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Marc Edelman, *Peasant Politics of the Twenty-First Century: Transnational Social Movements and Agrarian Change*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2024. 356 pp. ISBN 9781501773440.

Peasant Politics of the Twenty-First Century: Transnational Social Movements and Agrarian Change discusses two key issues: the effects of neoliberal globalisation on agrarianism and the global lack of political recognition of agrarian social movements. Marc Edelman, Professor of Anthropology at City University New York, examines the causal factors which undermine agrarian societies and articulates what needs to change, to put peasants on an equal footing with other members of global society (p. 1). The book discusses multiple transnational agrarian social movements, analysing what they have achieved or intend to achieve in different countries across the globe.

Peasant Politics of the Twenty-First Century uses multiple research methodologies to provide a robustly evidenced theoretical review of transnational agrarian social movements. The review of documentary sources enables a systematic review of transnational agrarian social movements that works particularly well. Grey literature, sources not controlled by commercial publishers, including media interviews with people living an agrarian lifestyle, are included. There is discourse analysis of interviews with key informants and ethnographic research based on attendance at agrarian social movement meetings and events. This method sheds light on the lived experience of peasants in the mid-2020s and distinguishes *Peasant Politics of the Twenty-First Century* from other books in the genre. As 'Peasant Politics' unfolds, the book develops across five main domains: Social, Economic, Political, Civil Society and Neoliberalism, using subheadings to discuss specific concepts.

Peasant politics of the twenty-first century, Edelman argues, needs to consider a matrix of causal factors, including the global need for stable food supplies. A change in the global social landscape is required so that agrarian rural communities are recognised and respected for the vital work they do in delivering our food from farm to fork. The book alerts us to the need to have some form of universal basic income applicable in all countries to ensure that peasants have sufficient income to remain in business, survive, participate in consumerism, and provide an alternative to large corporate agricultural producers. The author clearly wants the reader to interpret this book as a call to arms, manifest as peaceful protest to campaign for a more

humanistic approach to agrarianism and increased peasant rights to protect them from neoliberal market forces (p. 35).

Edelman demonstrates his social justice interpretation of the efficacy, ethos and remit of transnational agrarian social movements most admirably in the book. For example, the second chapter discusses how agrarian movements and mobilised peasants successfully derailed global trade negotiations. These 1999 World Trade Organisation (WTO) talks included discussion on the rates of import and export tariffs, which would be applied on trade of agricultural products between WTO members. Developing country WTO delegates were swayed by the peaceful protests of agrarian social movements to the extent that they opposed the normative, neoliberal approach to global food production exacted by the WTO orthodoxy (pp. 69-70).

In chapter three, Edelman further demonstrates his citizenship-focused, humanistic interpretation, with his analysis of the concepts of “rooted, rural, and subaltern cosmopolitans” within transnational agrarian social movements (p. 87). According to his definition, ‘rooted cosmopolitans’ embrace universalism manifest as multiple identities of people who have differing backgrounds but are seen as equals with a common goal. ‘Rural cosmopolitans’ are understood as a more passive form of peasantry, compared to ‘rooted cosmopolitans’ or ‘subaltern cosmopolitans’. Rural cosmopolitan agrarian workers are “culturally versatile” (p. 89), they have to navigate between the social location of rural work and non-rural destinations in order to maintain incomes. They are not politically minded in becoming active members of transnational agrarian social movements. Analysis of the ‘subaltern cosmopolitan’ is perhaps where Edelman’s social justice leanings are most clearly expressed. Subaltern here is defined as agrarian dwellers who have little or no voice or influence in their agrarian society. These agrarian peasants become visible when neoliberal hegemonic forces want them to work; they are invisibilised when those self-same neoliberal market forces replace them, using cheaper labour supplies delivered by globalisation (p. 89).

Peasant Politics of the Twenty-First Century makes several important contributions to the existing scholarship, particularly in the fields of international development and social and cultural anthropology. In chapter four Edelman underscores the need to reconceptualize the definition of peasant as discussed by Michael Kearney (1996) (p. 107). The book indicates that people who self-identify as peasants have complex realities, which includes the instability of being a migratory, transient community, as well as the fact that some peasants are middle income earners. These social realities of some peasants’ lives make the downtrodden, powerless, voiceless definitions of ‘peasant’ obsolete to a degree (p. 222).

Chapter five discusses the fundamental concept of networking pre- and post-computerisation. Without networking, transnational agrarian social movements would not have developed in the way that they have in the twenty-first century. Without the effective reliable communication afforded by the proliferation of personal computers, agrarian movements would not have been able to mobilise as quickly and effectively as was the case in the Seattle peaceful protest (1999); or more generally, the continuing success of *La Via Campesina* and associated transnational agrarian social movements (p. 136). Edelman’s analysis of the importance of clicktivism -- computer use in making transnational social movements of any persuasion

effective and manifest as coordinated global activism -- is a key contribution. Greta Thunberg and the rise of Extinction Rebellion is testament to that. On the other hand, Edelman argues that “civil society”, “network,” and “social movement” are imprecise terms; essentially, they act to impede each other and cancel themselves out. This, Edelman explains, is ‘[w]hen networks don’t work’ (p. 127). In this sense, ‘Peasant Politics’ makes an important critical contribution, articulating how networking can have both positive and negative effects upon agrarian movements (p. 137).

As a small critique, the book is a little too focussed on the contemporary history of transnational agrarian social movements, less so on peasant politics in the twenty-first century. This makes the title of this excellent empirical study slightly misleading. I would have liked to see more critical policy suggestions of what supra and transnational organisations, such as the WTO and the UN, should be doing to protect small peasant farmers.

Peasant Politics of the Twenty-First Century makes an important contribution to the analysis of the effectiveness of social movements. The book provides a valuable introduction for the uninitiated on what globalisation is and how it works. The text indicates in a nuanced, understated way, why we need to change the system for agrarian societies and for other marginalised communities. These changes need to be fundamental redistributive changes, so that agrarian workers can survive in the capitalist, neoliberal market-driven society we currently live in. ‘Peasant Politics’ makes the reader think again about multiple concepts, for example, the fact that there are different ways of knowing when assessing the efficacy of globally coordinated activism. On democratisation, he argues there needs to be a different way to deliver decision-making, without resorting to elite-led reforms. With regard to national identity, he notes how small peasant farmers have differing levels of political gravitas in particular national contexts, with stark differences between Europe and Latin America.

‘Peasant Politics’ covers the contemporary period from the mid-1940s to the 2020s. Topics addressed include the legacy of the effects of the International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP) on Latin American small peasant farmers, the impact of commodities boards and other food production subsidies in the 1950s and the consequences of the Green Revolution in the 1960s. In the 1970s, Edelman shows, there were significant fluctuations in global food markets caused by various food subsidies leading to shortages and surpluses (p. 24). The Latin American peasant movement became far more mobilised and far better organised during this period (p. 126). Edelman also analyses the effects of neoliberal globalisation on local food markets in the 1980s and the impact of ‘counter agrarian reform’ and ‘market-led agrarian reform’ in the 1990s and 2000s. Edelman’s analysis of ‘Regional Civil Society in Central America’ is especially useful in introducing the advent of digital collaboration in the Latin American peasant’s movement. With respect to the 2010s, there is analysis of the wider recognition of the 2007 UN Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples and an evaluation of the effectiveness of the 2018 UN Declaration of the Rights of Peasants. Finally, the book examines how, in the 2020s, the emergence of agroecology and the consideration of climate change, intensive farming, and fertiliser use has begun to filter through in Latin America peasant politics. Another important contribution this book makes is to keep the concepts of “food security” and “food sovereignty”

(p. 174), active in the global debate from the perspective of agrarian society. “Food security” is a government requirement that all its people have access to suitable affordable food; “Food sovereignty” in the context of this book, is the right of peasants living in agrarian societies to decide what happens to the food they produce.

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