



**Artisans of the world, unite**  
**The ‘peasant way’ and alliances for an artisan mode of  
production**

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## Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to search, from a class perspective, for the ‘natural allies’ of peasant movements today. What is the conceptual glue that could pit different sectoral movements together, and mutually attentive to their respective causes? I argue that by extrapolating the proposition of a ‘peasant way’ or peasant mode of production, governed and dynamically reproduced by its intrinsic laws and forces, into general political economy terms, the boundaries of a particular sector – agriculture – can be breached. Thus defining the quest for a peasant existence as the inverse of the proletarian existence – individual control over the means of production, and hence individual decision-making capability over production – we can search for the peasant-like producers of other sectors. From this search emerge fascinating similarities across diverse sectoral struggles. It suggests that the ‘peasant way’ is only one image of an ‘artisan mode of production’ which incarnates in all sectors from housing and education to the sectors of material and intellectual production.

Far from being represented by Marx’s theory of the ‘petty producer’, and having shown their ability to secure economies of scale through cooperation, these ‘outliers’ of the classical Marxist class system must realize their common class position and interests. Their ‘artisanism’ is characterized by disenchantment with both the reality and the ideal of being proletarian, i.e. with lacking direct control over one’s means of production, and thus lacking the capability to directly make production decisions, a view that resonates with a long history of Marxist currents beyond, besides and sometimes against the proletariat. In that sense, artisan-class alliances are, similar to the cross-sectoral alliance of wage workers that characterized anti-capitalist politics in the 20th century, more than mere tactics or mutual solidarity, and depend on a common economic logic of subsistence. Finally, the paper analyzes implications of this perspective on the ongoing debate over non-capitalist institutions and mechanisms of governance.

## Relevance to Development Studies

In the last two decades, critical agrarian studies has closely followed the emergence of new peasant movements, and offered constructive critiques of the concepts and priorities used in their political practice (*the* peasantry, ‘food sovereignty’, ‘organic farming’, ‘agroecology’ etc.). This thesis touches two still ‘hot’ topics: First, the location of peasants and the ‘peasant principle’ in Marxist class theory. Second, the potential for alliances between peasant movements and producer movements in other sectors. The latter mandates further cross-disciplinary research in the field, for which this thesis offers a frame.

## Keywords

Peasant way, peasant principle, class definition of peasantry, non-capitalist modes of production, artisan class

## I: Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to search for the ‘natural allies’ of peasant movements (PMs) today. It conceptualizes the class position that peasants share with a wider array of groups across diverse economic sectors. Similar to the concept of the ‘proletariat’ that aimed to unite *dependent*, wage-earning workers across a great diversity of sectors and occupations by studying the similarities between their respective experiences, it offers a class basis for the search for allies. This shared condition represents the inverse (and the antithesis) of the proletarian existence: *independent* labor, conditioned by control over the means of production and thus self-direction of labor. It achieves a class definition by extrapolating the sector-specific Chayanovian definition of the peasantry (van der Ploeg, 2008 & 2013; Chayanov, 1966) into general, sector-unspecific terms.

This analysis seeks to contribute to the longstanding debates between radical populist and Marxist positions on the correct theoretical representation of peasant producers and their interests. It aims especially to reconcile the Marxist analytical lens with the idea of an ‘other’ of capital (Bernstein, 2010 & 2014) that is not the proletariat, but indeed peasant producers practicing a ‘peasant mode of production’ (PMP). The Marxist class matrix is still dominated by the contradiction between proletarian labor and capital, with non-capitalist modes of production at best relegated to the sidelines, and at worst sacrificed for the accumulation of eventually socializable capital. A *stable* position for non-capitalist producers is missing. They are seen as remnants of the past, unable to compete with the capitalist mode of production, and doomed eventually to subsumption under, or out-competition by capital (Bernstein, 2006)<sup>1</sup>.

It is clear that many PMs today have transcended the determinist politics often based on a literal reading of Marx’s class matrix. This has led to the development of competing methodologies, the most contagious of which has been the ‘food sovereignty’ framework (FS) espoused by *La Via Campesina* and a significant part of radical NGOs and academics (Forum for FS, 2007; Patel, 2009). Marxist scholars have criticized these pluralist frameworks as being ‘class-blind’, or evading class theory altogether. Bernstein (2014) laments that FS is ‘lumping together’ groups such as small farmers and the rural proletariat, which often have contrarian interests. Especially along the frontier of capitalist (or socialist) accumulation, the forces behind accumulation often build on a keen knowledge of this divergence to ‘divide and rule’ these new spaces (Peoples & Sudgen, 1991).

While difficulties of mobilization across classes have characterized FS movements, a conciliatory road is taken by many leading advocates. This has resulted in calls for ‘food movements’ (representing class positions as different as those of small farmers, farm workers, consumers and food chain workers) to

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Subsumption’ refers to “*the processes through which labour is incorporated into capitalist development projects*” (London, 1997: 269), or more generally the ways through which capital subordinates labor. Marx considered two forms of subsumption: Real subsumption describes wage work directly controlled by the capitalist, while formal subsumption applies to various forms of indirect control and management that allow the extraction of surplus (Marx, 1976: 1013).

‘unite’ around the common vision and principles of FS (Holt-Giménez, 2012). Similarly, many FS movement actors have broadly used non-class based definitions of the peasantry, and commonly refer to all ‘rural poor’ as part of that category<sup>2</sup>. As sympathetic as I am to this vision, I hold that a class-based perspective can complement it to a much larger degree than has been reflected in recent debates. PMs need a class matrix, though this does not mean reproducing the flaws of a singular focus on the struggle between capital and the proletariat. Thus, connecting the radical agenda of FS with a clear analysis of class dynamics, both within and beyond agriculture, remains an important challenge<sup>3</sup>.

This thesis defends the position that, at the center of their agendas, PMs are characterized by their *in opposition to the proletarianization of agricultural work*. FS movements such as *La Via Campesina* correctly link this to a broader struggle against the commodification of food and agriculture. Meanwhile, they have struggled to diversify into situations where proletarianization has already taken place and is not easily reversible. Their *raison d’être*, however, remains in the reality of the peasant condition, as well as in the advocacy of a ‘peasant way’ to organize rural social relations. Movements that primarily advocate for small farmers’ incorporation into capital-dominated markets are, in that sense, not PMs, but movements of and for proletarians in the making.

By submitting to this assumption, and using class analysis, it will be possible to treat another question Marxists have posed to the political projects of, or in the name of, the peasantry: *what are these projects part of?* Many of the goals advanced by radical PMs cannot be reached as a standalone project, they require allies outside the sector of food and agriculture to, together, actualize the enormous changes needed to advance on their own, respective, sectoral goals<sup>4</sup>. Structuring the search for allies beyond food and agriculture, finding common interests that are not merely ‘tactical’ but ‘objective’ - i.e. inherent in the respective groups’ similar relations to the means of production, must be a top priority of theory-building. Yet, it has received little attention.

In this context, and from a PM perspective: How can the struggle for a ‘peasant way’ be formulated in terms that would make potential alliances with other sectoral struggles as visible as possible? What is the larger category into which peasants and their struggles fall? The first step to embark on this question must be a coherent definition of the peasantry as a class in the Marxist

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<sup>2</sup> LVC’s *Declaration of the Rights of Peasants*, for example, asserts that “the term peasant also applies to landless” (La Via Campesina, 2009: 7).

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted here that, as much as the quests for FS are analyzed and debated as a novel framework today, it is also ‘only’ a current illustration of PMs and their struggles against capital since the first enclosures, and against feudal power before and besides. When mentioning FS, this text assumes it in this capacity as an illustrative, currently well-referenced case.

<sup>4</sup> Many objectives that are fundamental to building and safeguarding FS, to take one example, are clearly impossible to reach (or even sensibly delineate) comprehensively as food-sector standalone projects. This includes the attempt to re-invest sovereignty in localities, reduce the power of multi-sectoral transnational companies and flexible, international capital and a comprehensive reform of spatial planning and governance.

sense, as well as the mode of production it is engaged in. While Bernstein (2014) criticizes the idea of the peasantry as a group with shared interests, his offer for peasants to see themselves as part of ‘the classes of labor’, i.e. those who “now depend – directly and indirectly – on their labor power” is too deterministic (Panitch & Leys, 2001: ix, quoted in Bernstein, 2010: 110). He correctly critiques inclusive, non-class notions of the peasantry as an autonomous class, but in response offers an extreme position in the exact opposite direction, another all-inclusive concept born out of the assumption that all rural labor is already, or will soon be, subsumed under capital in one or another way. It misses that instances of dependency often co-exist with significant autonomy, and that the latter must give birth to theories, visions and actions of peasant agency outside of capitalism.

Van der Ploeg (2005)<sup>5</sup> suggests that we “recognize that the ‘peasant principle’ operates in large domains of society – domains that stretch far beyond agriculture and the countryside”, and that we make our concepts for the peasantry ‘travel’. “What I propose, then, is to drastically go beyond the artificial boundaries between town and countryside, and between agriculture and the rest of the economy. What we have to do is, I believe, to explore uncapturedness, the struggle for autonomy and the creation of non-controllability wherever they emerge” This thesis attempts exactly this.

In the first section, a class definition of the peasantry and the PMP is assembled from the existing literature. The following part (sections III and IV) generalizes that definition, developing the concepts of the ‘artisan class’ and the ‘artisan mode of production’ as ideal types. Section V then applies these concepts to a range of sectors. Finally, section VI turns to some of the implications of this frame, asking how artisans relate with each other, with markets and with the state.

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<sup>5</sup> Source was published without page numbers.



## II. The peasant mode of production

The idea of a ‘peasant mode of production’ as a phenomenon that continues through the emergence of capitalism and can both subsist besides it and, if historic conditions exist, can also overtake spaces from capitalism itself, has been with us since the 1920s, and was initially spawned by Chayanov’s *On the Theory of Non-Capitalist Economic Systems* (1966 [1924])<sup>6</sup>. Chayanov defines the peasantry as those agricultural producers who a) own, or enjoy direct access to, the means of their production, and b) use primarily non-wage family labor in farm operation. Consequently, they set the objectives, times, types and techniques of their labor in relative autonomy, in other words they engage in *self-directed* labor. While the means of production in a peasant economy are thus scattered, the limited presence of wage labor prevents their transformation into profit-seeking ‘capital’ in the Marxist sense. Chayanov concludes that the inner dynamics within such peasant units of production, as well as their social and economic interactions, cannot be understood through the theoretical lenses employed to understand capitalism. Particularly, the predominance of non-wage labor and at most limited, fragile presence of the profit-motive made it necessary to describe the PMP as a *non-capitalist* economic system.

“In modern theory of the national economy, it has become customary to think about *all* economic phenomena exclusively in terms of a capitalist economy. All the principles of our theory - rent, capital, price, and other categories - have been formed in the framework of an economy based on wage labor and seeking to maximize profits [...]. All other (noncapitalist) types of economic life are regarded as insignificant or dying out; they are, at any rate, considered to have no influence on the basic issues of the modern economy and, therefore, are of no theoretical interest.” (1966 [1924]: 1)

One important disclaimer must be made with regards to his theory of peasant units, to which we will come back in my later exposition of artisan units. Generations of critics have introduced Chayanov’s work as a theory of the *non-wage* peasant economy, thus accentuating the incompatibility between wage labor and a PMP. Though he describes the non-wage character of labor as an essential part of the peasant economy’s *ideal type* (much as Marx describes the wage character of labor within the ideal-type of capitalism), he also sees a relative presence of wage labor as an essential part of its *reality*:

“[...] in the broad grouping of peasant agriculture we can distinguish between the family labor farm type and the half-labor farm (farmer unit), which uses paid labor in addition to family labor power, *but not to such an extent as to give the farm a capitalist character*. Theoretical study of this case shows that the presence of the wages category somewhat changes the content of the labor farm’s usual categories but does

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<sup>6</sup> ‘Peasant mode of production’, ‘peasant mode of farming’ (Ploeg, 2008) and ‘peasant way’ are used interchangeably here.

not entirely succeed in substituting for them the categories of a capitalist farm.” (1966 [1924]: 22, emphasis added)

The last decade has seen new literature adapting Chayanov’s theories to today’s changed circumstances. Van der Ploeg (2008 & 2013) describes the ‘peasant condition’ or class character in relation to modern landscapes of technology and capital’s current methods of penetrating agricultural production. In doing so, he offers a theoretical framework to understand the potentials (and realities) of ‘peasant-driven agricultural growth’ as a competing theory of rural development (2014). Others have extended the definition of the peasant labor unit to include small non-family collectives of various forms, which have been common within ‘new peasant’ movements in the North (Meyerhoff et al, 2012).

Marxist critics have generally accepted large parts of this characterization. Even during some of the fiercest debates between divergent PE perspectives on the peasantry (carried out in the late 1970s in and around the then young *Journal of Peasant Studies*), Harrison wrote that, “[w]hether they are defined as the immediate producers who own the means of production, or as the family household operating its farm with non-wage family labor, we know, generally speaking, who the peasants are” (1977: 323). Marx seems to have used this definition when referring to peasants as an incarnation of the ‘petty mode of production’, “where the laborer is the private owner of his own means of labour set in action by himself: the peasant of the land which he cultivates, the artisan of the tool which he handles as a virtuoso” (1867)<sup>7</sup>.

While radical populists and Marxists generally agree on *what* the PMP is, they diverge when assessing its potential vis-à-vis capitalism. Radical populists focus on the possibilities for non-capitalist production to withstand the economic and extra-economic assault of capitalism, Marxists on the quest to redistribute the surplus, and eventually socialize the means of production, generated by capitalism *after* and *because of* its defeat of other modes of production. Marx observed correctly that “[t]he private property of the labourer in his means of production is the foundation of petty industry, whether agricultural, manufacturing, or both; petty industry, again, is an essential condition for the development of social production and of the free individuality of the labourer himself” (ibid). His judgment against ‘petty production’, including that which characterizes the peasantry, however, was founded on the following reasoning:

“This [petty] mode of production presupposes parcelling of the soil and scattering of the other means of production. As it excludes the concentration of these means of production, so also it excludes cooperation, division of labour within each separate process of production, the control over, and the productive application of the forces of Nature by society, and the free development of the social productive powers. It is compatible only with a system of production, and a society, moving within narrow and more or less primitive bounds. To perpetuate it would be, as Pecqueur rightly says, “to decree universal mediocrity”. At

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<sup>7</sup> Quotes by Marx and Lenin are cited from the Marxist Internet Archive (MIA), and linked to the respective sub-chapter, to facilitate access.

a certain stage of development, it brings forth the material agencies for its own dissolution” (ibid).

Within this tradition, the peasantry was seen as ‘a *form of transition* to modernity’ (Harrison, 1977: 324), a pre-capitalist social formation that would be unable to resist social differentiation into wage labor and capital. In the Marxist view, “one may call the peasantry a formation in transition from feudal society, not in the sense that it proceeded towards a *determinate goal*, but in the sense that the structures which had traditionally reproduced it were progressively and necessarily changed” (ibid: 335. emphasis added). In that sense, Marxists not only see limited potential of peasants to dodge the ‘stride of history’, but also, to one or another extent, *wish for* the demise of the peasantry when perpetuating the *ideal* of accumulation<sup>8</sup>. The crucial outcome of these discussions is thus the differentiation of an ‘accumulationist’ stand, largely rooted in Marxist traditions of thought and epistemology, and an ‘equilibrationist’ camp, inhabited by a variety of currents. The former favors the accumulation of the means of production, while the latter favors their equilibration and subsequent free co-operation.

Far from aiming to resolve this debate, this thesis argues instead to shift its axis. Discussing peasants and their PMP as a lonely ‘other’ in a capitalist world inavertably favors their classification as relatively insignificant. In the great majority contexts, peasants alone are certainly not powerful enough to challenge capitalism, making their gradual demise seem more likely than it perhaps is, or must be. After all, peasant agricultural producers are, in today’s diversified economies, not more than a sector of labor. A (re-)evaluation of their strength and potential must proceed, as with all other sectoral struggles against a strong, cross-sectoral power (capital), in an appraisal of their ability to create strong bonds of resistance with struggles in other sectors – bonds that are usually based on a common class position. The question should be: Is the peasantry a lonely outlier, or is it part of something bigger? If we hold that the peasantry indeed struggles towards its own ‘determinate goal’ - i.e. a non-capitalist mode of producing based on small, autonomous, co-operating units, with a clear logic that contains the means for its own dynamic reproduction - which groups does it share this goal with? Who, in other words, are the other outliers?

The following sections explore one possible answer to these questions. It attempts this by evaluating the principles that could, from a peasant advocacy perspective, be used to search for ‘the peasants of other sectors’, the matching, so far largely unrecognized doubles of the peasantry outside of agriculture, and thus the general class to which the peasantry belongs and which it incarnates in the agricultural sectors.

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<sup>8</sup> Exemplified by Hobsbawms *Age of Extremes*, which celebrates the ‘death of the peasantry’ as the final resolution of ‘the Middle Ages’, taking place in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (1994: 415).

### III. A class basis for the search for allies: The artisan class

Throughout his work on the PMP, Chayanov let it shine through that the concepts he assembled and developed were not necessarily limited to peasant production per se. Instead, he writes that they describe, more broadly, “the economic structure of a society where production is in the form of peasant *and artisan units* and where the institution of wage labor is lacking” (1966: 11, italics added). His exposition of the ‘family labor unit’ or ‘natural economic unit’ can be taken as the basis for a general theory of artisan production, which extends beyond agriculture. Alongside peasant producers, there remain a significant number of small economic units that are not internally governed by capitalist relations, similar to the internal dynamics of peasant units. This section proposes a class definition that makes their commonalities visible.

Over the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the term ‘artisan’ has acquired a fluid mixture of romanticized as well as condescending meanings, forming to conceptualize artisans as those who ‘still make things with their hands’ because they are unable (or unwilling) to use the new technological means. Such people are to be found in the ‘dying professions’ or in insignificant niches as high-end producers of luxury items, and around tourist magnets, selling hand-made souvenirs. There are two reasons why artisanship is more important than this. First, artisanship is a way of producing that, even if it almost never proceeds with the artisan’s ‘bare hands’ (as condescended in modern definitions), differs fundamentally from feudal or capitalist-controlled production in that the artisan unit (usually a family business or a small collective) has direct access to the means of its production and seeks to constantly reproduce its abilities to make autonomous decisions. Secondly, this relative autonomy, as well as their attachment to a particular profession and (often) place, allows artisans a relative flexibility in responding to shocks, bad years and environmental degradation, understanding their labor as a process of steady adaption and re-invention of workflows, tools and products. Viewing peasant farmers as the most capable class to realize ‘the art of farming’ (van der Ploeg, 2013), i.e. to cultivate farming as a responsive, flexible, and thus sustainable process, corresponds to this perspective of peasants as artisan producers. And indeed, the term’s original meaning (from the Italian *artigiano*, which again was based on the Latin *artitus*) relates it to art, proposing that artisans are applying artistic principles to production processes, and that their professions are commonly respected to require significant artistry.

Artisan work has the meaning of *artisanship*, which constantly shifts between *art* and *skilled trade*. This transcends the Fordian work process, which denies intrinsic meaning to a majority of work ‘positions’. The objective of the artisan labor unit is the construction, maintenance and adaptation of its common patrimony (van der Ploeg, 2008). According to van der Ploeg, the ‘peasant condition’ “aims at and materializes as the creation and development of a self-controlled and self-managed resource base (2008: 23)”. For this reason, the labor of artisans is categorically different to dependent labor. It is axiomatically self-directed, relying on the constant observation and planning that characterize self-direction. Each needs to be a master of his trade, a fact that hedges sig-

nificant pride. The deskilling that took place in many sectors during the processes of accumulation of the means of production is thus directly related to the loss of artisan livelihoods and artisan features in formally dependent workplaces<sup>9</sup>.

The artisan class is thus defined, as any other class, by its relationship to the means of production, as well as by the way it uses these means to produce, in other words: by the way it shapes the production processes it relies on. If the working class is defined inclusively as all those workers who are excluded from control over their labor processes, and is thus a class that can only exist with an ‘other’ of directors and managers (whether they are profit-seeking capitalists or the technocrats of ‘scientific communism’), the artisan class is characterized by the inverse relationship: they a) control the means of their production and b) are capable of self-directing their labor. These two aspects of the definition correspond to the inverse of the ‘double-free’ character of proletarian labor (‘free’ of control over the means of production, and ‘free’ to sell one’s labor to the highest bidder), which in turn prevent its self-direction and enable capital to separate a profit off the fruits of labor. Artisans are the class which opposes “the process which divorces the producer from the ownership of the conditions of his own labour” (Marx, 1867) and will engage in economic and political cooperation to safeguard control over of their means of production. In this sense, the quest for autonomy and the ‘peasant way’ (van der Ploeg, 2008) are founded not on ‘choice’ (Bernstein, 2014: 20), but on the intrinsic interests manifesting the class position of producers that control *most* of their means of production and self-direct *mostly* their own labor. As above with respect to the PMP, the word ‘mostly’ is crucial when moving from the ideal-type to a messy reality. Section IV will explore the degrees of control and self-direction in more detail.

Anthropologists have described the blurred boundaries between peasant and other artisan livelihoods in the context of diverse subsistence strategies, leading to the balancing of autonomy and dependency in ‘hybrid livelihoods’ (Fairbairn et al, 2014). What is important here is that peasants engage in other sectors of artisan production at least in part due to the interchangeability of economic rationales. As van der Ploeg notes, “both survival and the development of one’s own resource base might be strengthened through engagement in other non-agrarian activities (2008: 23)”. The same holds for non-peasant artisans, who often strengthen their position by engaging in agrarian production for self-provisioning and small-scale marketing, or even as a physical and aesthetical balance to their other labor. This diversification *into* agriculture, however, is often severed by a rise in land prices and industry standards such as those that have increased the minimum quantity of purchase, as well as standardized products to a degree prohibitive for second-income farmers. The fluency of the passage to and from non-farming artisan labor should also be pronounced in theory; the major shift for a peasant is perhaps not that in or

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<sup>9</sup> For examples of the deskilling debate see Stone (2007) on the emergence of input-managed cotton mono-cropping in India, and Harilal (1989) on the deskilling of the construction trades in India and its effects on wages, but also Jaffe & Gertler (2006) on the deskilling of the food *consumer*, and Shannon (1987) on the deskilling of educators due to standardization of curricula, textbooks and teaching methods.

out of agriculture, but the shift in or out of self-directed labor, even if it takes place without a change of occupation, e.g. from sugarcane farmer to sugarcane farmworker.

Why does the artisan class remain important? The concept of the artisan class should not be read merely as an aggrupation of those perhaps 10-15% of economic subjects around the world who have guarded significant self-direction until this stage of advanced accumulation. Instead, it also speaks to the ideals and visions of self-direction hedged by many of the rest, which have consistently constituted one of the strongest, though often marginalized, currents of anti-capitalist sentiment, and continue to do so today. Growing evidence suggests that the current crisis has, for many people, resulted in the move (or at least the desire) to set up artisan units, from ‘autogestión’ to ‘re-peasantization’ and the ‘new peasantries’ (Ruggeri, 2009; Skandalis, 2012; van der Ploeg, 2008; Da Vía, 2012). It seems obvious that ever more significant parts of today’s populations aim to achieve, and if they already have it, to protect, the following economic existence:

“The peasant and the artisan manage independently; they control their production and other economic activities on their own responsibility. They have at their disposal the full product of their labor output and are driven to achieve this labor output by family demands, the satisfaction of which is constrained only by the drudgery of the labor. (Chayanov, 1966: 13)”

In this political vision, analogous to the vision of a decent proletarian existence that characterized labor’s demands in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a wide variety of sectoral struggles are subject to an objective alliance. Examples of this alliance exist, though they are still far between. Field (1995: 786), for example, notes that “Western Nicaraguan artisan communities, a heterogeneous social group with variable and distinctive cultural practices, responded to the Sandinista Revolution by creating a union that represented artisans’ interests in terms of class rather than ethnicity”. In India, the Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) has, since its foundation in 1972, acted as a cross-sectoral syndicate of informal producers with around 2 million members. By instituting health and child care, as well as organizing informal producers, it has aimed to increase its members autonomy vis-à-vis local government and husbands (Datta, 2003). Meanwhile, the National Association of Street Vendors (NASVI) and its allies successfully campaigned for a union act delineating the rights of street vendors, as well as instituting benefits and social insurance measures that strongly resemble the struggles for farmers’ pensions and insurance (Bhowmik, 2010). The organization *StreetNet International* networks such informal economy unions in ways very similar to the early days of *La Via Campesina* (Brown et al, 2010; Lindell, 2010).

Nonetheless, the political struggles of artisans, against feudal and capitalist relations, are perhaps one of the major remaining fragments of marginalized history, similar to the ‘decolonializing’ histories of subjected peoples that are beginning to be written. E.P. Thompson saw the goal of his *The Making of the English Working Class* as “to rescue the stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the ‘obsolete’ hand-loom weaver, the ‘utopian’ artisan (...) from the enormous condescension of posterity” (1980: 12), all of which were part of the artisan class, not the proletariat. One century of almost undivided interest in the struggles and demands of proletarians has established the artisan class as a ‘silent loser’ of

the development of the means of production, standing in the shadow of the 'loud (potential) winners', the proletariat. But even a quick tour would show that the art of political contestation, strikes, riots and many forms of everyday resistance (Scott, 1986) originate from the fierce will for independence that has characterized the class position of artisans throughout history, which again brood in the objective conditions of their livelihood – self-directed labor, small-unit property and complex, anti-commodity valuation of labor and its products<sup>10</sup>. The place in the spotlight that artisans in agriculture have now gained should be used to urge a more general re-discovery of this 'class without history' (following Wolf, 1982), and the artisan condition that unites them. Shanin described peasants as Marxism's 'awkward class' (1978), but since then we have seen that they are not the only 'outliers' in the orthodox class matrix. The artisan class concept collects those groups whose relation to the means of production has likewise been 'awkward', and shows their commonality: control over the means of production, and self-direction of their labor.

### ***Bridging the gap: The history of Marxist anti-proletarianism***

Marxist theory has seen artisans in the context of a working class revolution for proletarian dictatorship, typically defining them as 'petty-bourgeois' for their ambiguous class position vis-à-vis that political project. It is probably true that, as the early Marxists argued, artisans have been on the 'wrong side', or at least on the margins, of this particular struggle in many cases. But, as van der Ploeg notes for the peasantry, artisans "should be defined [...] according to what they are, not as a negation of what they definitely are not (2008: 23)". Through that process of struggling with feudal, capitalist and communist forces, they have been laying out their own framework, describing how wealth can be created and distributed based not on capitalist or socialist accumulation, but on a more equal distribution of the means of production.

In doing so, the artisan class concept realizes a bridge between Marxist and radical agrarian populist perspectives on peasant agriculture. It allows Marxists to understand the common class position of the peasantry *as envisioned by* radical agrarian populists, but converted into terms that have analytical value in political economy. Bernstein (2014: 2) argues that there are inconsistencies in FS's "construction of capital's other". This difficulty, however, extends much further than FS, indeed it might be seen as the main theoretical vacuum that has kept sectoral and punctual struggles of resistance from converging forcefully against global capitalism. The first cross-sectoral attempt to construct capital's 'other'/antagonist resulted in a framework revolving exclusively around the proletariat, which forged powerful inter-sectoral alliances until the 1970s. Many of them have declined since, leading into the current low-point in the history of proletarian solidarity. While some analysts have explained this ebb through the advance of neoliberalism, to be overcome by 'reinforcing the

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<sup>10</sup> See Breuilly (1985) on how early proletarian movements in Britain learned from earlier or collaborating artisan movements, and Schultz (1993) and Prothero (2013 [1979]) on artisan political power in Philadelphia and London, respectively, during the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

struggle’, growing currents are questioning why we have looked, and keep looking almost exclusively to the proletariat as the agent, catalyst and beneficiary of anti-capitalist struggles.

If a proletarian is defined as lacking control over the means to, and decisions over, his production, his only mode to gain liberty (labor beyond “necessity and mundane considerations”) is through the pure, unlikely luck that he is given it, or at least successfully deceived into believing so. In this sense, thus, Marxism rests on a profoundly *anti-proletarian* understanding of what emancipated labor, the objective of revolutionary politics, is. Marxist political philosophy, however, practices the glorification of the proletariat for its perceived potential to struggle, and its ‘historical role’ as the ‘undertakers of capitalism’. The resulting tension between the ideal of self-directed labor as the future goal of communism and the ‘political necessity’ for many generations to largely forfeit their wish to such self-directed labor in the name of the ‘development of the productive forces’ runs deep. It is exacerbated by the likewise Marxian theory of *alienation*, which warns of the immense potential of proletarian life realities to actualize in the conscience of those they hold prisoners as double-free laborers. Nonetheless, Marxist visions of the development of the means of production have typically gone hand in hand with a quest to further proletarianize, and thus alienate, work. Lenin described the ideal of economic planning as follows:

“Accounting and control – that is mainly what is needed for the ‘smooth working’, for the proper functioning, of the first phase of communist society. All citizens are transformed into hired employees of the state, which consists of the armed workers. All citizens have become employees and workers of a single country-wide ‘syndicate’. All that is required is that they should work equally, do their proper share of work, and get equal pay. The accounting and control necessary for this have been simplified by capitalism to the utmost and reduced to the extraordinarily simple operations – which any literate person can perform – of supervising and recording, knowledge of the four rules of arithmetic, and issuing appropriate receipts. [...] The whole of society will have become a single office and a single factory, with equality of labour and pay.” (Lenin, 1975: 383)

Emancipation through the ‘free association of producers’ envisioned by Marx is impossible in this context. “The vision of a unified working class has always been imbued with a pinch of collectivist delusion and a fair portion of conformism” (Grigat, 2014: 20).

Throughout socialism’s ambiguous relationship with labor dependency, two general routes were taken to minimize the proletarian existence. Advocating for the reduction of the work week was the more prominent, though, or because, it never shook the general ideal of dependent labor. The increase of self-directed labor was a second, largely marginal discourse. E.P. Thompson, for example, favored self-employment, naming it the ‘natural human work-rhythm’ (1967: 73). Autonomist and situationist Marxists, among other currents, took Marx’s original offer that under communism, he would expect “to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic”, more literally than the mainstream (1845: 9). Many of the debates between interpretations of



the ‘young’ and ‘old’ Marx are related to this question. Oscar Wilde and Paul Lafargue likewise argued against the idea of full (dependent) employment: “It is to be regretted that a portion of our community should be practically in slavery, but to propose to solve the problem by enslaving the entire community is childish” (Wilde, 1891). This anti-proletarianism, negating what was seen as a perpetuation of dependence as ‘wage slavery’, stood against a revolutionary mainstream that classified self-directed work in small units as an undesirable ideal, and employed various theories about the egoism and narrow-mindedness of the ‘petit-bourgeoisie’, and gave peasants and other self-directed labor an ambiguous, ‘impure’ position in the class matrix.

As Grigat shows, this connects to the question of potential agency: “Bad societal conditions cannot be changed through the consistent conscientization of interests (i.e. class conscience) because they themselves constitute these interests. Wage workers as wage workers want higher wages, not communism” (2014: 21). Whether we agree with this in theory, the observation that the weight of anti-capitalist political contestation has shifted markedly from the proletarian majority at the heart of a resilient capitalism to the margins and those groups and spaces that are not directly governed by capital or wages is perhaps not a controversial one. While proletarian workers are now fighting almost exclusively for higher wages and benefits *as part of* their companies prosperity, struggles against commodification or for its reversal are increasingly led by non-proletarian movements<sup>11</sup>.

A more encompassing history would assemble a vast array of theoretical tendencies contained within Marxism that allow for a humbling of the proletarian as the agent, as well as ideal and objective of revolutionary politics. In fact, large fractions of the Marxist left never subscribed to the cult of the proletariat. It is these fractions that are ripe for a complimentary project to the building of the working class, and of the means of production through its labor (and dictatorship). To realize this option within Marxist theory, the portfolio of modes of production needs a new member. In its simplest form, such a (complementary) re-focus would have to produce or otherwise rest on two theoretical units: a concept and definition of the envisioned mode of subsistence, i.e. a class definition of those who are, in the Marxist sense, neither members of a feudal regime, nor bourgeois or proletarian, as well as a concept of how this class produces, i.e. the mode of production it is involved in.

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<sup>11</sup> Examples include anti-globalization, environmentalist and free software/appropriate technology movements, all of which oppose commodification and largely follow autonomist conceptions of the individual. These and other so-called ‘new social movements’ are observed to “struggle in the name of autonomy, plurality, and difference” (Cohen, 1985: 665), reversing the logic of proletarian politics. Non-proletarian producer movements have likewise made a strong appearance, such as La Via Campesina, Brazil’s Landless Farmers Movement (MST) and Mexico’s Zapatista Army of National Liberation.

## IV. The artisan mode of production

Different classes can be implicated in a mode of production dominated by one class, as is the case in the capitalist mode of production. Individual artisan businesses that subsist within the capitalist mode of production remain subject to the laws of exchange of a ‘foreign’ mode of production. When they create niches, however, they begin changing these laws, and carving out spaces that are not solely dominated by the capitalist logic of accumulation. In the terms of Marx, they are successfully struggling against a variety of ways capital seeks to formally subsume them. But if one mode is replaced by another, how should we call the instituted mode of production? It clearly is not an image of the ‘communist mode of production’ as theorized in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries - the struggle to gain control over the means of production with the aim of socializing them via the state or otherwise collectivizing them. Rather, the objective is to gain *and maintain* control in the hands of artisans, their institutions and allies. I argue that peasant-based production as advocated by PMs and their allies should be seen as one incarnation of a broader mode of production – the artisan mode of production (AMP). In other words, it is part of the wider struggle to carve up ever larger spaces in which an AMP can compete and reproduce. This important stream of anti-capitalism today struggles for something that might be called ‘artisanism’, or the quest to control the means of one’s production individually or cooperatively, and thus have control over the goals and techniques of one’s labor, as well as to find political, economic and cultural institutions capable of reproducing such a state of equality in, and co-operation based on self-direction. Peasants are in no way exceptional in this regard: artisan units have defied (and thus also limited) capitalist accumulation in the great majority of sectors. There are, thus, two options in the Marxist quest to expose ‘peasant essentialism’ (Bernstein, 2003 & Brass, 1990) by relying on class theory: critiquing the notion of a third class and competing mode of production in contemporary agricultures, or critiquing its very containment at the boundaries of agricultural production. Both answer the crucial question: ‘Why should there be a special status for the peasantry?’

What, then, makes the AMP a self-consistent mode of production? According to Harrison’s review on the PMP,

“In Marxist theory the mode of production can be defined firstly as the labour process – forces of production, the relationship between the worker and the owners of the means of production, that between the worker and the product. Secondly, the mode of production is itself *reproduced* through an interactive process of economic, ideological and political mechanisms intrinsic to itself, and through its subordination of or by other modes of production. Thirdly, the mode of production embodies *contradictions* at each of these points which both drive it forward and develop the conditions for its own disintegration, through the development of class struggle and of class alliances involving those enmeshed in the surrounding modes of production (1977: 324).”

Every economic activity can be performed in an artisan mode. Whether or not we should call an economic activity artisanal is not a question of the physical act of production (the extent of machinery use or similar indicators), but of

the social relations of property, access and control that determine economic activity and its remuneration. If the capitalist mode of production is fundamentally characterized by the separation of capital and labor, leading to a contradiction between their respective interests, the AMP is marked by their integration. This inhibits either from taking on a life of its own. Production through an AMP is not governed by capital in the classical Marxist sense, as surplus-seeking and commodifying. ‘Capital’ for artisans signifies ‘means of production’ in the wider sense, including physical as well as social and ecological assets, and knowledge (van der Ploeg, 2013). It is not determined by capital markets, but by the artisan unit’s equilibration of a number of interlinked balances, factors and interests<sup>12</sup>. Hence, artisan labor both builds and depends on intrinsic value formation mechanisms, while proletarian labor is governed by exchange value.

### ***Degrees of artisanness***

Of course this definition is often a question of degree, which moves along two scales. The first dimension of artisanness is the degree to which the means of production, including auxiliary and supporting means such as knowledge and infrastructure, are controlled directly by the labor unit. This need not be through direct control by ownership; instead it can in part be operationalized as effective direct control of commons or usufruct resources. What matters is not ownership on paper, but effective access, as well as the power to maintain that access (Ribot & Peluso, 2003).

In addition to the primary material means (land, buildings, tools), artisans rely heavily on social means (often more so than larger enterprises), such as sovereignty over payment systems, freedoms to sell, liberties from excessive taxation or standards. If an artisan unit spends half of its labor time engaging in or paying others to file its tax and insurance forms, write grant requests or provide accountancy to please state agencies or insurance companies (as is common for artisans in medicine or culture), this time discounts from its artisan character. These social means, together with the indivisible secondary material means of production, such as air and water, are the reason why artisans are, and have always been, strongly engaged in political action. Since workers can only own or otherwise directly control some of their means of production, those means that are outside their reach for intrinsic reasons (water and air for their intrinsic movements; knowledge and innovation for their intrinsic scale and so on) are the Achilles heel of artisanism. They can be controlled privately or as commons, with state entities oscillating between the two ideal types. The contention over their control is central to the AMP in many sectors. Much of this dimension is about designing effective operationalizations of direct democracy and the government of the commons (Ostrom, 1990). The push for a re-invigoration of the commons should be understood as the wish to maintain

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<sup>12</sup> Chayanov (1966 [1924]) described the dynamics of peasant farm organization as the equilibration of interlinked *balances*, such as the balance between the utility of an additional chore and the drudgery it represents. Ploeg (2013) constructs a detailed picture of these peasant balances in current political and technological landscapes.

the very conditions for present and future artisan labor and production. The commons' real significance is thus the fact that they encourage the artisan characteristics of production processes, by providing those means of production that artisan units cannot control themselves. Many farmers now need to make more money to access the privatized (or nationalized) commons than for their own household reproduction. Artisanism would see these cases as an artificial bloating of the economy, which reflects the theory that peasants practice "a form of self-sufficiency (or self-provisioning) that is not related (...) to the family consumption of food, but to the operation of the farm unit as a whole" (van der Ploeg, 2008: 30) onto the artisan class in general.

The second dimension refers to the capabilities (intrinsic and extrinsic) of artisan units to shape their production processes responsively and artistically. As Marxists note, modes of production are never uniform across sectors, and capitalist and artisan (e.g. peasant) production can co-exist *between* and *within* sectors. Correspondingly, the struggle to establish, strengthen or defend an AMP in a particular sector or territory transcends a simple revolutionary endeavor. Like peasant politics, it is found in the multiple, constant, struggles for economic space. Realizing an AMP in one respective sector is about having a majority of artisans, not retaining 10% artisans (who might voice minority demands for privileges) on the margins. Wage labor may exist within it up to a certain degree (as livelihood diversification) without changing the basic nature of the social relations. Chayanov shows this for peasant agriculture, *within* which "we can distinguish between the family labor farm type and the half-labor farm (farmer unit), which uses paid labor in addition to family labor power, but not to such an extent as to give the farm a capitalist character" (1966: 22).

Together, the two axes (control over the means of production & self-direction of labor) add to a typology (Figure 1). Points \*1 und \*2 show the ideal types of proletarian and artisan work (full subsumption and full autonomy, respectively). \*3 represents the ideal-type contractor, whose labor is completely subsumed under capital, while the means of his production (and the associated loans, risks etc.) are the worker's responsibility. Most existing proletarians are found in the red zone, indicating limited freedom to change, for example, employees or occupations, or schedule parts of their work autonomously. The green zone assembles positions in which the artisan condition of the labor unit is predominant. Though the artisan is never completely autonomous, it is the significant autonomy he has that defines his perspective. This corresponds to Toledo's conceptualization of the 'degrees of peasantness' (1995):

"In ideal-typical terms, there are clear and fundamental differences; but in real-life situations there are – alongside clear empirical expressions of these ideal types – extended grey zones that link such expressions and at the same time demonstrate the gradual nature of these linkages. In these grey zones one encounters degrees of peasantness that are far from being theoretically irrelevant. Indeed, they characterize arenas in which, over time, important fluctuations occur with respect to de- and repeasantization" (van der Ploeg, 2008: 36, 137-8).



Figure 1: *The artisan and proletarian character of labor: Positions and trajectories.* Author's elaboration.

It should be noted that this is not a *normative* typology, and that point \*2 is an ideal type, not necessarily an ideal. Increases in individual control over the means of production and self-direction are not in every case a positive change. When PMs challenge excessive hygienic standards, they demand that the scale of control shift to the right by a relative amount. The ideal-type that enjoys complete sovereignty over its production most likely does not exist, and most likely should not exist. The artisan class is not situated at this extreme point of the scale, but within a range of positions of significant individual or small collective sovereignty which determines an artisan outlook on the unit's labor and opportunities.

The typology also serves as a two-dimensional space in which different realities of labor can be situated. Changes in the regulatory environment, market conditions and prices around the labor unit will draw a unique trajectory into this space, offering a way to visualize their effects on the worker's class position. One can follow the class position of a small farm unit (x), controlling some means of production (land, water) but dependent on the corporate buyer for others (fertilizers, seed), as the price of its primary product increases from an extreme low. While price pressure loosens, the farm unit gains capabilities to move from market-determined farm operation (using all land and time for the primary, standardized cash crop) towards using some of its resources autonomously (to diversify production, cut the working day etc. (x2)). With some of those freed resources, the unit might invest in lowering input dependency and thus improve its position against the buyer, gaining power to self-direct. The farm unit hereby develops from a subsumed position within capitalism towards an artisan condition of significant autonomy.

Similarly, the trajectory drawn by a proletarian worker's reduction of the work week can be visualized (y). As wage work decreases, self-directed work in hobbies, clubs etc. become more important parts of the work week. Although these likely rely on self-controlled means of production, the worker's subsistence still depends primarily on his first job, which remains under the control of capital.

Visualizing the artisan and capitalist characters of economic activity as such also allows for the location of different hybrid structures, as well as their prioritization. In other words, Chayanov's ideal type models are built on the ideal-type situation where labor is fixed (by family size and composition), while the objective of organization is to bring "all other factors of production [land, capital...] in an optimal relationship to this fixed element (Chayanov, 1986: 92)". Nonetheless, the question today is usually about the relative extent and conditions of dependent labor, versus the extent and conditions of artisan labor. The terms of competition between the two forms are constantly renegotiated. Besides these external influences of hybridity, Netting notes that a certain internal hybridity of the Chayanovian ideal-type, influenced by labor hiring as well as wage-earning opportunities, would be a more adequate empirical basis for theory-building (1993). The same holds true in other sectors of artisan activity: Many artisans hire a limited amount of labor from outside their labor unit, and while this can certainly shift them towards a petty-capitalist approach to production, there are also a variety of 'normal' moments of labor hiring within an AMP. Apprentices are usually better off as dependent laborers during their learning process, and build or take over a patrimony only when they are ready to manage it sustainably. Artisans in different seasonal activities may hire each other, as long as this results in a relative balance of performing and hiring dependent labor. Finally, some workers shy away from the responsibility and continuity of an artisan livelihood. While they might encounter fitting positions within public agencies and companies, they also work in artisan businesses, trading a smaller share of the labor unit's responsibility for a smaller share of its earnings.

An artisan economy may thus be expected to have one autonomous labor unit for every 5-20 population, depending on the dependency ratio, on the workforce employed by public entities, the ratio of people opting out of responsibility, the amount and mode of learning required to (co-)lead an artisan business, the seasonality of labor and, finally, the dominant type of labor units (individual, family or small collective). The latter determine the number of owners per business, ranging from one (individual) to ten or more (small collectives). Of course the manageability of collective businesses decreases with their size, leading sooner or later to the internal differentiation of essentially capitalist and proletarian roles<sup>13</sup>.

Conceptualizing autonomy in this broad way, it also becomes clear that simple self-employment as defined by today's tax agencies can, as a legalistic binary measure, only hint at the extent of actual artisan labor. The World Bank found 29% of the world's workforce to be self-employed either alone, with a small number of partners, or in a cooperative (World Bank, 2012: 21). Howev-

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<sup>13</sup> See Meyers (2006) for a differentiated perspective on the potentials of medium-sized collective labor units to maintain an equitable distribution of power.

er, part of this number is so-called ‘dependent self-employment’ from contract farming to freelancing, instituted by companies to circumvent labor laws and collective bargaining as well as re-order risk and debt in the value chain (Román et al, 2011; McMichael, 2013). In that sense, the legally self-employed are found all over the typology, from positions of strong subsumption to capital to positions of proud artisanship.

A better approximation than the formal size of the business is often offered by the size of the production process, or value chain (not that of the labor unit within it). The only problem is that this would mis-categorize small businesses with absentee owners (see Alexander et al, 1977: 432-435). The same discussion on the negative repercussions of absentee farm ownership (Goldschmidt 1947, Strange 1988, Netting 1993) is valid for urban communities, and leads to a general re-appreciation of small-scale ownership and power equilibration (e.g. Schumacher 1978). Chapter VI follows this lead.

What, then, are the reasons why a labor unit that controls the means of its production may, nonetheless, not be an artisan labor unit? This results in situation where, for one or another reason, the second dimension of the artisan condition – self-direction of labor – is obstructed. Capital can orchestrate the subsumption of decision-making power, as in contract farming and product standards (McMichael, 2013), forms of subsumption that are, in one or another form, found in all sectors. However, also sheer poverty can effectively eliminate the unit’s choices altogether, thus making the nominal capability to self-direct meaningless. The result may likewise be that a labor unit’s operations are controlled by ‘dull compulsion’, though not necessarily that of a capital-controlled market. Here also lies the main difference between the archetype of the peasant as constantly besieged by famine, or “permanently up to the neck in water”<sup>14</sup>. In fact, the more the threat of famine defines the operation of a farm or another artisan unit, the less its workers find themselves in the ‘artisan condition’, and the more they will do to rebound to it.

It follows that, instead of defining it in terms of exchange value, seeing poverty as the condition where low capital stocks and the existence of negative feedback loops practically eliminate a worker’s leeway to self-direct his labor has suited peasant theory, and suits artisan theory. Without leeway, self-direction is empty. *Gaining* leeway, then, is the perpetual quest that forms the core of the ‘peasant principle’. It answers the important question of labor’s emancipation in an AMP.

## ***Emancipation***

The AMP’s mechanism for the emancipation of labor is captured by Chayanov’s theory of peasant accounting, i.e. the shifting balance between labor product and drudgery:

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<sup>14</sup> Tawney (1966: 77), endorsed in Scott (1976: 1-7). Bernstein carries this line on in Marxist terms when proposing that “the term ‘peasant’ usually signifies household farming *organized for simple reproduction*, notably to supply its own food (‘subsistence’)” (2010: 3, emphasis added).

“[T]he family's single indivisible labor product and, consequently, the prosperity of the farm family do not increase so markedly as does the return to a capitalist economic unit influenced by the same factors, for the laboring peasant, noticing the increase in labor productivity, will inevitably balance the internal economic factors of his farm earlier, i.e., with less self-exploitation of his labor power. He satisfies his family's demands more completely with less expenditure of labor, and he thus decreases the technical intensity of his economic activity as a whole. (1966: 8)”

In other words: Emancipation within an AMP means an increase in the freedom to be idle, which is fluid because labor and consumption are weighed directly within the same unit without intermediation by political standards (such as a 40-hour week law) or hierarchical channels (such as are present in capitalist production units). The decision to relax the labor schedule is, of course, mediated by the expected ‘living standard’, “laid down by custom and habit, which determines the extent of consumption claims, and, thus, the exertion of labor power” (ibid: 12). This is where a convergence between peasant and other artisan movements and advocates of ‘post-scarcity’ economics and culture is possible (Giddens, 1996; Bookchin, 2004). Every effective decrease of the costs of living and downsizing of the material ‘living standard’ increases the space for individuals to opt out of the proletarian labor they required to ‘pay the bills’ (Schwartz, 1994).

It is also here that the AMP contrasts most definitely the goal of the revolutionary mainstream throughout most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – state collectivism:

“Since [in state collectivism] each worker's standard of living determined by the state has no connection, if taken by itself, with his labor output, he has to be driven to labor by his social consciousness and by state sanctions, and perhaps even by a premium system. In contrast to [the peasant economy], which can exist purely automatically and elementally, a communist economic order requires for its maintenance and continuation in accordance with the state plan a continuous social exertion and, to prevent the rise of economic activity not intended in the state plan, a number of economic and noneconomic sanctions. (Chayanov, 1966 [1924]: 24)”



## V. How artisan production incarnates

What, then, makes the artisan character in different production/servicing processes? Who are the ‘peasants’ of other sectors, whose production, labor and use of technology mirrors the peasant mode of farming? Applying the theory of the AMP to specific sectoral dynamics can produce a political economy-guided answer, i.e. one that transcends subjective alliances. In each sector, the search should be for those who represent the vision of self-directed labor and small-scale, equilibrated control over the means of production. It reveals that the same two discourses are pitted against each other in many, if not all, other sectors of material, intellectual and cultural production. On the one hand it is the discourse on the benefits of accumulation (of the means of production, and of decision-making power), on the other the discourse on the benefits of equilibration.

To begin a short assembly of those groups and concepts allied through the AMP (see also Table 1), one of the more obvious connections from the perspective of the peasant producer can be drawn with the artisan processor and retailer. This is similar to Slow Food’s networking of farmers, processors and gastronomists, though small retail can potentially source much more peasant-produced food than restaurant chefs. The emergence of franchises, chains and standardized stocks and offers has shifted the pre-eminent mode of production in retail from artisanry towards capitalism. Similar to agriculture, many artisans have been able to survive within the new surroundings by means that resemble the peasant unit’s abilities to self-exploit, maintain the patrimony in the absence of profit, intensify production and trade intermediate dependencies for the unit’s principal subsistence. They have likewise answered economies of scale by way of building supply, inventory purchasing and marketing cooperatives, such as *Interflora* that has helped the florist profession to remain composed largely of artisan units, or even ‘independent’ food retail cooperatives such as *SPAR* and *Reformhaus* in Europe.

Similarly, many skilled trades and crafts have retained much of their artisan character (and in some languages also the name ‘artisan’) even in advanced capitalism by increasing cooperative association. The guild, which survives as an organizational form since the 13th century, still exists as a locally-embedded organization of artisans in many European countries. In Germany, the *Zentralverband des Deutschen Handwerks* (ZDH), the national association of guilds, counts 5.36 million members (12,8% of the workforce) in 1 million businesses (ZDV, 2014). Though the very limited number of medium-sized businesses yield a disproportionate power in some guilds, the large majority are small or very small businesses, many of which retain an artisan character. Richard Sennett’s manifesto, *The Craftsman* (2008), curiously describes the qualities of craft production and the craftsman’s condition in the same terms van der Ploeg (2013) uses to describe the peasant.

Whole occupations have remained artisan to a degree comparable or larger than we observe in agriculture: think of taxi drivers, doctors with independent practices, family-run restaurants and therapists. The same basic demands for a sectoral landscape characterized by self-ownership and high degrees of self-direction are found in the demands of trades association across the board;

while the product/service differs, the mode of production does not. The International Confederation of Midwives (ICM), to take one of many examples, defines its mission as “advance[ing] the profession of midwifery globally by *promoting autonomous midwives* as the most appropriate caregivers for childbearing women” (ICM, 2014), repeating some of the central ideals of the ‘peasant way’.

<i>Sector</i>	<i>Primary product</i>	<i>Capitalist mode of producing</i>	<i>Artisan mode of producing and associated change concepts</i>
Agriculture	Food	Input-based industrialization, contracting into value chains	Peasant farming and processing, Food sovereignty
Gastronomy	Food service	Franchises, chains	Family restaurants, Slow Food
Manufacturing	Manufactured goods	Conglomerates and TNC’s, integrated global production chains, ‘comparative advantage’	Artisan manufacturing, crafts and trades, small-scale production, cooperative vertical integration
Retail	Product distribution	Retail chains	Family- and cooperatively-owned shops
Housing	Shelter, sites of production	Rent, speculation	Self-ownership, housing trusts & co-operatives, squatting, anti-gentrification
Architecture	Building designs	Large-scale projects	Vernacular & Evolutionary architecture
Planning	Zonation	Large-scale zones, allocation according to profit margins, enabling of capitalist units	City/countryside for all, enabling of artisan units, small lots, mosaics of human activity
Energy	Electricity, fuel, heat	Global sourcing, large-scale grids	Decentral energy systems; regional, local & household self-reliance
Education	Learning	Centralized curricula, focus on the production of ‘solid workers’ and standardized consumers/citizens	Individual curricula, self-directed learning, Freinet pedagogy
Research	Knowledge	Profit-driven, conditional funding, economic valuation, research departments	Curiosity-driven, unconditional funding, university autonomy, social valuation, producer innovation networks
Medicine	Healthcare	Insurance industry, increasing use of healthcare products	Cooperative/Public insurance, independent practice system, family doctor system, preventive healthcare
Decision-making over the state	State policy	Representative elections	Direct democracy, referenda, regional autonomism
Trade	Resource and product flows	Comparative advantage	Bioregionalism, fair trade, protectionism
Monetary systems	Money	Debt-banking, detached financial markets	Local currencies, sovereign (debt-free) money, cooperative and state credit
Conservation	Resource recharge, beauty	Fencing off reserves	Mosaic landscapes (Perfecto et al, 2009)
Leisure	Recharge, but also production/contemplation	Commoditized entertainment, work-leisure separation	‘Meaningful work’, Self-employment for self-reliance, urban gardening, crafts, struggles against time poverty, societal work-equilibration

**Table 1:** *Tracing the sectoral struggles for an artisan mode of production*

In hospitality and tourism, competition between independent bed-and-breakfasts and capitalist hotels has always hinged on the regulatory framework (Staley, 2007), leading to different ownership patterns between regions. As Che et al (2005) show, the possibility to rent out rooms often serves as a project to support a primary artisan activity, such as peasant farming. As in agriculture, the ongoing societal debates on sustainability and local development have favored small-scale, locally-embedded bed-and-breakfasts over multinational hotel chains (Girard & Nijkamp, 2009). At the same time, internet platforms have created new means for guesthouses and small hotels to enter the market, and for micro-landlords to sublet rooms in their own house. Gregory & Breitner (2001) showed how e-marketing could 'level the playing field' between hotel chains, local wage-labor based hotels and family-run bed-and-breakfasts. The difference, however, between public and private intermediaries, the latter seeking a share of up to 20% of the rental price, is crucial for many artisan units (Hills & Cairncross, 2011).

Techniques and technologies have inbuilt size characteristics that contribute to either artisan or accumulated control over production. This is, for example, a main difference between renewables and fossil energy sources: renewables can be used in both modes, depending on the terms of competition, while most fossil fuels are intrinsically based on accumulated capital. In electricity production, the struggle is between the narratives of large-scale 'provision' through (inter-)national, mostly fossil, sources and grids and the decentral, household- to regional-scaled, mostly renewable sources of energy sovereignty. The characteristics of 'energy regimes', as well as their transitions, can thus be described in terms similar to the 'food regimes' thesis (McMichael, 2009). Characteristically, many cities in the real-socialist countries were heated centrally, with heat produced in cogeneration plants and transported through vast networks of heat tubes to its destiny in apartments and public buildings. This contrasts with techniques, such as passive solar heating, that design for autonomy and reduce the need for inhabitants to sell their labor to 'pay the bills'.

Artisan-based transport systems, including taxis, shared taxis and minibuses, are in operation alongside public or private bus and rail systems across the globe. Cooperative arrangements are often used to avoid competition, such as organizing routes and pick-up points through the local government, but leaving the operation to independent drivers who retain their freedom to search routes and rides outside of the system. Even the *gondolieri* of Venice have formed cooperatives to counter the pressure of monopolization and calm the constant fights for the best spots, a venture that, with time, expanded into piers maintenance, shipyards to restore and build gondolas and a travel agency (Cooperativa 'Daniele Manin', 2014). In the taxicab sector, struggles against capitalist penetration take place around the cost and financing of licenses and vehicles, which ultimately determine the ownership of those means of production. While drivers favor cooperative dispatch systems that operate as a service to them, corporate-controlled systems have become the norm in many cities (Leavitt & Blasi, 2009), and new internet brands such as *Uber* are able to squeeze 20% of the revenue from drivers.

In other sectors, the incarnation is perhaps less obvious. Shelter, for example, either involves the capitalist mode of *renting* (profit-seeking on the base of accumulated ownership of the means of production), or self-ownership and

other forms of control, such as housing cooperatives. As tenants will know, this difference goes on to determine the capabilities to self-direct the shelter's functions, make changes to them and thus develop one's *patrimony*. Housing ownership rates have very concrete and far-reaching effects on the framing and practice of labor throughout all other sectors. This is because a subsistence strategy that begins with food and clothing needs mandates different livelihood strategies than a strategy that must include rent or mortgage payments before all else (Smith, 1987). A high rural house ownership rate has been crucial to the survival of peasant production, and a similar observation can be made for urban artisans. Certainly, however, family-based ownership is only one model that keeps capitalist relations out of housing. Small housing cooperatives build or buy buildings before deciding between a variety of internal management options designed to suit diverse life trajectories, from transient students to long-term residents (McStotts, 2004).

In the academy, the path of conditional funding and internal hierarchy (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997) is pitted against the ideal of autonomous research and teaching. The alternative of curiosity-driven research and learning, unconditional funding and university autonomy carries the ideal of artisan labor into this sector. In the much-talked about realm of 'valuation', the creation of corporate bonds is pitted against an alternative of social engagement and collaboration with artisan producers and their innovation networks. In the field of education, knowledge and experience are the products. An artisan mode of education acknowledges the inherent individuality of learning, and as a result engages questions of how authority over such learning processes (examination, grading, standardization of curricula etc.) can be sensibly reduced. On the first dimension, educational philosophers such as Paolo Freire theorized that everyone's reality inherently contains the means of production to significant, relevant and deep knowledge, and allow for significant autonomy from centralized 'learning capital', such as patented textbooks, state-controlled curricula, and even school and university buildings as such. Hannah Arendt's theory of the development of political consciousness (Arendt, 1968) follows a similar premise when criticizing representative systems that passivize individuals and turn the political arena into a bazaar of commodified opinions sold by established parties.

Artisan cultural spaces are intimately connected with this maintenance and 'recovery of the public world' (Hill, 1979). European independent cinemas, for example, are struggling with the upcoming cinema chains that offer standardized, commodity-based schedules, subjecting one of the last joints in the film chain to the profit motive. The 'Working Group Cinema – Guild of German Arthouse Cinemas', to again take an arbitrary example, describes objectives that closely resemble the ideals of FS movements: 'locally and regionally rooted cinemas', 'socially engaged' cinemas, and public policies that strengthen small cinemas against the sector's trends of accumulation (AG Kino, 2014). Similarly, corporate control over music and film production is challenged by small studios and 'independent' film-makers and musicians determined to play on their own schedule, shoot on their own themes and receive the full share of their earnings.

Some scholars have pointed out how monetary systems resonate the dominant mode of production. While interest-based money is the incarnation of "the necessary and ever-growing expansion of value" in capitalism (Bernstein

2014: 10), ‘sovereign’ or ‘positive money’ (Kennedy & Kennedy, 1995; Boscia, 2009) incarnate the interests of a dominant AMP. Where market exigencies based on debt relations and interest are limited, they allow for ‘slow’ production, distribution and consumption. The development of cooperative and so-called ‘ethical’ banks since the 1970s can be understood as a counter-movement to dis-embedded finance capital, and many such banks have focused on enabling artisan producers, from new farmers to new housing cooperatives.

In many ways, architecture and planning connect these many sectors. While artisan-based economies produce mosaics of human activity, and drive vernacular architecture, small-scale interaction between zones, and complex networks of land use. This is where new theories about conservation, such as Perfecto et al’s theory on *mosaic landscapes* reveal their political potential (2009). When showing how small-scale, heterogeneous land use patterns safeguard and build ecological diversity, they connect the conservation of ‘nature’ to the conservation of the diversity of techniques, products, seeds and traditions interacting with it. Artisans are the agents of these mosaics, and their activities form the antithesis to accumulation of land and homogenization of its uses. Artisan-friendly trade policies are geared towards maintaining such mosaics of activity, allowing for protectionism, and giving precedence to local and regional production in favor of a global ‘distribution of labor’ according to power-based competitive advantages.

Finally, so-called ‘leisure’ or ‘hobby’ activities can themselves be artisan labor, often aimed at experiencing spurs of self-directed work between hours ‘on the job’ or even replacing some wage-earning hours with artisan production, from hobby beekeeping to city walks or work in small community organizations. While capitalism has sought to separate work and leisure into periods of productivity and periods of consumption, often through commoditized entertainment, competing ideals have always existed and represented considerable parts of dependent labor. New interest in urban gardening and crafts can be interpreted as paths to increase self-reliance (Richter, 2013). Wherever younger generations seek ‘more meaningful work’, such leisure activities can be important experiences leading onto the way. Projects that seek an equilibration of dependent work hours amongst members of society - such as a lowering of the work week, play into the hands of artisan units that develop and accumulate assets on the side of a dependent job. Similarly, movements for a basic income are proposing a relative (depending on the amount paid per person) decrease in the necessity to sell one’s labor the highest bidder (Raventós, 2007). The projected outcome is a significant move of labor into self-directed activity, susceptible to the ideals and desires of the workers, not employers.

All these sectoral incarnations of the artisanry and its activities show a strong degree of decentral innovation based in networks that are dominated by informal relations, not expertism or the patent motive. They show that experimentation is an intrinsic characteristic (*the norm*) of producing as an artisan, with diversity being its fundamental engine. Modelled on innovation in ecological systems, this resembles the farmer-to-farmer innovation systems advocated by PMs (Holt-Giménez, 2006).

## ***Consumer interests and consumption in an artisan mode of production***

Recent radical consumer movements have tended to advocate an increase in ‘choice’, i.e. a shift of sovereignty over consumption decisions from corporations, advertisement patterns and bureaucracy to consumers themselves. The consumer interests represented within Slow Food are an example of this. The increase in choice (for example to drink non-homogenized milk, or otherwise evade the standardization of foods on offer) typically necessitates a corresponding increase in the diversity of businesses that offer particular options, especially small, artisan producers (Miele & Murdoch, 2002). However, also the search for consumption patterns outside and against capitalism can be traced to an ‘artisan perspective’ on how consumption decisions should work, which complements artisan decision-making in production. The artisan consumption unit and its *household economy* in many ways resemble their counterparts in production.

Where modern capitalism seeks, through advertisement, trendsetting and other methods, to make as many consumption decisions as possible for the consumer, it creates large-scale consumption units over which the individual consumer cannot exert control, and within which he ceases most aspects of self-direction. He may choose between three brands of a quasi-monopolistic conglomerate, or between two similar versions of the same product, but is repressed with all means available from opting out. His consumer role resembles more and more the role of proletarian labor in capital-controlled consumption units.

These strategies aim primarily for the household’s variable income, i.e. the part of its income that remains after fixed costs such as rent, utilities and food staples are paid. They do so by theorizing a mode of emancipation that involves the continual spending of this variable income, and thus the continual necessity to earn it (and ever more of it) as proletarian workers. Artisanism describes those quests that seek to tell a different story of emancipation, based on individual deliberation over consumption decisions. Again, food-related movements such as the British *Campaign for Real Ale* and the CSA movement have been at the forefront, but their philosophies and strategies as well as obstacles and dilemmas are replicated in other sectors. What started as *Slow Food* is now a cross-sectoral family of concepts and practices, ranging from *Slow Travel* and *Slow Goods* to networks around town planning, university research and education, and healthcare (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010; Pink & Servon, 2013; Berg & Seeber, 2013).

Reducing and redirecting variable costs may, hence, be one of the most potent means for a restructuration of labor, lowering the amount of proletarian labor needed to ‘lead a good life’. But also fixed costs are of interest to artisan consumers. Such consumers more easily evade the subsumption into capitalist markets when deciding how to spend or whether to even earn (and toil for) a significant surplus in their household economy (which is used to pay for variable costs). Their fixed costs, however, are more systematically inscribed into their household economy. Many movements and innovative and innovations are challenging this inscription. While homes have for many decades been designed with in-built, often substantial bills for heating energy, electricity and water as well as sizeable mortgages, booming architectural subcultures are ad-

vancing designs that use passive solar heating, collect and treat water, produce electricity and cost a fraction of ‘conventional’ homes (Ip & Müller, 2009; Chan et al, 2011). The objective of these innovations is to increase the autonomy of the household unit from capital-controlled energy and financial markets.

### ***Artisanal industries?***

As noted above, Chayanov’s view of the PMP was the opposite of a stasis of work processes and stagnation in the levels of technology. He “saw the future of peasant economy [...] as lying along a peasant path of modernized techniques, agricultural extension and co-operative organization” (Harrison, 1977: 324). Marxists’ criticism of FS as an ideology of ‘the small-scale’ and its pointing towards thorny topics such as labor productivity, the division of labor and the need to feed majority-urban populations leads to an important distinction: Peasants, according to Chayanov (1966 [1924]) and van der Ploeg (2008), are not primarily defined by small-scale activity, but by the character of their labor, the ‘peasant condition’. Large-scale farms that run primarily on family labor are thus also peasant farms, though their farming style is more likely to rely on dependencies with upstream and downstream corporations, cheap oil prices and unsustainable monocultures, all of which limits their peasant character, and fosters the capitalist character of production in other sectors (a lack of solidarity based on the need to survive, similar to the lack of solidarity of coal mining proletarians that is likewise based on the need to survive). Similar examples for all other sectors would show that artisans mechanize and increase production in different ways, while, as detailed in van der Ploeg (2008), they prefer doing so in ways that allow safeguarding the relative autonomy of the labor unit (credit shyness etc.).

Thus, an ambiguity reigns between the industrial and artisanal characters of a production process: while they are not opposites, some of their constituent forces tend to create tensions. An AMP, however, does not always subvert industrial production processes, nor the labor productivity these can entail. Interconnected artisans can work in connected workspaces, given that many products and services can be produced flexibly even in long chains, given that they comprise modules and horizontal communication. The role of cooperatives in making the two characters compatible must be emphasized, but also the way in which their contradictions can play out within a cooperative. Cooperative structures are thus such structures that increase the scale of the production process without a corresponding centralization of control. As Chayanov stated for agricultural cooperatives, cooperation can “render to small enterprises all the benefits of the large ones” (Chayanov, 1991: 155). We can now assemble much more evidence for this case, but will be pushed to qualify when legally cooperative structures guard the artisan character of its members, and when they actually undermine it. The dairy cooperatives that facilitated the survival of artisan units in the sector until the 1980s, have gradually transitioned into enormous, still legally cooperative, behemoths with thousands of largely passive members (“shareholders” of same-size shares) and now facilitate the industrialization and increase in scale that pushed many small farmers out of the sector. They may be cooperative in a superficial legal definition, but their decision-making processes are primarily corporate, while their production pro-

cess is built on wage labor in industrial dairy plants and transport<sup>15</sup>. Thus, in both dimensions of the above definition, they are no longer (to a significant degree) employing or strengthening an AMP.

In all sectors, the benefits of scale can be secured without a shift from artisan to capitalist modes of production. The ‘industrial’ scope of products carried by large supermarkets is achieved just as well, and often clearly exceeded, by bazaars and open markets that agglomerate many artisan vendors. Each specializes in a part of what, for the buyer, appears as an enormous range and diversity of goods on offer. In healthcare, the benefits of high-tech machinery such as X-ray machines may not be accessible to scattered individual practitioners. As a result, they may become salaried employees in hospitals, as is the dominant mode of *outpatient* and *inpatient* healthcare in the Netherlands. In neighboring Germany, however, a different legal situation allowed such practices to congregate in so-called ‘Ärztelhäuser’, buildings that house 5-10 independent practices, each of which send their x-ray patient ‘upstairs’ to the next practice (Frielingsdorf, 2009). This story is never foretold. The belief that capital accumulation and the development of wage labor necessarily accompany technological advances has been unable to account for these very significant options. As Chayanov argued for peasant production, ways exist for artisans in all sectors to access expensive technologies or distant markets without changing their basic mode of production. In more polemic words, artisanism proposes to understand capitalism (whether private or state-based) as an uninvited guest, not as a byproduct or a even catalyst, of technological innovation and ‘development’.

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<sup>15</sup> Birchall, 2014, provides a taxonomy of cooperatives that goes beyond legal definitions and the enterprises ‘cooperative principles’, and touches on issues of size and power.



## VI. Social relations of the artisan class

So far, we identified the main experience of control over the means of production and self-direction of labor that characterizes the *individual* artisan unit, and glimpsed at how these commonalities associate artisans producing across a variety of sectors. This section adds to the picture those social relations that we observe to develop *between* artisan units, between artisans and markets, and between artisans and the state. In other words: how do artisans' class interests play out in their social relations?

The main requirement for maintaining an AMP in a given sector is its protection from social differentiation, i.e. the inhibition of accumulation beyond a certain point. Governance that dynamically reproduces an AMP is thus essentially a 'governance of size'. The politics of the artisan class and its allies is to counteract and, where necessary, reverse accumulation of the means of production, hence its political premise is *equilibration* that results in and maintains a thinly-woven fabric of power. It seeks a balancing of power, with continuous negotiation for the autonomy of individuals and the small-scale collectives they choose to congregate in (families, clans, collectives etc.). This resembles the 'peasant principle' of radical agrarian populism, which van der Ploeg defines as the "active and goal-oriented involvement [through which] the peasant condition will progressively unfold" as a "many sided negation of Empire" (van der Ploeg, 2009: 276).

Nonetheless, with decades of increased interest in 'accumulation by dispossession', new forms of 'primitive accumulation', criticism of 'socialist accumulation' and 'global capitalist accumulation', the flipside of the argument has scarcely been touched by Marxists. When Bernstein (2013: 18) asks: "Is there any busier notion at the moment than that of primitive accumulation (and its analogues and extensions)?", he fails to acknowledge the counteracting project and agenda of *equilibration* and the ways in which PMs champion it for food-related sectors. Accumulation and social differentiation always face a counter-project, though one that today is not sufficiently integrated across sectors. Its agenda consists broadly of three strategies: a) resistance to accumulation projects and processes where they take place (i.e. land grabs, entrance of supermarket chains, corporate housing developments etc.); b) equilibration, i.e. carving artisan units out of capitalist ones or developing new niches (land reform, squatting etc.); and c) the installation of self-rejuvenating dynamics that impede bottom-up social differentiation. While the first two are straightforward, the third merits closer attention, as it counters the standard Marxist belief in the ultimate inevitability of differentiation. The question is whether a group of artisans in the same sector is able, and willing, to institute regulations and social norms that effectively repress differentiation of access to the means of production within their group, as well as gaps towards other groups. While the assault of external forces of accumulation *against* artisan units mandates political counter-movements, those forces of accumulation that labor *between* them are the object of social, as well as public, countermeasures.

The next section deals with such social regulations between artisans, and suggests that they constitute 'moral economies' in the way that the term has been used in peasant studies.

## ***Social relations between artisans: Failure and success of social equilibration***

All artisan professional groups build moral economies that surround and mediate their economic motives, as well as negotiate with other groups and classes in society. Such moral economies are essentially equilibration systems. They are the arenas in which artisans can engage in a constant quest to establish social peace through power equilibration and defensive cooperation of different agents and institutions, in which the economic success or failure of the individual labor unit or household is balanced by society – rights and duties. In this respect, guilds allowed economic success, but made sure no member could buy out the others, and social duties increased steeply in accordance to wealth. Peasant communities instituted communal forms of land tenure not because private property was unknown, but because it allowed for a self-rejuvenating process of relative equilibration of the land. Land is often re-distributed every 5-10 years, or according to changes in household size and composition, as well as household exits and entries (O’Flaherty, 1998). Size discrimination in cooperatives can also act as equilibration tools, such as giving premiums or preferential access for the first X units sold to the cooperative.

Hence, moral economies and equilibration are the antithesis to the Hobbesian philosophy which seeks (social) peace through the expansion of one power to a state of hegemony (Hobbes, 1928). This theory of peace underlies modern quests to nest authority in the state, increase the capabilities of head corporations to structure value chains, strengthen the authority of patents and bolster the international hegemonic position of one state over others, amongst others.

While income inequality exists between artisans, it is limited by the inability to exploit a large number of workers. Even in an artisan-dominated economy, dentists may be highly regarded and better-paid, but this privilege and power would be limited by the amount of labor commanded by an artisan dentist practice. Nonetheless, within embedded local and regional economies, considerable tensions between subgroups of the artisan class exist, which resemble the internal contradictions of similar classifications, including those between ‘fractions of capital’ and between sections of the proletariat. Artisans may split into subgroup interests just as, for example, precarious unskilled workers and skilled technicians working in the same factory are sometimes observed to. The commonalities expressed by any of these class definitions is always relative, to culture, kinship and subclass interests, but also - and this is the power of good class definitions – relative to class affiliation, class-based political organization, education and solidarity. Professionals such as family doctors and architects may find sufficient reasons against solidarity with artisans in manufacturing or agriculture, given different occupational *cultures* that resulted from historical wealth gaps. Reasons that pit these groups together, however, are associated with their common class position towards capital.

A walk through the Salone del Gusto, the main international event of Slow Food, reveals how important a conscious politics of equilibration is for emerging food movements, and how its absence can spoil many of the objectives these movements put forward. What happens, for example, when some of the peasant producers Slow Food has supported become prosperous enough to buy out other producers? Though the Salone del Gusto still features many arti-

san producers, others are by now full-fledged capitalist enterprises, represented by sales agents and with promotional pictures of a sizeable salaried workforce that is organized behind the suit-wearing owners in accordance to their position in the factory hierarchy. They have taken the space of five or ten artisan producers, not only with their larger exhibition booths, but most likely also in their fields and presidia. Certainly, these outcomes have to be considered, and more so since the failure to effectively bind the ideal of organic agriculture to peasant production (de Wit & Verhoog, 2007). In its most polemic form, the artisan motto for equilibration is ‘Every expander robs another one of us of his livelihood’.

The peasant support system devised by the Basque peasant union EHNE-Bizkaia may serve as a positive example of artisan politics. Their Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) network links 80 peasant producers with 700 households who each purchase a weekly produce box. Such a system has elsewhere resulted in significant accumulation, with some established CSA farms in the USA or Germany using more than a dozen wage workers to produce for 500-800 households, and thus giving little space to emerging farms. EHNE’s system groups nearby households into groups of around 25, and couples each group with a peasant producer. For each 25 new consumer-members, a new peasant unit (or a small group of associated producers) is served with a definite market for parts of their production. 50 of them were new farmers. Through this system, EHNE-Bizkaia equilibrates market access among its peasant membership, and has fostered considerable solidarity, not competition, between them (EHNE Bizkaia, 2013).

The logic of artisans behaving as a class-for-itself (following Shanin, 2014 for the peasantry) is to ostracize ‘expanders’ for stealing other families’ livelihood. Instead, expansion and capital formation are idealized as cooperative ventures, aiming to give each member the benefit arising from a new technology, technique or market.

### ***Artisans within the market***

Van der Ploeg (2005) warns that “autonomy should not be understood as the simple antipode of dependency”. To some degree it is always gained to be again given up in self-chosen, nested social structures. Amish farmers see their economic independence as a necessary precondition to realize the state of social dependency they favor. Similarly, the autonomy to open a small business will inevitably lead to specialization in its area of production, and building an autonomous home creates new bonds to a particular place and social system. Dependency from capital is replaced by social bonds, representing the Polanyian shift from the ‘self-adjusting market’ to the embedded market (Polanyi, 1957: 3-4, 56-59). Nigh & González Cabañas’ analysis of how new peasants construct socially-embedded, ‘nested markets’ could likewise describe an artisan carpenter or painter, who is woven into his local social fabric through informal agreements of cooperation with shop-owners and artisans in related trades (2014). In this context, the role of guilds is to make the artisan trades more competitive, by coordinating apprentice education, managing standards and consumer trust, and representing artisans in local policy deliberations.

The ‘competitive advantage’ of capitalist units is not given, as perceived by classical Marxism, but *made*, i.e. it is specific to the laws and interests represent-

ed in a given market at a given time. As van der Ploeg (2008: 17) concludes, “[t]here is no point in discussing whether this model [the superiority of capitalist farms] is true or not. The crux of the matter is that such a model has been *made* true, albeit to different degrees and with contradicting outcomes. The same two discourses are pitted against each other in all other sectors. Modernization ideology has faced an opponent in each sector it has tried to actualize itself in. These opponents, however, have not but scarcely connected themselves beyond their respective sectors, while the modernization discourse and its power bases could source from *universal* theories and engage in combined efforts. Commodification has engaged peasants in agriculture, small shops in retail, intellectuals in the academy, open-source programmers in IT, and so on, while all those groups still struggle to understand the common basis for their respective sectoral resistance.

Not always are the outcomes of changes in markets obvious. Online platforms such as Ebay, Etzy or Taobao can serve as an example for this ambiguity. While they certainly destroyed local markets and replaced many embedded artisan sales units with detached online re-sellers, they have also created new artisan niches by transcending local and regional reach. Such ‘zero-employee web-enabled businesses’ (McQueen & Yin, 2014) often sell their own products and services, ranging from second-hand books to niche foods and crafts. In China, whole villages have now become clusters of small producer-vendors, termed ‘Taobao villages’ (Guihang et al, 2014).

Given that capitalist and artisan modes of production are in constant competition, this competition plays out in the relation between an activity’s expected capitalist profit and its artisan labor product. Where the balance favors the capitalist form of production, the natural objective of artisan movements is to provoke a shift in their favor, either by making capitalist production more costly, or by increasing their own competitiveness through cooperation or intensification. In this they coincide with organized proletarian labor, whose natural objective is likewise to increase the costs of capitalist production by effectuating wage and benefit raises. The crucial point is reached when a further betterment for the proletarian would result in a loss of proletarian jobs, and a respective (often larger) gain of artisan jobs in the same sector. Methods must then be found to organize the shift of proletarians to artisanry. In many ways, these resemble the methods needed to organize non-family succession on peasant farms (Potter & Lobley, 1992; Fischer & Burton, 2014).

Besides political struggles, “the labor process [itself] is an important arena of social struggle for the peasantry (van der Ploeg, 2008, 26, see also Schneider and Niederle 2010)” and artisans in general, while the struggle of proletarians takes place entirely outside of their work, even critically depends on non-work (strikes, walkouts and sabotage). But the main economic struggle of artisan groups is around value formation for the products of their sector, which can favor capitalist or artisan production. The question here is how to inhibit the parallel force of capitalist accumulation through size-discriminatory measures. Nonetheless, the use of size theories such as those by Leopold Kohr and Fritz Schumacher in rural politics has been limited (Kohr, 2001; Schumacher, 1978). Their contribution should be understood as the universalization of Chayanov’s ‘optimum farm sizes’ argument into the economy at large, as well as its application on the state. Though Chayanov’s law of diminishing returns to size beyond the optimum is often inaccurate if purely quantitative economic criteria

are applied, it has gained strength since the turn to a prioritization of largely qualitative measures of economic outcomes, such as personal pride, subsistence, autonomy, self-sufficiency and others (Martínez-Alier et al, 1998).

As the norm for capitalist enterprises has become to run below ‘real costs’, i.e. to rely on the externalization of certain environmental, social and research costs, artificial incompetitiveness of artisan production is the norm in many sectors. Internalizing these externalities will thus also imply an exodus of workers towards artisan livelihoods, implying far-reaching changes in work patterns, products and efficiencies. The factors of emancipation from wage slavery would broadly resemble the out-competition of indentured and slave labor in the outgoing 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The state has held an ambiguous role in shaping, furthering, but also restricting the autonomy of labor. The political logic of artisan interaction with the state is the quest for a third party that respects artisan autonomy while curtailing social differentiation and uneven capital formation. On the one hand, artisans are aware of the state’s relationship with capital. On the other, artisans request public agencies as service providers. A crucial advantage of large businesses is their ability to unilaterally set up services to support their core activities. Artisans, however, need to relay most of these services, either to other artisans where this is possible, or to the state where it is not (mail sorting, railways, the electricity grid etc.). In addition, the state can create ‘nested markets’ for artisan products by the way it regulates public procurement. Brazil’s recent laws ordering school meals for the country’s 45 million students and food used for social programs to be procured to at least 30% by family labor farms is an example of such a development. Though central laws mandate the program, it is realized on the local level through cooperative agreements between the buyer (school, food bank etc.) and a farmer or farmer’s association, resulting in the development of long-term relationships that have allowed farmers to diversify production and cut out middlemen (Chmielewska & Souza 2010; Sambuichi et al 2013)<sup>16</sup>. In Europe, procurement has taken the exact opposite turn towards a capitalist market logic: new laws that command local public works and services to enter a EU-wide tender have reduced the position of small businesses in procurement. Finally, the scale of public works matters: while interregional highways favor construction conglomerates by design, local roads can be built and maintained by small units.

Within a capitalist-dominated market, i.e. in terms of a measure that exclusively shows exchange value, the products of artisan units typically appear more ‘expensive’. Only where markets are ‘nested’ (van der Ploeg, 2008), their

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<sup>16</sup> This and other forms of positive discrimination of family farms in Brazil rest on law 11,326 (Brazil, 2006), which established a legal delineation of ‘family agriculture’ that largely corresponds to the artisan class definition proposed here. According to the law, the “family farmer and the rural family enterprise [...] predominantly utilizes labor of their own family within the economic activities of their establishment or enterprise”, own an area of land smaller than 4 fiscal modules (which vary in size between districts), and “manages their establishment or enterprise with their family” (Grossi & Marques, 2010: 5-6). Interestingly, the law made specific provisions to include other sectoral groups: fishermen, aquaculturists, foresters and ‘extraction workers’ such as rubber tappers or beekeepers.

better outcomes are represented by the dominant mechanism of value formation. In nested markets, the heterogeneity of products is large, with the *niche* (i.e. the embedded or nested market) being the *norm* space of production decisions, taste, designs etc., instead of a marginal space alongside a standardized mainstream of capitalist production. Institutions are focused on maintaining interrelated niches, instead of driving universality. Production and consumption happens largely in socially short, co-designable circuits, though it does not preclude long geographical distances (Burnett & Murphy, 2014). This is captured amongst others in the terms of Ecological Economics (Martínez Alier et al 1998), which operationalizes the ‘incommensurability’ of value that ‘nested markets’ struggle to institute. Artisans are subject to complex and diverse incentive structures (‘moral economies’), instead of purely economic incentives and individual self-interest.

Elias Canetti’s account of a visit to the Suks market in Marrakesh during the 1960s captures the competitive advantage that the products of artisans have as long as markets are nested:

“It is astounding what dignity they achieve, these things that men have made. [...] In addition to the booths that are only for selling there are many where you can stand and watch the things being manufactured. You are in on the process from the start, and seeing it makes you feel good. Because part of the desolation of our modern life is the fact that we get everything delivered to the door ready for consumption as if it came out of some horrid conjuring device. But here you can see the rope-maker busy at his work, and his stock of finished ropes hangs beside him. [...] Their activity is public, displaying itself in the same way as the finished goods. (Canetti, 1978)”

## VII. Conclusion

In the overwhelming majority of territories (those where peasants neither constitute the vast majority of inhabitants, nor have significant control over the state), peasant politics cannot reach its principal anti-capitalist objectives in the absence of strong, enduring alliances with other sectoral struggles. The paper has analyzed the common class position on which such an alliance can be based.

Marx's class matrix, which sees the world as characterized by the struggle between proletarians and bourgeois, neither represents the class interests of peasants, nor accounts for their potential, and thus cannot serve its political projects. Formulating the core demands of PMs and peasant-based agriculture in generalized terms has helped to see that peasants are by far not the only 'outliers'. I argue that the larger, cross-sectoral, generalized category into which peasant agriculture falls is the AMP. First, an AMP exists, at least partially, in many sectors within and besides capitalist production, and should be acknowledged as such. Second, it exists as an analytical category, unifying the various recognized, but sectoral concepts for an alternative mode of production to capitalism. Third, it exists as a vision *beyond* capitalism, albeit with many different names, and in many different, sectoral movements. Like the term 'peasantry', the concept of the 'artisan class' is fueled by pluralism, in other words it proposes to unite similar demands without homogenizing them. Consequently, the demands of the peasantry are integral to the demands of a wider class-by-itself, the artisan class, whose trajectory to becoming a class-for-itself (Shanin, 2014) still lays in the future. The experience and relative strength of peasant movements, as well as the strong theoretical frames developed by their allies, can serve as a lighthouse example for the conscientization of the artisan class in other sectors, and across sectors.

Some of the natural allies of FS gain radically from association with a political project for an AMP. Agroecology, for example, would be able to theorize itself as the wider, political concept that more radical agroecologists want it to be (González de Molina, 2013); the same counts for vernacular architecture initiatives. As Andrews (2008) argues, it was such a cross-sectoral approach built on an inclusive definition of the 'co-producers' of food that allowed Slow Food to develop from a 'mainly gastronomic association' into a wider political and social movement. Nonetheless, also Slow Food can gain radically from accompanying its agendas with a class definition. All these movements are offering a vision for their respective sectors. The AMP hypothesis is a quest to integrate these visions, and to see them, together, as a quest to change the general forces of reproduction.

This thesis leaves many questions for further research. If we acknowledge the broad existence of an artisan class that produces within capitalism, but also besides and beyond it, this leads us to many new questions. How do we decide which of its incarnations we support, and in which of its struggles? The manifold incarnations of artisan production in individual sectors certainly necessitate a much more encompassing treatment. Specifically, this would aim to reveal the contradictions (Harrison's third defining feature of any 'mode of production') between these sectoral agendas, as well as points of convergence

and class consciousness beyond the shared ‘artisan condition’. Further research is needed in this direction.

Certainly, class-based movements are not in themselves more likely than others to be ‘right’, and each needs strong networks of critical participants and observers to keep their balances. Their advantage, however, is that they are more likely to be strong, based on their ability to mobilize across sectors. For PMs, the AMP can be a) a strategy for finding the peasantry’s natural allies (those with a similar or complementary class position), and b) a potential platform to communicate and coordinate demands with them. For all others it can structure the quest to “recognize that the ‘peasant principle’ operates in large domains of society” and to “explore uncapturedness, the struggle for autonomy and the creation of non-controllability wherever they emerge” (van der Ploeg, 2005). Consequently, new PMs such as *La Via Campesina* may be seen as new class-based movements, following a class theory that emerges from the demise of the proletariat. Their experience with and struggle for socially-embedded labor makes artisans the obvious agents of Polanyi’s counter-movement to the independent market. In that sense, the continuity of PMs in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century is not a standalone phenomenon. It is an incarnation, in one sector of human livelihoods, of a slumbering, perhaps already emerging, vision of human relations and production after modernity. In scope, this vision emulates the communist project of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, learns from its demise, and seeks to formulate a coherent basis for anti-capitalist struggles in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Conceptualizing this new convergence of scattered sectoral demands in the 21<sup>st</sup> century must be paramount on the agenda.

For political economists, recognizing an ‘artisan class’ presents an intriguing challenge. We can rely on extensive literature to apprehend the logic of capital, the quest to control the means of production to oversee the creation and smooth appropriation of a surplus. The logic of the proletariat is likewise clear: move control of the means of production to its representatives, who oversee production and socialize the surplus. As proposed here, the logic of artisans, the ‘artisan principle’, is the third class-based project of critical relevance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It seeks to retain and expand individual and, where that is impossible or ill-advised, cooperative control over the means of production, mold them with labor, and thus re-embed production in society. Certainly, whether a class remains scattered and politically silent, or whether it discovers its commonalities in adverse conditions are outcomes of political practice, not theory. And so it is with all due reservation that I note: the motto to transcend capitalism might, one day, read: Artisans of the world unite!



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