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PEASANT MOVEMENTS IN THE TWENTIETH AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURIES: FROM PAROCHIAL REACTIONS TO GLOBAL STRUGGLE?

In this contribution, we compare two cases of peasant movements and peasant resistance in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Do we see a shift from a local to a global platform? By focusing on peasant movements during the Stalinist collectivization in the 1930s and on the twenty-first century transnational peasant movement *La Vía Campesina* we ask what this comparative exercise can teach us about the scale and range of peasant actions in a globalizing world: How are peasant actions organized? What are their demands and expectations? Whom do they see as their enemies and adversaries? This comparative exercise questions the shift in peasant actions from a local to a transnational and global scale.¹

1. The Return of the Peasant

Understanding old and new peasants requires new historical knowledge about the role of peasantries and peasant movements within long-term transformations of historical capitalism.² For more than a century, debates about the ‘peasant question’ have been dominated by two groups of protagonists.³ On the one hand, the ‘disappearance thesis’ defends the viewpoint that the expansion of capitalism will lead to an extermination of the peasantry. Lenin and Kautsky transformed a previously undifferentiated class of peasants into new, distinct groups: capital owners (capitalist farmers) and wage laborers. On the other hand, advocates of the ‘permanence thesis’ argue in favor of Chayanov’s peasant mode of production in which peasant societies have a distinct development logic that supports the survival of the peasantry within capitalism. Araghi labels the first option as teleological and the second as essentialist; both suffer from ahistorical and often functionalistic presumptions. According to Araghi, “depeasantization has been neither a unilinear process, nor has it taken the historically particular form of differentiation in the countryside within each and every nation-state.”

The biggest problem with the concept of depeasantization is its predominantly inherent and often unexplained link with urbanization, industrialization, development, and margin-

¹ This article is based on: C. Van Den Abeele, *De Russische peasant en de collectivisatie in de jaren 1930. Het traditionele verzet tegen oppressie en exploitatie, of een unieke casus?*, Master Thesis Ghent University 2009; C. Van Den Abeele/E. Vanhaute, *Zo ongeveer als een zak met aardappelen een zak aardappelen vormt*, in: *Brood en Rozen*, 2, 2012, 5-27.

² In this contribution, we distinguish between peasants (small producers primarily aimed at the survival of their household) and farmers (running larger enterprises and primarily producing for the market). In the USSR of the 1920s, the two types were present. Next to the mass of peasants, there was a smaller group of rich farmers, the kulaks.

³ E. Vanhaute, *Peasants, peasantries and (de)peasantization in the capitalist world-system*, in: *Routledge Handbook of World-Systems Analysis*, C. Chase Dunn/S. Babones (ed.), London 2012, 313-321; F. Araghi, *Global depeasantization, 1945–1990*, in: *The Sociological Quarterly*, 36(1995), 601-632.

alization. What is often regarded as ‘depeasantization’ is, in essence, part of the peasantry’s diversified labour and income strategies. The marginalization of a growing portion of the world’s population makes these mixed survival strategies more important than ever.⁴

The peasantry has to be understood as a set of social relationships. The household is the basic economic unit and gateway to the wider world. It engages in economic transactions in order to secure a level of subsistence within the framework of a broader market economy. That is why the concept of the peasant needs to be redefined. It must be sensitive to local situations and should not turn non-capitalist entities into essentialist or dualistic frameworks such as agency-structure, West-rest, self-other, or capitalist-non-capitalist.⁵ Within this framework, the peasantry is an open concept that interacts within multiple forms and scales of action and conflict, thus leaving room for different levels of autonomy. Depeasantization and peasantization are ongoing processes of adaptation and of resistance. Moreover, “like every social entity, peasantry exists in fact only as a process.”⁶

In his novel, *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century*, anthropologist Eric Wolf analysed the destructive impact of capitalism on peasant communities. Capitalism has not only generated ecological pressure and overpopulation in the twentieth century, but has also caused a fundamental crisis in the exercise of power relations within rural communities. The traditional methods that peasants used to answer societal tensions no longer suffice: “The peasant rebellions of the twentieth century are no longer simple responses to local problems, if indeed they ever were. They are but the parochial reactions to major social dislocations, set in motion by overwhelming societal change. The spread of the market has torn men up by their roots.”⁷

The old strategies and institutions have been undermined by the same forces against which the peasants were fighting.⁸ In this new, more globalized world, peasants have no longer been able to independently combat the systematic weakening of their bases for survival, nor formulate alternatives. The main causes are thought to be a lack of leadership and organization. Eric Hobsbawm states that peasants could have been a decisive factor in the twentieth century, but only when united under an external leader. Usually, the changes they realize did not improve their living circumstances.⁹ The role of peasants as an independent social actor seems to have ended.

But is this correct? At the beginning of the twenty-first century, after three decades of rapid globalization, peasant resistance is once again on the social agenda while the new food crisis since 2007-2008 has put the agrarian producer on the international agenda once again.¹⁰ Peasant movements of all kinds are part of alter-globalization movements.¹¹ Sev-

⁴ J. D. Van der Ploeg, The peasantries of the twenty-first century: the commoditisation debate revisited, in: *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 37 (2010), 1, 20-23.

⁵ J. R. Owen, In defense of the ‘peasant’, in: *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 35,(2005), 382.

⁶ T. Shanin, Introduction. Peasantry as a concept, in: T. Shanin (ed.), *Peasants and peasant societies. Selected readings*, Oxford and New York 1987, 6.

⁷ E. R. Wolf, *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century*, New York 1969, 1999, 295.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 282.

⁹ E. Hobsbawm, *Peasants and politics*, in: *Journal of Peasant Studies*, (1973), 1, 3-22.

¹⁰ For example: *World Development Report 2008: Agriculture for Development* (<http://wdronline.worldbank.org>, last consulted 27/04/2012), was the first report of the World Bank in 25 years putting agriculture in the centre.

eral countries have been faced with new forms of rural and agrarian resistance. This ranges from European farmers pouring their milk on their fields to land occupations in Central America and Latin America, Africa, India, and China. People who need to live from the land express themselves loudly amidst a world of increasing food insecurity.¹² In today's world, peasants are still the largest social group. Of the seven billion people on our planet, half still live in the countryside and 42 percent of all active women work the land.¹³ It is not surprising that international organizations such as the World Bank are reconsidering the importance of the small peasant. Agriculture is no longer perceived as an impediment but as an important *road to development*.¹⁴ Recent studies by both the United Nations and the World Bank illustrate that small-scale agriculture practised by the peasantry can provide a good answer to today's challenges.¹⁵

In this contribution, we review literature in order to analyse peasant resistance in a comparative historical perspective. We focus on two cases: peasant resistance under Stalinist collectivization in the 1930s and today's transnational peasant movement La Vía Campesina. In doing so, we assess to what degree former and new peasant movements are comparable. We question how peasants reacted to changes to their land and lives: How did they organize themselves? Which demands did they pose? Whom did they consider to be their adversary, and which methods and actions did they use? Can we follow the pessimistic vision of Eric Wolf, Eric Hobsbawm, and others? Is it true that the forms and methods of peasant resistance in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are no longer effective? Or, do peasant movements succeed in adapting to the new spatial and social context: from local to transnational?

2. Peasant Movements in 1930s Russia: “Parochial Reactions to Major Social Dislocations”¹⁶

2.1 Organization: A Movement Without Leaders?

Stalin launched total collectivization in the Soviet Union on 5 January 1930. Individual farms became large agricultural enterprises called kolkhozes. Farmers were forced to hand over their cattle, materials and labour to those new farms. Peasant resistance against this all-out attack on their lives and work was far-reaching. Several authors have researched this

¹¹ S. Borras/M. Edelman/C. Kay, Transnational Agrarian Movements: Origins and Politics, Campaigns and Impact, in: *Journal of Agrarian Change*, (2008), 2-3, 169-204.

¹² E. Holt-Giménez/R. Patel, *Food Rebellions! Crisis and the Hunger for Justice. The real story behind the world food crisis and what we can do about it*, Oakland 2009.

¹³ According to the statistics of the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations), see: <http://faostat.fao.org>, last consulted on 27/04/2012.

¹⁴ E. Vanhaute, The End of Peasantries? Rethinking the Role of Peasantries in a World-Historical View, in: *Review* (Fernand Braudel Center), (2008), 1, 39-59; E. Vanhaute, From famine to food crisis: what history can teach us about local and global subsistence crises, in: *Journal of Peasant Studies*, (2011), 1, 47-65.

¹⁵ M. A. Altieri, Small farms as a planetary ecological asset. Five key reasons why we should support the revitalization of small farms in the Global South. Op: Website Food First, Institute for Food & Development Policy, <http://www.foodfirst.org/en/node/2115>, 2008.

¹⁶ E. R. Wolf, *Peasant Wars* (Fn 7), 295.

opposition.¹⁷ Their views differ strongly, especially with regard to organization of this resistance.

Former Soviet leaders and Marxist authors strongly underestimated the organizational capacity and impact of these peasant resistance movements. By considering the peasantry as a class *an sich* (in itself) rather than a class *für sich* (for itself) with an independent class consciousness, they expressed their doubt in the ability of individual and subordinate peasants to organize themselves as a class in order to defend their common interests.¹⁸ Naturally, the peasantry was not able to organize themselves independently or on a long-term basis.¹⁹ Any cooperation would and could only be temporary and targeted at specific goals.²⁰ The Soviet authorities repeated this vision when they were faced with resistance against forced collectivization in the countryside in the 1930s. They described this as a loose set of spontaneous rebellions.²¹ However, historical research illustrates that a lack of formal organization does not mean a lack of direction and association with the resistance. Secret meetings and gatherings were held, and headquarters were erected.²² There was internal consultation concerning demands and strategies.²³ In times of external threat, research has shown that peasants are capable of cooperating and leaving their internal differences behind.²⁴ Studies regarding the Russian peasant rebellions illustrate several forms of group solidarity.²⁵

Nevertheless, many authors consider those forms of informal organization and coordination as weak and temporary.²⁶ Lynn Viola has researched these rebellions thoroughly and stresses the strong and structural forms of organization amongst Russian peasants. The main problem is that observers, mostly outsiders and historians, have a distinct, often modern or urban, perception of collective rebellions and protests. This obscures a better understanding of the basic structures behind the apparently loose forms of protest.²⁷ There were no public leaders, membership rolls, manifestations, or public activities. According to James Scott, these movements can be considered social movements despite this institutional

¹⁷ This article is mainly based on the research of Sheila Fitzpatrick, Andrea Graziosi, Kevin McDermott, Tracy McDonald and Lynn Viola.

¹⁸ K. Marx, *De Achttiende Brumaire van Louis Bonaparte*, 1852. see: <http://www.marxists.org/nederlands/marx-engels/1852/18e.htm>, last consulted 27/04/2012.

¹⁹ T. Shanin, *Defining Peasants*, Oxford 1990, 152; I. Hill, *The End of the Russian Peasantry?* In: *Soviet Studies*, 27 (1975), 1, 111; E. Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, London 1969, 13.

²⁰ E. R. Wolf, *Peasants*, New Jersey 1966, p. 108; E. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels. Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th century*, Manchester 1959, p. 18.

²¹ T. McDonald, *A Peasant Rebellion in Stalin's Russia: The Pitelinskii Uprising, Riazan 1930*, in: *Journal of Social History*, 35 (2001), 1, 130; L. Viola, *Bab'I Bunty and Peasant Women's Protest during Collectivization*, in: *Russian Review*, 45 (1986), 1, 33.

²² *Ibid.*, 125-128; L. Viola/V. P. Danilov/N. A. Ivnitiskii/D. Kozlov (red.), *The War Against the Peasantry, 1927-1930. The Tragedy of the Soviet Countryside*, London 2005, 258.

²³ J. C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak. Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, London 1985, 301.

²⁴ Y.-M. Berce, *Rural Unrest*, in: J. Blum (red.), *Our Forgotten Past. Seven centuries of life on the land*, London 1982, 142.

²⁵ A. Graziosi, *Collectivisation, révoltes paysannes et politiques gouvernementales à travers les rapports du GPU d'Ukraine de février-mars 1930*, in: *Cahiers du monde Russe*, 35 (1994), 454; L. Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin. Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance*, Oxford 1996, 5-6.

²⁶ E. Hobsbawm, *Peasants and Politics* (Fn 9), 5-7; T. Shanin, *Defining Peasants* (Fn 19), 151-152.

²⁷ L. Viola, *Bab'I Bunty* (Fn 21), 36-40.

invisibility.²⁸ A lack of formal organization is the norm due to the danger and permanent threat of repression.²⁹ Peasants usually acted individually or in small groups.³⁰ This necessitated only small-scale, informal organization and coordination. The traditional pattern of a peasant revolt consisted of a sequence of smaller, more or less isolated eruptions, internally coordinated but without visible leadership.³¹

Nevertheless, many authors consider leadership to be crucial for the success of rural protests.³² That is why contemporaries, both allies and adversaries, created mythical peasant leaders.³³ According to Eric Wolf, those leaders were often rural dwellers with a certain degree of status and independence.³⁴ The Soviet authorities also identified two groups as being responsible for the rebellion: outsiders³⁵ and rich farmers or kulaks.³⁶ However, neither historical research³⁷ nor the few remaining testimonies confirm this thesis, “et je suis sure que personne ne la dirigeait”.³⁸ Small-scale actions did not require clear leadership, diminishing the possibility of repression. Leadership was concealed from contemporaries and remains concealed from historians.³⁹

2.2 Demands: Violation of Local Conventions

Rebellious peasants often put forward their demands only implicitly, so historians have to derive these demands from their concrete actions.⁴⁰ Although peasants could be quite extremist in their world view (for example, by imagining a reversal in the distribution of riches and status), generally these were not in their demands and actions. Peasants did not ask for radical societal changes; on the contrary, their demands derived from daily experiences.⁴¹ Scott summarizes their claims as a cry for bread, land and fewer or no taxes.⁴² Russian and Ukrainian peasants repeatedly demanded restitution for their recently confiscated grain, cattle, and machinery.⁴³ Furthermore, they asked for fair wages for their work

²⁸ J. C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance. Hidden Transcripts*, London 1990, 200.

²⁹ J. C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak* (Fn 23), 35, 297-298, xv, 297-299, 301, 273.

³⁰ J. C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts* (Fn 28), 200.

³¹ E. Hobsbawm, *Peasants and Politics* (Fn 9), 9; Y.-M. Berce, *Rural unrest* (Fn 24), 143.

³² T. Shanin, *Defining Peasants* (Fn 19), 152; E. Hobsbawm, *Peasants and Politics* (Fn 9), 12; E. R. Wolf, *Peasant Wars* (Fn 7), 294; J. C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak* (Fn 23), xv; Y.-M. Berce, *Rural unrest* (Fn 24), 141.

³³ E. R. Wolf, *Peasant Wars* (Fn 7), 107, 41.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 268-270.

³⁵ T. McDonald, *A Peasant Rebellion* (Fn 21), 130-131, 133.

³⁶ L. Viola/V. P. Danilov/N. A. Ivnitskii/D. Kozlov (red.), *The War Against the Peasantry* (Fn 22), 257.

³⁷ S. Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's peasants. Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization*, New York 1994, 3-4; R. Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow. Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine*, Oxford 1986, 4; L. Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin* (Fn 25), 113-114.

³⁸ P. Grigorenko, *Mémoires*, Paris: Presses de la Renaissance, 1980, 135.

³⁹ T. Shanin, *Defining Peasants* (Fn 19), 151-153; J. C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts* (Fn 28), 139.

⁴⁰ A. Megill, *Some Aspects of the Ethics of History-Writing: Reflections on Edith Wyschogrod's An Ethics of Remembering*, in: D. Carr/T. R. Flynn/R. A. Makkreell (red.), *The ethics of history*, Illinois 2004, 67; Y.-M. Berce, *Rural unrest* (Fn 24), 148.

⁴¹ J. C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak* (Fn 23), 326, 331, 348-350.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 295.

⁴³ T. McDonald, *A Peasant Rebellion* (Fn 22), 127-128; A. Graziosi, *Collectivisation, révoltes paysannes* (Fn 27), 456.

on the kolkhozes, rebelled against the partition of land, and were concerned about the shortages of food resulting from the collectivization.⁴⁴

On the whole, their demands covered fundamental material and physical needs. The Soviet authorities liked to describe the resistance as irrational and hysterical, especially when it was led by women. Yet women were responsible for the survival of their families. The confiscation of cows deteriorated peasant families' economic base and threatened the future of their children and households.

This causes most authors to conclude that peasants normally fight for rather modest demands. Their aim was not the abolishment of the existing social order, but a fight against specific changes in their way of life. Their goal was not to topple the dominant system, but to facilitate their survival within that system: "the usual goal of peasants [...] is 'working the system to their minimum disadvantage'"⁴⁵ As such, the Russian peasantry in the 1930s did not try to topple the Soviet authorities; they tried to get the most unfavorable measures abolished.⁴⁶ This was translated in slogans across the Russian countryside: "We welcome Soviet power without collective farms, grain collections, and local communists"⁴⁷, "Soviet Power, but without Collective Farms", "We Are for Soviet Power, but against the communists"⁴⁸ After all, Russian peasants were already used to communist power, which was established in 1917. Collectivization, however, was new. The primary goal of their resistance was to protect as much of their independence as they could.

The demands of the Russian peasantry were by no means extreme. Furthermore, the demands of peasant movements were often based on their sense of justice.⁴⁹ Their perception of a fairer social order frequently formed the basis of protest movements.⁵⁰ Confiscating the property of the kulaks and forcing the peasants to hand everything over to the kolkhoz did not comply with that sense of justice.⁵¹ Consequently, peasants often demanded an investigation into the excesses of the collectivization campaigns.

The – imagined – past constituted another important breeding ground for resistance. This was often translated into a desire to return to the former way of life, to old customs and traditions.⁵² Actions of resistance were regularly aimed at symbols of renewal such as schools. They demanded their abolition and a banishment of the teachers.⁵³ This past was often reconstructed as a function of the present; old conventions, disadvantageous for the peasantry, were left out.⁵⁴ Resistance was also a consequence of their loss of status and their role in cultural life.⁵⁵

⁴⁴ T. McDonald, *A Peasant Rebellion* (Fn 21), 129; L. Viola/V. P. Danilov/N. A. Ivinskii/D. Kozlov (red.), *The War Against the Peasantry* (Fn 22), 320.

⁴⁵ J. C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak* (Fn 23), 301, 341-343.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 348.

⁴⁷ Y.-M. Berce, *Rural unrest* (Fn 24), 129.

⁴⁸ L. Viola/V. P. Danilov/N. A. Ivinskii/D. Kozlov (red.), *The War Against the Peasantry* (Fn 22), 258.

⁴⁹ Y.-M. Berce, *Rural unrest* (Fn 24), 135.

⁵⁰ E. R. Wolf, *Peasant Wars* (Fn 7), 295; E. R. Wolf, *Peasants* (Fn 20), 106.

⁵¹ A. Graziosi, *Collectivisation, révoltes paysannes* (Fn 25), 456.

⁵² T. McDonald, *A Peasant Rebellion* (Fn 21), 127, 134.

⁵³ A. Graziosi, *Collectivisation, révoltes paysannes* (Fn 25), 457.

⁵⁴ Y.-M. Berce, *Rural unrest* (Fn 24), 136, 148, 139; J. C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak* (Fn 23), 318, 179, 345-347.

⁵⁵ J. C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak* (Fn 23), 236, 239; T. McDonald, *A Peasant Rebellion* (Fn 21), 130.

2.3 Opponents: *The Local Logic of Accusation*

When Russian peasants switched to direct action in the form of destroying properties, breaking windows, and attacking people physically, their actions were almost always directed against local representatives of Soviet power and members of the local Soviet, their families and property.⁵⁶ The Russian uprisings of the 1930s confirmed the tradition of peasant rebellions, focusing almost exclusively on local targets. Peasants were aware of the larger processes, but they experienced and combated those in personal, specific and local forms. Their adversaries became real people, actors responsible for their deeds. This kind of personification canalized anger and provoked actions that would have been less likely if the causes were considered to be impersonal and inevitable. James Scott calls this redirection of anger the *local logic of accusation*. Members of the local community bore obligations towards each other and could be advised about their responsibility. Strangers, on the other hand, could not be held responsible since local moral conventions could not be applied to them.⁵⁷

This also explains why the distant symbol of suppressive power, the sovereign, was typically not a victim of peasant rebellions.⁵⁸ Myths about the sincere king express the belief that, if only he knew about the injustices, he would set things right.⁵⁹ Some explain this via religion: the king was sent by God to enforce justice and thus was the one who could restore harmony.⁶⁰ The same pattern can be seen in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) of the 1930s. Peasants directed their grievances towards central authorities in the vain hope that Stalin or the Central Committee of the communist party would defend them against the local Soviet powers.⁶¹ Stalin became a hero of the Russian peasantry after the publication of the article *Dizzy with success* in March 1930, in which he accused local staff members of committing excesses during collectivization. They felt supported by Stalin in their struggle against local Soviet members. Stalin was considered the good tsar residing in far-away Moscow.⁶² Instead of being a victim of the peasantry's anger, Stalin succeeded in becoming the "good leader".⁶³

Attacks against members of the local Soviet fits into this picture. Moreover, many communists did collectivize in an aggressive manner so as to report the best numbers to Moscow. Despite the warning not to start a 'game of collectivization', local officials tried to expropriate and/or deport as many kulaks and to establish as many kolkhozes as possible. The central authorities' strategy of accusing the local Soviets of being the cause of unrest was successful. Shifting responsibility onto those locals became one of Stalin's typical policies. To what degree this strategy was able to convince all peasants remains unclear. Some slogans illustrate a more fundamental dissatisfaction with the regime: "down with

⁵⁶ T. McDonald, *A Peasant Rebellion* (Fn 21), 126, 136; L. Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin* (Fn 25), 111-113.

⁵⁷ J. C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak* (Fn 23), 168-169, 181-183, 347-348.

⁵⁸ E. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels* (Fn 20), 22, 26.

⁵⁹ E. Hobsbawm, *Peasants and Politics* (Fn 9), 12, 14.

⁶⁰ Y.-M. Berce, *Rural unrest* (Fn 24), 135-136.

⁶¹ L. Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin* (Fn 25), 4.

⁶² L. Viola/V. P. Danilov/N. A. Ivnikskii/D. Kozlov (red.), *The War Against the Peasantry* (Fn 22), 267; L. Viola, *Bab'I Bunty* (Fn 21), 40.

⁶³ K. McDermott, *Stalin. Revolutionary in an Era of War*, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006, 65, 71.

Stalin's dictatorship, long live a real worker's and peasants' dictatorship", or "down with Stalin, give us Trotsky, the leader of the Red Army, and Comrade Mykov".⁶⁴ According to Fitzpatrick, the Stalin cult of the peasantry was only a façade; they held him responsible for collectivization and the subsequent famine.⁶⁵

2.4 Actions: Weapons of the Weak

Just like their demands and targets, the peasantry's actions were usually modest, careful and realistic. These low-profile forms of resistance are called *everyday forms of resistance*,⁶⁶ *infrapolitics*,⁶⁷ or *passive resistance*. They appeared to be an effective strategy, especially in rural settings. The simple act of not understanding an order gave peasants enormous power. They could use the system to their maximal advantage and minimal disadvantage.⁶⁸ Rebellious peasants used to do their work "carelessly and inefficiently. They could intentionally or unconsciously feign illness, ignorance and incompetence", which made their resistance "nearly unbeatable".⁶⁹ This disorder and inertia was also a widespread phenomenon in the USSR. The peasants only worked a minimum number of days on the kolkhoz, while tools and machinery were scattered around and abandoned.⁷⁰ The cattle was neglected,⁷¹ or sold and slaughtered.⁷² Socialist properties were damaged and destroyed,⁷³ nobody bothered to repair them.⁷⁴ Absenteeism was endemic in the 1930s. Peasants simply refused to do a certain task, or they had to be bribed.⁷⁵ Robbery was omnipresent.⁷⁶

Language and cultural patterns are part of these 'infrapolitics'. Since exploitation and domination were legitimized through ideology, the resistance needed a counter-ideology,⁷⁷ which made use of contradictions and openings within the dominant culture.⁷⁸ For example, peasants constructed barricades and asked every passer-by to show his or her documents, a practice widespread under communists.⁷⁹ The farms of communists were dekulakized.⁸⁰ Such symbolic inversions were typical of peasant resistance, although normally only expressed in drawings and stories. While there was no cooperation in the tradi-

⁶⁴ L. Viola/V. P. Danilov/N. A. Ivnikskii/D. Kozlov (red.), *The War Against the Peasantry* (Fn 22), 204, 265, 322, 346.

⁶⁵ S. Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's peasants* (Fn 37), 17.

⁶⁶ J. C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak* (Fn 23), XVI, 348.

⁶⁷ J. C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts* (Fn 28), 19.

⁶⁸ E. Hobsbawm, *Peasants and Politics* (Fn 9), 13, 20.

⁶⁹ J. C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak* (Fn 23), 273, 282, xvii, 22, 227-230, 248-251, 265, 33.

⁷⁰ N. Shimotomai, *A Note on the Kuban Affair (1932-1933)*, in: *Acta Slavica Iaponica*, (1983), 1, 47.

⁷¹ V. Kravchenko, *I Chose Freedom. The Personal and Political Life of a Soviet Official*, New York: Garden City, 1946, 99.

⁷² S. Lozovy, *What happened in Hadyach County*, in: I. I. Sandul/A. P. Stepovy/S. O. Pidhainy (red.), *The Black Deeds of the Kremlin. A White Book, Vol. I. Book of Testimonies*, Toronto 1953, 247.

⁷³ L. Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin* (Fn 25), 218.

⁷⁴ N. Werth, *La vie quotidienne des paysans Russes de la révolution à la collectivisation (1917-1939)*, Paris 1984, 360, 369.

⁷⁵ L. Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin* (Fn 25), 214, 211 (28).

⁷⁶ N. Werth, *La vie quotidienne* (Fn 74), 365, 371.

⁷⁷ J. C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts* (Fn 28), 118, 136-137, 139, 152.

⁷⁸ J. C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak* (Fn 23), 336-339.

⁷⁹ T. McDonald, *A Peasant Rebellion* (Fn 21), 135.

⁸⁰ L. Viola/V. P. Danilov/N. A. Ivnikskii/D. Kozlov (red.), *The War Against the Peasantry* (Fn 22), 259.

tional sense, this cultural atmosphere made a minimal form of coordination possible. It created a *climate of opinion*, a silent support of each other's actions.

An additional advantage was the oral character of popular culture, which made it impossible for the authorities to trace who was saying what. This enabled peasants to express dangerous opinions in relative security. Another way of securing the anonymity of a speaker was by spreading false rumors.⁸¹ In the Russian countryside, rumors spread that women's hair served as a means of payment to the Chinese for the Trans-Siberian railway, and that all men and women should be forced to sleep in one bed. Rumors were partly based on reality. In some cases, women were indeed forced to cut their hair and in the Northern Caucasus local activists collectivized all blankets. At the same time, by pretending to believe the rumors, one could participate in easy accessible, non-politic protest.⁸² False rumors also reflected the wishes, hopes, and fears of the peasants,⁸³ as it is illustrated by the rumors related to an international intervention, a papal interference,⁸⁴ and the collectivization of women and children.⁸⁵

When it was not possible to guarantee the anonymity of a speaker, they concealed the message, for example, by making use of euphemisms, metaphors and other linguistic tricks.⁸⁶ Those silent actions were hidden behind a public façade of obedience and respect.⁸⁷

More sporadically, resistance turned violent and open. During the first months of the 1930s, the fight was fierce. Communists were beaten up, chased away, and killed. Peasants took back their grain, and destroyed portraits, windows, and buildings.⁸⁸ In rural society, violence remained just beneath the surface: What was necessary to cause it to erupt?⁸⁹ According to Scott, the moment of eruption was difficult to predict since it cannot always be seen as an act of rebellion; it is often somebody's failure to control themselves. Nevertheless, some structural features can be identified, making the transition from passive to active rebellion more likely.⁹⁰ When changes were carried out gradually, they did not affect everyone equally. On the contrary, when changes were a sudden attack against all daily routines, active rebellion became more probable.⁹¹ Viola describes collectivization as an "all-out attack against the peasantry, its culture, and way of life".⁹² Even though the Russian peasantry was not a homogeneous group, collectivization affected all more or less to the same degree, allowing them to transcend their internal differences and work together against a common enemy. Dekulakization made the peasantry even more homogeneous, thereby reinforcing their solidarity.⁹³ Open rebellion became more likely when peasants had

⁸¹ J. C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts* (Fn 28), 140, 144-145, 160, 162, 166-167, 171; J. C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak* (Fn 23), 300-301.

⁸² L. Viola, *Bab'I Bunty* (Fn 21), 28-32.

⁸³ J. C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts* (Fn 28), 140, 144-145.

⁸⁴ S. Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's peasants* (Fn 37), 67-68.

⁸⁵ L. Viola, *Bab'I Bunty* (Fn 21), 31.

⁸⁶ J. C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts* (Fn 28), 136-137, 139, 152, 166-167, 171.

⁸⁷ J. C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak* (Fn 23), xvii, 26, 304.

⁸⁸ T. McDonald, *A Peasant Rebellion* (Fn 21), 126, 128, 134-135.

⁸⁹ Y.-M. Berce, *Rural unrest* (Fn 24), 148.

⁹⁰ J. C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts* (Fn 28), 210, 217-219.

⁹¹ J. C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak* (Fn 23), 242.

⁹² L. Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin* (Fn 25), vii, 44.

⁹³ A. Graziosi, *The Great Soviet Peasant War, Bolsheviks and Peasants, 1917-1933*, Harvard 1996, 61.

the feeling that changes violated their basic rights, when they interpreted something as an act of aggression or provocation, and when they felt humiliated or exploited.⁹⁴ This was also the case in Stalin's Russia; the peasantry considered collectivization as a return to slavery⁹⁵ and as theft: "socialism, they sneered, 'Robbery is a better name for it'"⁹⁶

Repression was another factor that influenced the probability of outright rebellion.⁹⁷ When the government made all other forms of resistance impossible, open resistance was the only option left.⁹⁸ Active rebellion mostly occurred during huge crises,⁹⁹ when there was nothing left to lose.¹⁰⁰ It was a sign of despair; it illustrated the failure of hidden forms of resistance.¹⁰¹ Those 'infrapolitics' were not a substitute for open resistance or an outlet for their anger; they formed the basis for rebellions or revolutions that only erupted after a long yet hidden struggle.¹⁰² In the Soviet Union, violence had a prehistory. The year 1927 is traditionally considered the start of troubles between the government and the peasantry.¹⁰³ The peasantry no longer wanted to sell their grain to the state, the so-called 'grain procurement crisis', since, next to bad weather conditions and crop failures, prices were too low and few goods were offered in exchange. Stalin was convinced of the need for collectivization after 1927. He succeeded in silencing the opposition and carried through his plan in 1929.¹⁰⁴ After three years of struggle, the Russian peasantry probably felt that their traditional forms of resistance had failed.

After six months, in the summer of 1930, active resistance was revived in the USSR.¹⁰⁵ Authors concluded that a long-term mobilization of the peasantry was nearly an impossible task.¹⁰⁶ Field work was solitary or family-based, and competition for the scarce resources of the land was the rule. Furthermore, all peasants were not affected equally by the reforms. This created other divisions in rural society.¹⁰⁷ Finally, repression was harsh, depriving the peasantry of any realistic perspective. One of the few alternatives was to flee, which Scott calls 'avoidance protest',¹⁰⁸ a phenomenon also widespread in the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁹

The most realistic forms of resistance in rural societies were the *weapons of the weak*. Those often hidden forms of resistance were most sustainable and best suited for a long-term struggle. When active rebellion failed or was suppressed, one could revert to those

⁹⁴ J. C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts* (Fn 28), 219; Y.-M. Berce, *Rural unrest* (Fn 24), 139, 148, 142-143, 150, 135.

⁹⁵ S. Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's peasants* (Fn 37), 48.

⁹⁶ V. Kravchenko, *I Chose Freedom* (Fn 71), 131.

⁹⁷ J. C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak* (Fn 23), 299.

⁹⁸ E. Hobsbawm, *Peasants and Politics* (Fn 9), 15; J. C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts* (Fn 30), 216-217.

⁹⁹ E. R. Wolf, *On Peasant Rebellions*, in: T. Shanin (red.), *Peasants and peasant societies, selected readings*, Harmondsworth 1971, 265-267.

¹⁰⁰ J. C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts* (Fn 28), 156, 190.

¹⁰¹ J. C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak* (Fn 23), xvi, 29, 37, 273, 297.

¹⁰² J. C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts* (Fn 28), 184, 186-187, 227.

¹⁰³ S. Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's peasants* (Fn 37), 37.

¹⁰⁴ L. Viola/V. P. Danilov/N. A. Ivnikskii/D. Kozlov (red.), *The War Against the Peasantry* (Fn 22), 16-19, 59, 123-124.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 322.

¹⁰⁶ E. R. Wolf, *On Peasant Rebellions* (Fn 99), 268.

¹⁰⁷ E. R. Wolf, *Peasant Wars* (Fn 7), 289-290.

¹⁰⁸ J. C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak* (Fn 23), 242, 245.

¹⁰⁹ L. Viola/V. P. Danilov/N. A. Ivnikskii/D. Kozlov (red.), *The War Against the Peasantry* (Fn 22), 213, 250.

‘infrapolitics’. Since collectivization was not halted, it can be assumed that everyday forms of resistance continued in the USSR beyond the 1930s. According to Viola, it was this silent and inconspicuous resistance that undermined the fundamentals of Soviet politics in the long run.¹¹⁰ McDermott postulates that “collectivised agriculture continued to be the Achilles heel of the Soviet economy right to the Gorbachev era”.¹¹¹

2.5 Failed Rebellions?

How can one decide whether the rebellions were successful or not? This is a difficult question to answer since it involves the consideration of objective targets and a subjective assessment.

Some specific demands were realized.¹¹² A women’s rebellion in Viknyna in February 1930 was able to temporarily abolish the kolkhoz.¹¹³ The degree of unrest in the countryside was so overwhelming that the communists were forced to make temporary concessions. The decree of 1 March 1930 gave the peasantry the right to own some cattle and poultry as well as their own piece of the land. Continuing unrest forced Stalin to publish his article *Dizzy with Success*, which effectively resulted in a temporary stop of collectivization. On 10 March, another decree was published that confirmed a prohibition of the collectivization of poultry and cattle, required the reopening of markets and churches, and revised the list of households that should be dekulakized. Stalin promised a cow to every household on the kolkhoz in 1933. Those concessions did not end collectivization, but they did soften the most detested practices, such as direct attacks against the church, an attempt to collectivize all cattle, and the impunity of local Soviet members.¹¹⁴

Despite those initial achievements, most authors conclude that peasants could not realize their goals in the long run, and the fight almost always ended in defeat.¹¹⁵ Even with an external leader, regarded as essential by some, success was not guaranteed. Very often the peasantry found themselves helping leaders rise to power who subsequently neglected their interests.¹¹⁶ This also happened to the Russian peasantry after they helped the communists gain power in 1917.

Since the Soviet authorities succeeded in carrying out collectivization, it is not surprising that they described the peasants’ resistance as a failure. Graziosi states that Stalin’s victory over the rebellious peasantry was complete in 1933.¹¹⁷ However, all historians are not in agreement. According to McDermott, agriculture remained the Achilles heel of the Soviet state. Viola thinks the state’s victory was a Pyrrhic victory. Due to collectivization, peasants became bitter and turned to long-term, passive resistance. Fitzpatrick argues that

¹¹⁰ L. Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin* (Fn 25), 205.

¹¹¹ K. McDermott, *Stalin* (Fn 67), 69.

¹¹² Y.-M. Berce, *Rural unrest* (Fn 24), 140-143, 152.

¹¹³ O. Hai-Holowko, *The Tragedy of Viknyna*, in: I. I. Sandul/A. P. Stepovy/S. O. Pidhainy (red.), *The Black Deeds of the Kremlin. A White Book, Vol. I. Book of Testimonies*, Toronto 1953, 292.

¹¹⁴ L. Viola, *Bab’I Bunty* (Fn 21), 25, 41, 26, 41; L. Viola/V. P. Danilov/N. A. Ivnikskii/D. Kozlov (red.), *The War Against the Peasantry* (Fn 22), 257, 268, 320, 216, 267-268.

¹¹⁵ J. C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak* (Fn 23), 298, 29, xvi, 350; E. R. Wolf, *Peasants* (Fn 20), 108, Y.-M. Berce, *Rural unrest* (Fn 24), 140-142, 152.

¹¹⁶ J. C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak* (Fn 23), 29.

¹¹⁷ A. Graziosi, *The Great Soviet Peasant War* (Fn 93), 52, 56-57, 68-69.

the state could not control the Russian peasantry completely; peasants succeeded in limiting their contribution to the Soviet state to a minimum.¹¹⁸

James Scott recognizes that in the course of history, occasional and isolated peasant resistance did not have much impact. The situation changed when resistance adopted a consistent pattern, even if that pattern was not coordinated or organized. Through their *everyday forms of resistance*, peasants were definitely able to disrupt the ambitions and plans of a state, as is shown in the case of the Soviet Union. Throughout history, peasants have frequently made unpopular measures impossible through the use of passive resistance. The efficiency of those forms of resistance increased as the peasantry succeeded in cooperating.¹¹⁹ Several authors state that the Russian peasantry was able to temporarily transcend their traditional cleavages and unite in their fight against a common adversary.¹²⁰

At the same time, James Scott acknowledges that the results of rural resistance must not be overestimated.¹²¹ The actions did not bring fundamental changes.¹²² Most of the time it was the landlord or the government that won the fight, even though they occasionally had to make some concessions. In general, peasantry victories – resulting from both active and passive resistance – were only marginal and temporary.¹²³ In the Soviet Union, the abolishment of kolkhozes did not last. The government continued to confiscate grain on a large scale. Peasants seldom received a fair share of the harvest or just wages for their work. Collectivized properties were not returned to their initial owners, and commerce was only possible under very strict conditions. Therefore, resistance only resulted in small and temporary concessions.

Despite their enormous de facto power, why were peasants not able to obtain more than some modest successes? Explanations refer to the weak or inferior position of the social group, their lack of resources, the nature of their work on the land, and their desolation and disintegration.¹²⁴ It would be too easy to see this as the ultimate cause for a failure of peasant movements. Due to a local focal point of resistance, successes on the local scale were often significant. Researchers, however, can seldom detect whether the peasants considered their actions successful or not.¹²⁵

¹¹⁸ C. van den Abeele, *De collectivisatie in de USSR, 1929-1933*, UGent, Bachelor paper, 2008, 19.

¹¹⁹ J. C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak* (Fn 23), 296, 30-31, 303, xvii, 36, 38, 294, 298, 31.

¹²⁰ A. Graziosi, *The Great Soviet Peasant War* (Fn 93), 52, 61; L. Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin* (Fn 25), 8.

¹²¹ J. C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak* (Fn 23), 282, 29-30, 183, 229, 241, 248, 252-255.

¹²² J. C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts* (Fn 28), 191.

¹²³ Y.-M. Berce, *Rural unrest* (Fn 24), 140-142, 152; J. C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak* (Fn 23), 212, 229, 183, 248, 250-255, 29-30.

¹²⁴ E. Hobsbawm, *Peasants and Politics* (Fn 9), 12; E. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels* (Fn 20), 26-28; I. Hill, *The End of the Russian Peasantry* (Fn 19), 111; Y.-M. Berce, *Rural unrest* (Fn 24), 141; E. R. Wolf, *Peasants* (Fn 20), 108.

¹²⁵ J. C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak* (Fn 23), 258.

3. La Vía Campesina: ‘Globalizing the Struggle’

3.1 Organization: A Global Grassroots Movement

Current changes in the global food chain and the position of food producers have thoroughly redefined the areas of action and resistance of peasant movements. Peasant movements have adopted a clear identity and agenda. The social group of rural producers seems to have transformed into a class *für sich*. Today’s peasants are represented by several formal, permanent organizations, with a board of directors, membership rolls, public activities, and an identifiable structure. They are defined as small and medium-scale agricultural producers. They cultivate the land and act as global citizens. They protest against globalization in its current form, in mutual consultation and solidarity. Agreements are no longer only made on a local and regional level, but also within national and global networks. *La Vía Campesina*, founded in 1993, is a global peasant movement uniting billions of peasants from the Americas, Africa, Europe and Asia.¹²⁶ This movement is built on the mutual recognition of and solidarity between peasants from all parts of the world.¹²⁷ Until recently, the huge diversity between the peasants was seen as a significant weakness.¹²⁸ Now it is believed that, despite the big differences in living and working conditions, new transnational movements can create new forms of cohesion. All workers of the land are presumed to fight for the same goals and to share the same values. This results from a growing consciousness that the problems they face are similar and transcend local and regional boundaries.¹²⁹ From its start, *La Vía Campesina* has expressed itself as a transnational movement, an international alliance of peasant and family farmer organizations. It aims to be a conglomerate of local, regional, and national organizations. This makes it fragile and vulnerable, and confronts it with internal tensions and contradictions.¹³⁰

That is why *La Vía Campesina* is working on a common identity, strengthened by the conviction that all peasants have the same problems and adversaries despite their social and spatial differences. The need for global unity relates to an exchange of experiences, the need to educate people, and the strengthening of local peasant organizations, as expressed in their central slogan “Globalizing Hope – Globalizing the Struggle!”

3.2 Demands: Another Modernity

La Vía Campesina fiercely reclaims the identity of the campesino, the peasant. The movement shows the important contribution that small peasants make to twenty-first century global society, especially regarding food production and food security. It points out the

¹²⁶ See: <http://viacampesina.org> (last consulted 04/05/2012), where the movement presents itself as ‘the international peasant’s voice’: ‘globalizing hope, globalizing the struggle!’

¹²⁷ M. Edelman, Bringing the Moral Economy back in ... to the Study of 21st-Century Transnational Peasant Movements, in: *American Anthropologist*, 107 (2005), 3, 338; R. Patel, International Agrarian Restructuring and the Practical Ethics of Peasant Movement Solidarity, in: *Journal of Social Philosophy*, 39 (2008), 1, 85, 87.

¹²⁸ E. Hobsbawm, *Peasants and Politics* (Fn 9), 6-7.

¹²⁹ R. Patel, International Agrarian Restructuring (Fn 127), 85,87; A. A. Desmarais, The power of peasants: reflections on the meanings of La Vía Campesina, in: *Journal of Rural Studies*, 24 (2008), 2, 141-142.

social and ecological stability and sustainability of local, small-scale agriculture.¹³¹ The movement does not aim to return to a romanticized past. On the contrary, it strives for a new and different modernity.¹³² Today's world economy creates a social space in which this movement operates. The main ambitions of *La Via Campesina* are an end to the neoliberal world-system, the withdrawal of agriculture as one of the policy domains of the World Trade Organization, the idea of food sovereignty, and the protection of regional food systems. In order to realize this, a reversal in the current world order is necessary. The goals are definitely radical and peasants no longer put forward their demands within the existing social order, as their ancestors did. Justice is currently more than simply a moral right; it is the goal of a global social struggle.¹³³

The program of *La Via Campesina* combines a global analysis of the basic problems with locally oriented solutions. 'What are we fighting against?': imperialism, neo-liberalism, neo-colonialism and patriarchy: all systems that impoverish life, resources and ecosystems, and agents that promote the above such as international financial institutions, the World Trade Organization, free trade agreements, transnational corporations, and governments that are antagonistic to their peoples. 'What do we defend?': Peasant, family farm-based production and people's food sovereignty, organized according to the needs of local communities and via decentralized food production and supply chains.

3.3 Opponents: Agents of Neo-liberal Globalization

La Via Campesina no longer focuses exclusively on local, regional or even national governments. Justice needs to be realized on a global level, primarily by correcting the skewed global food regime.¹³⁴ First, *La Via Campesina* directs its actions against the institutional supports of the global system, as stated in the Maputo Declaration: "Our reflections have made it clear to us that multinational corporations and international finance capital are our most important common enemies, and that as such, we have to bring our struggle to them more directly. They are the ones behind the other enemies of peasants, like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the FTAs and EPAs, neoliberal governments, as well as aggressive economic expansionism, imperialism and militarism. Now is the time to redouble our struggle against FTAs and EPAs, and against the WTO, but this time more clearly indicating the central role played by the TNCs." At the same time, *La Via Campesina* also fights the big transnational corporation dominating the global food system, especially Monsanto, Syngenta, Du Pont, Bayer, Cargill, BASF and Dow.

¹³¹ A. A. Desmarais, The power of peasants (Fn 129), 139-141.

¹³² A. A. Desmarais, Peasants Speak – The Via Campesina: Consolidating an International Peasant and Farm Movement, in: Journal of Rural Studies, 29 (2002), 2, 101.

¹³³ E. R. Wolf, Peasant Wars (Fn 7), 295.

¹³⁴ P. McMichael, Peasant Prospects in the Neoliberal Age, in: New Political Economy, 11 (2006), 3, 409.

3.4 Actions: Act Local, Aim Global

The actions of today's peasant movements are still in line with peasant traditions. Many of their actions are still locally oriented, such as the occupation of a McDonald's in France or the attack of offices of the multinational Cargill by East Indian peasants.¹³⁵ The objectives, however, supersede this regional focus. Peasant movements claim a transcending peasant identity and make demands concerning world trade.¹³⁶ Today's peasants look for forms of organization that collaborate on a supra-regional scale and make full use of all recent communication techniques. Their opponents are global enterprises and organizations. Local and regional strategies no longer suffice. Meetings, forums, tribunals, and demonstrations need to have an international appeal and draw global attention.¹³⁷ The struggle is open, rather than hidden and disguised as it used to be, in a repressive local environment.

La Via Campesina is active on two fronts. On the one hand, they focus on the international agents of neo-liberal globalization. Protest and negotiations are combined: "Negotiations with other agencies would be weak without the real threat that *Via Campesina* can actually resort to militant forms of actions against them; conversely, purely 'expose and oppose' actions without intermittent negotiations would project the movement as unreasonable." On the other hand, the movement consists of several organizations that are active on local and regional scales. *La Via Campesina* promotes local struggles for access to and control of productive resources such as land, credit, seeds, knowledge and water. It also helps marginalized people have a greater say in defining community and national agricultural policies. Media coverage is very important for the actions of *La Via Campesina*. The Internet is a crucial aid that the movement employs and can control.

4. Old and New Peasant Movement: From Local to Global, and Back

Peasant movements, both historical and contemporary, do not easily fit into simple templates. The differences across time and space are considerable. Nevertheless, comparison is possible using well-defined analytical models. This contribution attempts to make a comparison.

An analysis of historical research related to peasant uprisings during the collectivization campaign in the Soviet Union in the 1930s confirms both the power and the weakness of traditional peasant resistance. Peasants were organized into informal networks in which actions and resistance were mainly coordinated locally and formal leadership remained invisible. Authorities often described the resistance as instinctive, uncoordinated and irrational, partly as a consequence of their inability to think outside of the box, and partly to avoid the obligation of giving in to their demands. Demands and goals were often specific and local; they aimed at safeguarding the survival of the family and relations within the local community. They were always linked to the material and physical needs of the peasantry. The fight also had a symbolic character; it was about the definition of justice and an

¹³⁵ M. Edelman, Bringing the Moral Economy back in (Fn 127), 339.

¹³⁶ A. A. Desmarais, The power of peasants (129), 139-140.

¹³⁷ M. Edelman, Bringing the Moral Economy back in (Fn 127), 338-340.

interpretation of the past. Peasants struggled for the survival of both their physical existence and their cultural status.

Their targets also were almost exclusively local. The Russian peasants did not focus on Stalin, Moscow and the communist party. Their fight was not part of a large project to bring about change but was a consequence of their fear of losing the world they knew. The techniques they employed were usually small-scale and hidden, so-called *everyday forms of resistance*. Workers of the land switched to active and open resistance only in times of great crisis. The beginning of collectivization can be seen as such a crisis. During the first months of 1930, the Soviet Union encountered a real wave of violent resistance. After a few months, the peasants fell back on more hidden forms of protest, their *weapons of the weak*. As James Scott emphasises, historians have difficulty grasping the spirit of these forms of resistance. What was hidden behind their silence? What were the intentions of the peasants? How successful could such resistance be? Critical minds such as Eric Wolf and Eric Hobsbawm often repeated that peasant resistance was unsuccessful in the tumultuous twentieth century. They were caught up in the social changes that they tried to fight, both in the forms of capitalism and communism. That was one of the harsh lessons that Russian peasants learned.

The peasants of the twenty-first century do not seem to care about history. Their fight is no longer directed against the local lord or the repressive state but against an unfair world order. The patterns of peasants in resistance, based on historical cases of rebellion, need to be revised. Contrary to many expectations predicting the end of the peasantry, a further marginalization of rural areas and of the peasant population does not mark the final collapse of peasant resistance, but the start of a new type of autonomous peasant organizations. Based on a proud and universal peasant identity – together with support by the most recent forms of media, communication and action – this movement combines a connection to the land with self-conscious world citizenship. There is no need for external leadership, but alliances with other alter-globalization movements are necessary.

The capitalist world-system has historically expanded and transformed in coexistence with frontier zones or zones of contact.¹³⁸ The processes of interaction that emanate from these contacts are challenged by pressures for incorporation into the modern world-system. These pressures contribute to the homogenization of the world by reducing its frontiers, and they simultaneously lead to heterogenization because they are answered by the formulation of old and new frontiers. Throughout history, peasant societies and rural zones have represented geographically diverse frontier zones. Rural communities have never been able to escape the pressures of incorporation once they come into contact with the modern world-system. In response, they have been developing strategies for survival and resistance, articulated towards expanding state power, expanding market relations, class struggle, and ethno-cultural identity. Over time, the scales upon which these social power relations are expressed have been widening and multiplying, and they have become increasingly interdependent. On a global scale, processes of deagrarianization in the core zones often created new peasantries in the periphery. Recent forces of deagrarianization are triggered by the enforcement of neo-liberal policies and Structural Adjustment Plans.

¹³⁸ E. Vanhaute, Peasants, peasantries and (de)peasantization (Fn 3).

Vulnerability, the link between risk and the precariousness of people's livelihood, has always been part of the peasant's existence. A diversification of income and coping strategies – by the individual, in the household and in the village – has always been the primary answer. However, a continuing erosion of the family basis of livelihoods has created new and more massive forms of vulnerability. This has eroded former household and village security mechanisms and it affects their ability to overcome short-term economic stress. Three decades of economic liberalization and institutional restructuring, resulting in multiple and intensified involvement in markets – including commodities, credit, technology, land, and all kinds of services – have created growing and interconnected vulnerabilities and new risks. New forms of organized peasant reactions such as *La Via Campesina* try to formulate an answer to the predominantly neoliberal mode of food production.¹³⁹ Food sovereignty, control over one's own food production and food markets, is put forward as an alternative for food security, a concept agnostic about food production systems. A call for localizing food power implies support for domestic food production and the promotion of a return to smallholder farming.¹⁴⁰ At the same time, peasant's rights are now defined as a set of 'transgressive rights', challenging the primacy of the nation-state and calling for international and universal (human rights) spaces.¹⁴¹ This clarifies how the present material and ideological struggles for 'peasant spaces' put the peasantry in the center of the twenty-first century's systemic crisis. The peasants of the twenty-first century have taught us an important lesson: they are not a redundant relict, but a force of change directed at the future.

¹³⁹ R. Patel, International agrarian restructuring and the practical ethics of peasant movement solidarity, in: *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 41 (2006), 1-2, 84-85.

¹⁴⁰ E. Holt-Giménez, The World food crisis. What's behind it and what can we do about it?, in: Food First. Institute for Food and Development Policy (Policy Brief nr 16), 2008, 13-14.

¹⁴¹ R. Patel, Transgressing rights. La Via Campesina's call for food sovereignty, in: *Feminist Economics*, 13 (2007), 1, 87-93; M. Edelman, Bringing the moral economy back in... to the study of 21st-century transnational peasant movements', in: *American Anthropologist*, 107 (2005), 3, 331-345; Ph. McMichael, Peasants make their own history, but not just as they please..., in: *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 8 (2008), 2-3, 205-228.