the generation of possibilities in the "diverse-economies" concept and Antonio Negri (cited in Van der Ploeg 2007) characterizes as the capacity to develop "potentialities that go beyond reigning forms of domination" (Van der Ploeg 2007).

Van der Ploeg analysis is part of a tradition that moves beyond the scholarly work that merely define resistance as negative in the sense of negation, being against, and acting against, beyond a limited understanding of agency as reactive. Instead he focusses our attention on agency as creative. This resistance is not just a struggle against capital or the state, and thus subject to and defined by it, but is a struggling for, and thus defined by an imaginary on its own terms – of a good farm or a good life. Rather than resist through overt or covert acts of opposition, this (third) form

operates on its own terms, as a construction by implication, in what it values, a positive definition. Such an approach connects rather well to recent academic work looking at what is referred to as constructive, creative or productive resistance (Koefoed 2017, Lilja and Vinthagen 2018). This resistance is constructive, creative or productive, since it enacts the worlds it envisions, the worlds it wants to live in, and actively produces the conditions for a livable live (Butler 2015).

In my own work, I have considered this study of resistance of the third kind, this constructive, creative or productive resistance, an important vein of a scholarship that fundamentally challenges domination and exploitation in making other worlds visible and possible (Jongerden 2018, Öztürk, Jongerden et al. 2018, Jongerden 2019). This is a scholarship that does not parachute a particular or hegemonic present into the future but rather starts from the contingent nature of the present and its actual potentialities for a moving beyond. Resistance, then, is actualizing the "not yet in the sense of a possibility" on the basis that "it could be there if we could only do something for it," which implies an intervening in everyday practices (Giroux 2004).

In *Resistance of the Third Kind* and the subsequent book, *The New Peasantries*, Van der Ploeg captured ways in which peasants directly intervene in everyday practices. This "direct intervention in, and alteration of, the processes of labour and production – is omnipresent in today's agriculture," he argued. "Resistance is encountered in a wide range of heterogeneous and increasingly interlinked practices through which the peasantry constitutes itself" – through and involving, for example, "reciprocity [and] socially regulated exchange, as well as self-provisioning enterprises" (Ploeg 2007).

In articles I co-authored with two colleagues (Öztürk et al. 2014, 2018), we discussed the ways in which smallholders – rural families, peasants – resist commodification through the maintenance of a non-commodity circuit augmented by wage-labor outside agriculture. Though a political-economist would easily qualify the latter as an indication of proletarianization or subsumption to capital, we focused on the autonomy this created, arguing that “the development of employment strategies outside of agriculture, together with retirement revenues and other social security benefits and transfers, enables families to keep their land and maintain their smallholdings” (Öztürk, Jongerden et al. 2014). As employment opportunities tend to be limited in rural regions, urban employment is sought. This is a form of resistance which “involves the adaption of a contemporary peasant way, consisting of the maintenance of autonomy in combination with an increased engagement in labour relations outside the farm. It is directly and indirectly enabled by rural development, including agricultural employment and non-farming economic activities, facilitated in part as a function of urban growth and to which villagers commit for their own benefit” (Öztürk, Jongerden et al. 2014, Öztürk, Jongerden et al. 2018). We concluded this “constitutes a resistance to capital,” one that was “not a resistance in the sense of a political activism, either overt (such as demonstrations, riots and strikes, mostly linked to urban contexts) or covert (false compliance, feigned ignorance and a range of other methods applied in peasant struggles), but a ‘resistance of a third kind’” (Öztürk, Jongerden et al. 2014). *It is constituted in* the intervention and alteration of processes of labor, production and reproduction that express themselves in a wide range of heterogeneous and interlinked practices.

The identification of these forms of self-constitution in our research was enabled by

adoption of a critical distance from familiar political economy representations of capitalism as a massive totality occupying and determining social space. The performative effect of such representations is not only an amplification of the strength of capitalism, but also of a diminution, belittling even, of alternatives, as tiny, irrelevant, and unrealizable (Gibson-Graham 2008: 615). For a genuine understanding of the multiplicity of present potentialities we need to dissolve these “mind-forg’d manacles” (Said 2003) of discourses which perceive subsumption, yet not meaningful difference, and see variation, yet disqualify it as false notes in the concert of capital. In order to move beyond this mental barrier imposed by capital-centric analysis, we need to perform what is referred to in autonomist thought as a “strategic inversion” (Tronti, Cleaver, Cleaver 1993) – and what Van der Ploeg has been doing in his work on peasants. This strategic inversion assumes the perspective of social struggles and the peoples involved in these struggles as an analytical lens through which to appreciate social realities, with the objective of learning about potentialities for alternative, radically different future trajectories in the here and now (Holloway 2010).

Conclusions

So, at the foundation of this resistance of a third kind, or, what is referred to as constructive, creative or productive resistance in resistance studies, are self-constituting practices. From this perspective, resistance of a third kind is part of a third mode of ordering next to and beyond the modes of ordering of capital and state (Jongerden 2021).

Butler, J. (2015). *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press.

Cleaver, H. (1992). *The Inversion of Class Perspective in Marxian Theory: From valorization*

to self-valorization. *Open Marxism: Theory and Praxis*. J. Holloway, W. Bonefeld and K. Psychopedis. London, Pluto.

Cleaver, H. (1993). Kropotkin, Self-Valorisation, and the Crisis of Marxism. *Anarchist Studies*. T. V. Cahill. Lancaster, Lancaster University.

Gibson-Graham, J. K. (2008). *Diverse Economies: Performative practices for ‘other worlds’*. *Progress in Human Geography* 32(5): pp. 613-632.

Giroux, H. A. (2004). *When Hope is Subversive*. *Tikkun* 19(6): pp. 38-41.

Hofstee, E. W. (1982). *Differentiele Sociologie in Kort Bestek: Schets van de differentiële sociologie en haar functie in het concrete sociaal-wetenschappelijk onderzoek*. Wageningen, Mededelingen van de Vakgroepen Sociologie van de Landbouwhogeschool

Holloway, J. (2010). *Crack Capitalism*. London, Pluto Press.

Jongerden, J. (2018). *Living Structures. Methodological Approaches in Kurdish Studies: Theoretical and Practical Insights from the Field*. B. Baser, M. Toivanen, B. Zorlu and Y. Duman. Boulder, Lexington Books: pp. 21-33.

Jongerden, J. (2019). *Learning from Defeat: Development and contestation of the “new paradigm” within Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK)*. *Kurdish Studies* 7(1): pp. 72-92.

Jongerden, J. (2021). *Autonomy as a third mode of ordering: Agriculture and the Kurdish movement in Rojava and North and East Syria*. *Agrarian Change* DOI: 10.1111/joac.12449.

Koefoed, M. (2017). *Constructive Resistance in Northern Kurdistan: Exploring the Peace, Development and Resistance Nexus*. *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 12(3).

Lilja, M. and S. Vinthagen (2018). *Dispersed Resistance: Unpacking the spectrum and properties of glaring everyday resistance*. *Journal of Political Power* 11(2): pp. 211-229.

Öztürk, M., J. Jongerden and A. Hilton (2014). *Commodification and the Social Commons: Smallholder Autonomy and Rural–Urban Kinship Communalism in Turkey*. *Agrarian South: Journal*

of Political Economy 3(3): 337-367.

Öztürk, M., J. Jongerden and A. Hilton (2018). *The (re)production of the new peasantry in Turkey*. *Rural Studies*.

Ploeg, J.-D. v. d. (2013). *Peasants and the art of offarming: a Chayanovian manifesto*. Halifax, Fernwood Publishing.

Ploeg, J. D. v. d. (2007). *Resistance of the Third Kind and the Construction of Sustainability*. Paper presented at the ESRC Conference. Wageningen.

Ploeg, J. D. v. d. (2008). *The New Peasantries: Struggles for autonomy and sustainability in an era of empire and globalization*. London, Earthscan.

Said, E. (2003). *Orientalism*. London, Penguin Books.

Scott, J. C. (1998). *Seeing Like a State: How certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed*. New Haven, Yale University Press.

Scott, J. C. (2009). *The Art of not being Governed: An anarchist history of upland Southeast Asia*. New Haven, Yale University.

Tronti, M. (1964). *Lenin in England’, in Working Class Autonomy and the Crisis*. London, Red Notes.

Wiskerke, J. S. C. (2009). *“On Places Lost and Places Regained: Reflections on the Alternative Food Geography and Sustainable Regional Development.”* *International Planning Studies* 14(4): pp. 369-387.