Understanding peasant revolution: From concept to theory and case

MARCUS J. KURTZ
University of Miami

Over the past three decades scholars have proposed a variety of competing explanations of peasant revolution.[1] Subsequent efforts at hypothesis refinement and testing, however, have only reproduced and expanded the scope of theoretical disagreements.[2] Much of this disputation arises from differences in the conceptualization of the key actor in most theories of revolution – the peasantry. These conceptual differences in turn profoundly affect the construction of theoretical arguments and the domains to which they can correctly be applied. Consequently, the regnant theoretical dissensus is unsurprising. Since conceptual differences are logically prior to the testing of theory, until they are resolved, progress through the empirical adjudication of competing explanations will be difficult indeed.

How does a focus on conceptualization help? It helps to establish whether what *appear* to be rival explanations of peasant revolution employ a shared understanding of "peasant," and hence whether they are, in fact, seeking to explain the same outcome. We can thereby avoid irresolvable debates, inappropriate claims of refutation (or confirmation), and a tendency to overstate the generality of theoretical claims. In the research design process, we will improve our attentiveness to how the concepts we employ should shape the cases we examine. It will not, however, solve all our problems. Even among scholars who share conceptual frameworks, important differences remain to be adjudicated on the basis of the empirical evidence. And all theories of peasant revolution must establish their validity in the face of theoretical approaches focused on other causal agents (since these are not restricted to any particular notion of a peasantry).[3] Finally, by highlighting the links among conceptualization, theory construction, and case selection, I seek to emphasize the analytical payoffs from more serious attention to concepts in the construction of research designs more generally.

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This article takes as its starting point the conceptual structure of the term "peasant" as it has developed in recent academic usage. Five different definitions of the term emerge, each of them implying a different set of empirical cases that fall within the boundary of the concept. The consequence of these differences is quite serious – frequently the empirical cases used to test the theoretical predictions of different scholars are not within the domain to which their respective theories apply. The confusion results from the use of the same term – peasant – for what are often quite different concepts. When this is the case, no hypothesis test can be employed, as "testing" a theory in a case to which it was not intended to apply is no test at all. And to the extent to which the empirical scope of different theories diverge entirely, they cannot be considered competing explanations. I make this case particularly in relationship to the debates among moral economy, political economy (rational choice), and structural explanations of social revolution.[4]

To unravel the relationship between concept formation and theory testing in the case of peasant revolution, I have identified four principal dimensions that are used in different combinations in defining the term. Scholars of revolution all at a very minimum understand peasants to be rural cultivators. But many consider them to be *more* than this. Three additional attributes, or combinations of them, figure prominently in academic understandings of peasants. Peasants, alternatively, (1) own or control the land they cultivate, and/or (2) are socially subordinate to a rural dominant class, and/or (3) are typified by distinctive community cultural practices. Based on these four attributes, we can identify five distinctive definitions of the peasantry. The *Weberian* conception considers peasants to be typified by all three attributes – land-ownership, cultural, and social – in addition to being rural cultivators.[5] The *Marxian* tradition focuses on the combination of land ownership and social subordination.[6] The *anthropological* tradition centers its understanding on the cultural distinctiveness of peasant communities.[7] The *moral economy* approach adds social subordination to this focus on the integrity of the peasant community.[8] Finally, a *minimalist* understanding of peasants, focusing only on their status as rural cultivators, can be found most prominently in rational-choice approaches to peasant revolution.[9] Given the divergent definitions of peasant, it is hardly surprising that scholars disagree about their role in social revolutions.

This article proceeds in two parts. First, I examine the differing usages of the concept "peasant" in the social sciences. Crucially, these con-

ceptual differences demarcate distinct subgroups of rural cultivators that can properly (for each school of thought) be considered peasants. Second, I examine the implications of this conceptual murkiness for the construction and assessment of causal hypotheses. Two conclusions follow. First, the conceptualization that one employs has a powerful effect on the hypotheses one produces. Second, inattention to the scope conditions entailed by different conceptions of peasants undermines the empirical evaluation of theories of revolution. Although not all analyses suffer from this defect, much of the ongoing debate over the causes of revolution results from conceptual problems and thus only indirectly represents meaningful theoretical and empirical differences.

Imposing structure: Five traditions of conceptualizing peasants

Deere and De Janvry noted, almost twenty years ago, the "absence of an adequate conceptual framework for the study of the peasantry."[10] Indeed, the problem of divergent definitions has periodically resulted in calls for the abandonment of the concept altogether.[11] But the existence of disagreements does not imply that there are no common features to all understandings of what a peasant is. The conceptualizations bear a structured relationship to each other; indeed, all begin with the same background assumptions. As different theoretical traditions add more properties to the definition of a peasant, the range of empirical cases to which it applies necessarily shrinks (Table 1).[12] It is in the differing domains entailed by each conceptualization that difficulties in theory testing emerge.

Any effort at conceptualization inherently involves simplifications of a complex underlying social reality. But for social science to begin to make sense of the world, reality must be rendered by means of these much more tractable abstractions. As Scott has recently pointed out, similar simplifications are essential to the practice of administration and governance. Such simplifications are Janus-faced, however. They inherently ignore much local specificity that can produce severe unintended consequences for those acting on the basis of these conceptual abstractions. The point is that conceptualization matters, and that the tradeoff between abstraction and specificity is anything but "purely definitional."[13] For social scientists, it affects social theory, for political leaders it affects societal outcomes.

Table 1. Conceptual dimensions underlying competing understandings of peasants

	Minimalist	Anthropological	Moral economy	Marxian	Weberian
1 Rural cultivators	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
2 Peasant communities characterized by distinct cultural practices		Yes	Yes		Yes
3 High levels of rural social subordination			Yes	Yes	Yes
4 Peasants control and/or own land				Yes	Yes
Range of cases covered	Very large	Large	Moderate	Moderate	Very small
Examples	Popkin (1979), Lichbach (1994), Bates (1984, 1988), and most rational choice theories	Redfield (1955), Kroeber (1948), also Banfield (1958)	Scott (1976), Magagna (1991), Kerkvliet (1977)	Wolf (1967),[a] Paige (1975)	Moore (1966), Shanin (1982)

[a] While Wolf's conceptualization is Marxian, his theoretical argument is sometimes moral economic in tone.

The dimensions of the concept

What, then, is a peasant? Table 1 sets out the properties used to define differing conceptions of the peasantry, as well as the relative empirical scope entailed by each definition. Below, I set out the basic contours of meaning of each of the underlying attributes used in different conceptualizations of the peasantry. It is important to remember that these dimensions represent idealizations that are unlikely to be reflected in perfect fashion in any real-world example.

1. Rural Cultivators. The Oxford English Dictionary defines a peasant simply as "one who lives in the country and works on the land."[14] Peasants are commonly understood to be rural cultivators. Academic definitions of "peasant" all share this background condition and proceed to build their respective conceptions on top of it, based on various combinations of three additional attributes – landholding, social subordination, and cultural distinctiveness. In addition to being defining attributes for many conceptions of a peasantry, these attributes also demarcate the boundaries of most well-known and commonly used subtypes of rural cultivators.[15]

2. Community Cultural Distinctiveness. A cultivator community whose members adhere to deeply held cultural practices and that has strong boundaries to community membership is used as a defining characteristic of a peasantry. Central to such integration are geographical proximity, limited intra-village class differentials, and traditional cultural practices that imply significant (though not necessarily symmetrical) reciprocity.

3. Social Subordination. A third dimension is social subordination. A situation of high subordination is a direct relationship of surplus extraction from the cultivator to some other agrarian social actor (for example, moneylenders, landlords, the state, the general store, or religious elites). It also carries with it the connotation of low social standing, and often also of exploitation. A situation of low subordination, by contrast, could include production for a capitalist market as long as the market power (e.g., market monopolization, cartelization, or monopsony) of various other classes does not make for extensive and direct extraction.

4. Control or Ownership of Agricultural Land. Because peasant societies predate modern notions of property, ownership and control of agri-

cultural land must be considered together. Peasants may own the land upon which they grow crops and control the process of production (e.g., which crops to plant, how to do so, when to harvest, how to divide the labor). If they do not own it, they may still have high levels of control over day-to-day productive activity (for example, in various forms of tenancy and collective land ownership). The absence of control over production defines the subset of rural cultivators who are wage-laborers. In practice, however, these distinctions can be very difficult to tease out, as rural cultivators often derive their subsistence from complex combinations of owned land, tenancy, and wage labor.[16]

Alternative conceptions of "peasant"

The task now is to understand the empirical scope of the alternative sets of defining properties laid out in Table 1. By doing this, the conceptualizations can be ordered with respect to the number of properties they contain, and thus the range of real-world rural cultivators that would fall within their boundaries. Obviously, the more properties in the definition (the more specific it is), the fewer real-world "peasants" it would tend to cover.[17]

Minimalist. The minimalist conception – essentially that peasants are rural cultivators – is a major approach in the literature on revolution. It is most prominent among scholars such as Popkin and Bates, who emphasize that peasants are individual rational actors. Indeed Popkin explicitly rejects the emphasis on the cultural distinctiveness of peasant villages, arguing that most of the world's peasants live in open villages.[18] Initially he suggests that tightly-integrated corporate communities existed as a historical fact.[19] But by the end of his book he seems to depart from this position, quoting Hinton, that "peasant society exhibits an all-pervading individualism engendered by the endless personal struggle to acquire a little land to beat out the other fellow in the market place."[20] The powerful assumption is thereby made that peasant society is characterized by individual cost-benefit calculation, and is not really a tightly integrated collectivity.

For Popkin, the other potential properties may be present in peasant society, but they are not definitional of it. For him, rural cultivators might be involved in diverse forms of land tenure (from rich peasant employers through sharecroppers and landless day laborers). Peasants may be socially subordinate, but they exist in such relationships to

rural elites only insofar as free-rider problems inhibit collective negotiation of prices, rents, or wages. Thus, peasants are at their core simply rural cultivators – the broadest possible meaning.[21]

The minimalist conception of a peasantry includes a large number of individuals within the conceptual boundary of the term. Such a broad approach poses challenges and opportunities. It requires that scholars find analytically meaningful similarities among peasants in widely varying sociocultural, geographic, and historical settings. Popkin and others have focused on a shared pattern of rational, individual decision-making. Indeed, in the face of an earlier literature that considered peasants to be "backward" or "traditional," it has been the particular contribution of these scholars to propose that peasants may in fact *not* be different types of decision makers.[22] To the extent to which this is convincing, however, it makes room for theories with broad empirical domains.

Anthropological. The next conception of peasant comes from what I have called the anthropological tradition. Perhaps the foundational figure in this tradition is Alfred Kroeber, who considered peasantries "part-societies with part-cultures."[23] That is, the characteristic feature of peasants is that they have a defined set of cultural practices that are distinct from the urban pattern. This could be embodied in the form of local dialects, patterns of dress, religious rituals, etc. Redfield goes further, claiming that peasant society and culture are not only distinct from urban culture, but share common features throughout the world.[24] More specifically, the principal unit of organization (and social meaning) for peasants is the local village community, which exists in structured relationships with the larger society that surrounds it.[25] This conception also influenced the work of political scientist Edward Banfield.[26]

Moral Economy. The moral economy approach got its start in the work of E. P. Thompson, who focused more broadly on the impoverished classes in eighteenth-century England – peasant and non-peasant alike.[27] He has two definitional foci: the norms and integration of communities, and the presence of subordination to local dominant classes. Thompson argues that small towns contained within them a sense of "traditional rights or customs" of which all community members were aware.[28] But unlike the Marxists, there is no focus on landholding in his understanding of peasants, whom he considers merely "rural laborers." Scott follows the same line, seeing peasants as individuals that "live in small, relatively homogeneous villages where much

of their life is governed by local custom."[29] Peasants, in direct contrast to urban workers, have communal norms, beliefs, and histories that form the core of their identities.[30] Magagna adds that for peasants spatial boundaries (i.e., villages) shape the very "nature and meaning of agrarian social structure."[31] This is, however, an ideal type. Even traditional communities have substantial individualistic cultural characteristics. What is critical is whether village norms are important enough to be seen as guides to peasant behavior.

Cultural patterns such as reciprocity, forced generosity, and communal landholdings are typical ways in which, for Scott, peasants provide themselves with subsistence insurance for times of dearth.[32] This is, however, only half of Scott's definition. The need for such mechanisms of minimum-subsistence insurance derive largely from the claims to peasant surplus made by outsiders – mainly landlords or the state. Thus, the peasantry is a culturally articulated community set in a subordinate structural position relative to outside social actors. The moral economy definition would include a moderate spectrum of cultivators under the rubric of "peasant." Typical landholding peasants, sharecroppers, tenants, and agricultural wage laborers would all qualify. Farmers, tribespeople, and all poorly integrated community systems would be excluded.[33]

Scott's more recent work, while centrally concerned with peasant politics, is not about social revolution. Still, even in his work on everyday resistance, essential components of his understanding of a peasantry include social subordination and the presence of a "supportive subculture" that often implies a "venerable popular culture of resistance."[34] Later, in his work examining class relations through the prism of contrasting public discourses and the "hidden transcripts" of social subordinates, moral economic notions of economic domination and the cultural distinctiveness of subalterns remain present.[35] When Scott turns his attention to the state, he argues that the misapprehensions (via abstraction, simplification, and ignorance) of the distinctiveness and specificity of the local norms and practices of peasants can have disastrous consequences.[36]

Marxian. The Marxian conception of "peasant" is principally derived from Marx's work on the French peasantry and also centers the definition of a peasant along two of the three axes. It claims that peasants are at once small-landowners, and subordinate within the prevailing mode of production. For Marx, implicitly, agricultural wage-workers –

the landless – would "really" be proletarians and not peasants. In Marx's discussion of France, peasants are seen as small landholders, isolated from each other, and engaged in competition in a way that inhibits collective action. However, "insofar as [they] … live under economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests, and their culture from those of other classes, and put them in hostile opposition to the latter, they form a class."[37] These cultivators are clearly in a subordinate relationship to other classes, but their individual landholding puts them in competition with each other; they are thus unable to become a "class for themselves." There is, for Marx, no peasantry without landholding or without subordination.

Paige, a contemporary neo-Marxist, has developed a theory of rural class conflict that focuses on "cultivating classes" as the central actors (in their relationship with non-cultivating dominant classes). His theoretical sweep thus extends beyond the peasantry to include rural workers. But while all cultivators are for him necessarily socially subordinate, only some are characterized by landholding – and he reserves the term "peasant" for this group.[38] This distinction is central for him, because it is only the wage-laboring cultivators and *not* the peasants that are potentially revolutionary.[39] Paige's recent work, while much more focused on the "class narratives" of the Central American coffee aristocracy, continues to utilize a Marxian notion of a peasant. They are still defined by landholding, and remain carefully distinguished from the migratory laborers and informal sectors who are for him the bearers of revolutionary crisis in the region.[40] Deere and De Janvry, in their attempt to impose conceptual clarity on the term "peasant," similarly focus on the social organization of landholding (production and reproduction on the peasant family farm), and subordination.[41]

Weberian. The most encompassing conception of the peasantry derives from Weber. For him, the peasant "was and remains a smallholder, furnished with land as compensation for subordination to his master…."[42] Cultural norms are hierarchical and personalistic, rather than the individual and rational pattern that prevails in the cities. To be a true peasant in the Weberian conception, rural producers have to control (but not necessarily own) land, be subordinate, and culturally distinct from urban-dwellers.

Shanin follows this approach. He argues that a true peasant would be characterized by: (1) family farm based production, (2) a farm economy of a low level of specialization, (3) a specific traditional culture related

to the manner of living in small villages, and (4) a relationship of domination by outsiders, which could be enforced variously through land-tenure, direct physical coercion, and abuse of market power.[43] Perhaps the clearest example of this usage in scholarship on revolution is in the work of Barrington Moore. In Moore's discussion of peasants and revolution, he focuses on all three attributes: "the character of the link between peasant community and the overlord [subordination], property and class divisions within the peasantry [land tenure], and the degree of solidarity or cohesiveness displayed by the peasant community [culture]."[44]

Conceptualization and the construction of theories of peasant revolution

Scholars have long been aware of the disagreements among different conceptualizations of peasants. Indeed, these disagreements are routinely noted in the opening paragraphs of works on revolution. Seldom, however, are their implications for the construction and testing of theories directly explored. The tendency is to be explicit about one's own conceptualization, and then proceed with the explanatory argument without reference to the consequences that would derive from alternative conceptualizations.

Conceptual disagreements have affected the empirical study of peasant revolution in two ways. First, the type of theory one constructs is closely tied to the conceptualization one employs. Eric Wolf has recently taken this point still further, arguing that there are important connections between conceptualization and power itself, and that prevailing anthropological definitions of culture have obscured this nexus.[45] But if concepts guide our thinking, then differences between theoretical arguments may reflect differences in conceptualization rather than competing empirically testable propositions about a shared set of actors. Hempel makes the point directly: "In actual scientific practice the process of framing a theoretical structure and interpreting it are not always sharply separated...."[46] Theory informs conceptualization, and the reverse. I contend that this issue has bedeviled theories of revolution, given the absence of conceptual uniformity. However, if conceptual differences are made explicit, the lack of conceptual uniformity could be a strength rather than a weakness, as the resulting theoretical pluralism may heighten creativity in dealing with a poorly-understood and complex social phenomenon.

The second consequence is very serious and arises from the empirical cases that are used to test competing arguments about peasant revolution. In some cases, debates are carried on between scholars who test competing theories in cases to which they were never meant to be applied. This occurs because different conceptualizations entail different universes of empirically relevant cases. Careful attention must be paid to whether the cases analyzed are within the scope of the theory being evaluated.

Walker and Cohen have pointed out that "scope statements" – explicit definitions of the class of cases to which a theory applies – are essential to its testing.[47] My goal here is to show that the scope of a theory is linked to the conceptualization of its central causal variables, and that where conceptual consensus is absent, problems of miscommunication and theory misevaluation are rife.

Two recommendations follow. First, we must be much more self-conscious in our conceptualization (*and* in understanding the implicit and explicit conceptual boundaries used by others) in the process of hypothesis testing and refinement. Failure to do so will result in irresolvable debates, inappropriate claims of theory refutation, and a tendency to make theoretical claims at a broader level of generality than is appropriate. Second, we must carefully examine when theorists really do offer competing explanations of a single phenomenon, and distinguish this from cases in which there are really two different theories designed to be applied to two very different domains of cases that are established by contrasting definitions of peasant. The separation of theoretical domains does not fully solve the problem – for within each particular conceptualization of a peasantry there remains substantial theoretical and empirical disagreement. But recognizing conceptual differences should make it possible for scholars to focus their energies on areas where empirical analysis can render theoretical judgements.

Concept, theory, and a debate that is not: Moral economy versus political economy

The process of theory construction does not proceed in a conceptual vacuum. If, as Laitin argues, "it is hard to think about the political world without them [concepts]," then differences in conceptualization must produce differences in how we explain politics.[48] I attempt to

Table 2. Theories of peasant revolution and the conceptual limits on their extension

Author	Definition	Cases examined	Summary of argument	Cases to which theory extension may be inappropriate
Scott	Moral economy	Colonial Vietnam and Burma (through the Great Depression)	Traditional community structures define the culturally-acceptable form of surplus extraction. If the penetration of markets or states changes the *form* of extraction in ways that undermine year to year collective food security, then the subsistence ethic is violated and revolt is likely.	Modern or highly individualized contexts. Where capitalist transition is consolidated. Where community structures are weak.
Popkin	Minimalist	Vietnam (principally 1940s–1950s)[a]	Free-rider problems are seen as the basic barrier to the mobilization of peasants. They can be successfully overcome through a combination of effective leadership, individual incentives, and the credibility of organizational entrepreneurs' promises of future benefits.	Where simple individual cost-benefit calculation is an inaccurate model of peasant decision-making. Where free-rider problems do not structure collective action.
Paige	Marxian	Vietnam and Guatemala 1940–1980s	Revolutionary and non-revolutionary outcomes are seen as products of differing agrarian class relations. In particular, landholding peasants are unlikely to produce revolution, which results from a combination of cultivators dependent on wages and elites dependent on land.	Where agrarian class structures are not well consolidated. Where export-oriented capitalist transitions are not complete.

[a] While Popkin discusses Vietnamese social and political organization as far back as the pre-colonial era, the actual instances of peasant mobilization he examines principally date from the 1940s and 1950s.

show here how wide divergences in the conceptualization of peasants have led to strongly contrasting theories of peasant revolution that are sometimes not truly contending explanations. Table 2 summarizes the theoretical position of three principal authors from the moral economy, political economy, and Marxian schools, and the areas to which extension of their theories would be problematic. In this section, I argue that the well-known debate between moral economy and political economy approaches to explaining revolutions is in fact best understood as involving conceptual differences that render the two theories largely incommensurable. In other cases, for example, debates between Marxian and political economy perspectives, conceptual differences have not undermined the clash of alternative explanations or the process

of theory testing. A focus on conceptual underpinnings is required, however, if we are to recognize and avoid these potential pitfalls.

We saw above that moral economy approaches to revolution define peasants in terms of the cultural distinctiveness of their villages and the presence of social subordination. Political economy approaches had the greatest empirical sweep, requiring only the background condition that peasants be rural cultivators. Linked to at least Popkin's version of this approach, however, is the assumption that peasants are individual cost-benefit calculators. From this, each perspective develops an "image" of village life that forms the context of its theoretical arguments. For moral economy, villages are closed, tightly knit (but not egalitarian), and corporate. For political economy, they are open, stratified, and internally competitive. It is a small step from these assumptions for the former to develop a theory of *group* moral codes, and the latter a theory of the barriers to *individual* participation in collective action.

Obviously, the tightly integrated villages of moral economy theory are characterized by varying degrees of individualism as well. The empirical assumption built into Scott's theory is that strong collective norms are also present and guide behavior. He argues that peasants by-and-large live only a hair's breadth away from threats to their very physical survival. Out of this reality comes a "safety-first" behavioral principle "which lies behind a great many of the technical, social, and moral arrangements of a precapitalist agrarian order."[49] This is no primitive egalitarian utopia, however. Rather, such an agrarian order is shot-through with struggle, inequality, and extraction by elites. What is critical for Scott, however, is the *type* of extraction. The key change comes when "the growth of the colonial state and the commercialization of agriculture exposed an ever-widening sector of the peasantry to new market-based insecurities which increased the variability of their income above and beyond the traditional risk in yield fluctuations."[50] The penetration of markets and states may modernize agriculture and raise rural incomes, but *if* it removes guarantees of minimum food security that village cultural and technological practices had formerly provided, then the morality of the subsistence ethic is violated and rebellion is likely. It is emphatically not exploitation that causes peasant revolt, nor capitalism; rather, only new or different forms of exploitation that bring with them increases in year-to-year food insecurity.

This theory is intimately associated with the conceptualization of "peasantry" that Scott employs. His focus on the social and moral customs that undergird village life makes sense only in the context of long-standing villages that have developed such practices to cope with centuries of living on the very edge of subsistence. Risk aversion and the "safety-first" principle are simply responses to life in a pre-capitalist agrarian economy. They may very well *not* be likely or rational responses to life as a rural cultivator within a reasonably well-established capitalist economic order. And with the passage of time, fewer and fewer peasantries may meet the demands of Scott's moral economy definition. Indeed, it is in the passing of this traditional society – a dynamic state – that Scott's theory has empirical bite. His is an explanation of what sort of externally-induced transformation will (or will not) engender potentially revolutionary peasant resistance.

Popkin's minimalist conceptualization of a peasantry, by contrast, has a large empirical scope. It is this fact that makes it difficult and essential, however, to ascertain the theoretically relevant similarities between all members of the peasant category. One of the ways to seek this homogeneity of peasants is by making an effort to challenge the more restrictive (lower range of cases) conceptual dimensions used by others, most particularly the moral economists. If he were successful in this endeavor, he would also be able to make those individuals defined as peasants by Scott fit within his own conceptualization, and establish a basis for the comparative evaluation of theory.

I contend, however, that these authors (and other contributors to the debate) may not be talking about the same objects of study. Moral economists Scott and Kerkvliet are explicit that they are interested in *pre-capitalist* peasantries.[51] To be sure, they analyze peasantries in transition under the influence of an expanding state or what Wolf has called "North Atlantic capitalism," but theirs is a theory of how a traditional peasantry reacts to change. Popkin, on the other hand, is careful to explain that for him peasants are self-interested *individual* decision-makers.[52] The individuals that the moral economists consider peasants fall within Popkin's minimalist definition only if precapitalist peasants are individual decision-makers in the utility-maximizing sense. Popkin recognizes this and thus is careful to introduce a negative restriction on the minimalist definition of a peasant – they must *not* live in tightly-integrated, culturally bounded communities that could induce collective forms of decision-making. That is, he is considering a peasantry that has already succumbed to the forces of commerciali-

zation and modernization. And Popkin goes to great lengths to argue that this is true of Vietnam, his empirical case.[53]

Popkin takes great pains to try to show that Vietnamese peasants are best seen as *individuals* "seeking to stabilize and secure their own existence."[54] Even so, in his discussion of pre-colonial and colonial villages, while he demonstrates inegalitarian socioeconomic patterns, he concedes that they contained important redistributive features, often had very sharp cultural boundaries, and were closed and corporate.[55] He and Scott concur that the advent of French colonialism dramatically changed rural social structure and the terms of peasant existence.[56] The problem is that the type of peasant analytically central to his theory of mobilization came about as a result of the transformations of the colonial era. As a consequence, his compelling empirical analysis of four peasant movements is temporally situated well *after* the period of time in which the type of peasants central to Scott's analysis existed.

The issue here, as Weber would be quick to point out, is that the type of individualistic and cost-benefit calculating behavior constructed in Popkin's theory is a decidedly modern phenomenon – it makes sense only where the transformation to commercial agriculture and market rationality is widespread and thoroughgoing.[57] The process of rationalization for Weber "is the deliberate substitution for the unthinking acceptance of ancient custom [e.g., the subsistence ethic of the moral economists], of deliberate adaptation to situations in terms of self-interest."[58] Rationalization and the penetration of markets and bureaucracies are inextricably linked.[59] But moral economists cast their theories about social contexts in which exactly such forms of production and their associated patterns of atomistic decision-making have not fully penetrated. It is a separate claim to argue that rational, individual decision-making predates capitalist transformation. Such an approach is considered below, and is certainly a fruitful line of exploration.

As presented, moral economy is a theory of the implications of market and state penetration *into* pre-capitalist communities.[60] Popkin's political economy is a theory about actors who operate in contexts in which market organization has already attained predominance. Understood in this way, there is no reason why the moral economy and political economy approaches could not *simultaneously* be correct (or incorrect). They may both refer to peasants, but they are not talking about the

same social actors. I intend no empirical critique of either approach, I claim only that they are not competing explanations.

It is also critical to understand here that I do not intend a general indictment of rational-choice approaches as inapplicable to certain types of peasant society. Rather, I merely contend that without modification to account for some of the cultural and social aspects of pre-capitalist communities, Popkin's version of individual rationality is an incomplete description of the decision-making processes of the types of peasant central to moral economy approaches. That is, the peasants that meet Scott's definition would not easily be understood using Popkin's theoretical apparatus (*and* vice versa). This does not, however, mean that Popkin's theory is inadequate for the case to which he applied it, or a wide variety of more contemporary peasantries. Nor does it mean that a differently formulated rational-choice inspired theory would necessarily fail to be theoretically competitive with moral economy approaches in a different set of cases.

Understanding the problem

Desai and Eckstein think of these conceptual differences in terms of the dependent variable – revolution. For them, there are pre-modern and modern revolutions, the latter being characterized by the presence of a bureaucratic revolutionary organization. While this formulation recognizes the conceptual core of the problem, narrowing the dependent variable is perhaps not the appropriate solution. As they themselves put it, "not only is revolutionary organization a modern phenomenon, but it is *made possible* by modernity."[61] But since modernity here is essentially the penetration of modern market-rational social patterns into the peasantry, the conceptual issue is how the "peasantry" has changed, not how revolution has changed. That is, as what constitutes a peasant has changed, then the causes of peasant revolution have also changed, including in the twentieth century the centrality of an organized revolutionary party. This is part of the cause of modern revolution, not part of its definition.

Similarly, Somers and Goldfrank, in their trenchant critique of Paige's structural theory, hit on the centrality of the distinction between "traditional" subsistence economies and modern commercial enclaves.[62] Their criticism of Paige, that he has "nothing to say about the effects of price fluctuations and the demand-induced conversion of lands for-

merly devoted to subsistence," applies to Popkin as well.[63] But neither theorist should have much to say, because this important question asks about a set of social actors not consistent with their conceptualization – subsistence (i.e., traditional) peasants under pressure from encroaching markets. It is not an accident that Scott's theory, which employs a conceptualization fully consonant with such peasant actors, has much to say on the topic. The theoretical silence that Somers and Goldfrank detect speaks, however, to a problem of theoretical incommensurability rooted in conceptual differences, not to theoretical inadequacy in the work of Paige (or by extension, Popkin), taken in their appropriate empirical domains.

It is only Popkin's attempt to universalize his particular version of the logic of individual decision-making, leading him to project his theory inappropriately into pre-capitalist settings, that weakens an otherwise compelling explanation. In the process of defining his perspective, he critiques the moral economists as arguing that "social relations in precapitalist or noncapitalist settings are more moral than are relations in capitalist settings, and that the externally induced 'breakdown' of precapitalist institutions hurts peasant welfare."[64] This is not quite Scott's point. Moral economy theory provides a basis for understanding what types of exploitation are not likely to threaten subsistence, and thus could be tolerated, and those that undermine the basic subsistence minimum, at least from time to time. It is important that the former may, over time, involve much more extraction than the latter. The penetration of market relations does not necessarily increase exploitation, rather it is potentially *differently* exploitative. It may create instabilities that threaten subsistence, even while on average returns improve. Scott's theory attempts to derive a basis for understanding what *types* of exploitation will be perceived as unjust (remember, for Scott all peasants are by definition subject to exploitation and subordination).

While the derivation of peasant moral economy – based in the subsistence ethic – is conceptualized as responsive to a "static" pattern of socioeconomic organization, the theory of revolution is dynamic. Scott and other allied approaches analyze traditional peasantries in the process of transformation, either from encroaching states or the penetration of commercial forces.[65] In a similar vein, Hobsbawm's discussion of social banditry examines the dynamics of transformation, especially "disintegrating kinship society and the transition to agrarian capitalism."[66] Social banditry as a phenomenon ceases to

exist once the transformation to fully commercial agriculture is complete.[67] What is critical is that the dynamic of peasant mobilization is understood as a response to transformative processes within *traditional* (precapitalist) peasantries.

Popkin's alternative is rooted in the notion that peasants are individual utility maximizers much like anyone else. In this sense it relies on a more static conceptualization of socioeconomic organization. To be sure, in this world modernization may proceed apace and society may be shot through with conflicts, but the rural economy is not seen as undergoing the throes of a "great transformation." His is a theory of the political dynamics of a commercialized agrarian economy, not a theory of the politics of the commercialization of agriculture.

From this perspective, decision-making involves tradeoffs between different sorts of short-run and long-run investments designed to improve their individual (or familial) subsistence level. The key issue from the perspective of mobilization and revolutionary activity involves the "conflicts between individual and group benefits."[68] The problem is defined as a version of Olson's dilemma of collective action.[69] As Popkin puts it, "unless the expected [individual] benefits outweigh the costs, the villager can be presumed not to contribute to collective action."[70] In Vietnam, it was only the skilled leadership of Communist cadres or various religious movements that could provide the incentives necessary to support collective action. Leaders accomplished this by excluding non-participants from the benefits of collective action, coordinating their contributions, manipulating information, and breaking larger goals into smaller discrete subsets. In this fashion they could convince peasants that their participation would have an appreciable effect on outcomes, and overcome barriers to action.[71] What Popkin does not do is attempt to reinterpret the movements central to Scott from his own theoretical perspective. I contend that this is because peasants of this earlier time period do not conform to the definition upon which his theory is founded.

A political economy perspective could be reformulated to fit pre-capitalist contexts, and might make moral economic predictions. For example, one could argue that free riding may be sanctioned through powerful community norms; and because general subsistence is threatened the *individual* costs of inaction are potentially enormous.[72] The marginal private share of a collective effort – even in a relatively large group – might well be critical even if one contributes only a small

amount to the outcome and the impact is barely noticeable; one is after all on the very margin of physical survival. In addition, one cannot underestimate the enforcement power of community norms. Indeed, Scott has on occasional discussed norms as individual incentives guiding peasant decision-making.[73] But as formulated, these are two different theories designed for two different contexts. To apply them to cases of "peasant revolution" in general is to be insensitive to the widely differing usages of the term peasant that each perspective employs. There can be no theory test between the two, because they do not compete.

Lichbach extends Popkin's line of thinking, focusing on the importance of selective incentives in generating collective action. Again, he points out that collective action – here subtly redefined as "collective organization" – depends on the private distribution of benefits from group membership. His examples range from the Nature Conservancy to the American Political Science Association. But the minimalist conception of peasants that he employs leads him to consider this an adequate theoretical model for peasants across time and place. A compelling case can be made that modern rural cultivators in free-market economies behave like environmentalists or political scientists – insofar as they face standard collective action dilemmas. But the universalization of this model to as wide a range of peasantries as Lichbach covers is problematic. Not all peasantries are modern, not all rural areas are heavily marketized, and not all peasant organization takes on the rational-legal/bureaucratic form identified by Lichbach.[74] Rather, the minimalist conception of peasantry leads him, like Popkin, to the theoretical step of universalizing a particular version of the logic of collective action. Scott is quick to critique such moves, giving examples of movements that are difficult to explain by an appeal to strictly individual logic – including the Wellingsborough Diggers and Zapata's uprising in early twentieth-century Morelos.[75] Notably, these are not modern contexts, though they may well be modernizing. As a result of this conceptual issue, a compelling and plausible theory is stretched to cover cases where its assumptions and predictions are unconvincing. But this is not a falsification of the theory more generally.

More recently Lichbach has noted that solutions to collective action dilemmas are contingent on the character of the groups acting and the institutional environment within which they act.[76] Thus, different types of groups (in this case, types of peasants) could potentially solve the problem of collective action in different fashions. He thinks of these

solutions (i.e., causes of mobilization) as falling into four broad types – markets, communities, contracts, and hierarchies.[77] That is, rebellion can have different causes in different groups. Unfortunately, in his empirical work on peasant rebellion, he continues to assume that pre-capitalist and modern peasantries form a single homogeneous group. Pursuing this notion of causal heterogeneity among different peasant groups, however, would help make rationalist approaches more commensurable with moral economy ones.

Attempts at coping with conceptual problems

Bates takes an important stride forward in recognizing the conceptual core of disagreements between moral economy and political economy theories. His solution to the dilemma is to make an empirical case that no peasants fitting the moral economy definition are to be found, at least in Africa. He begins, quite correctly, by pointing out that communal and culturally-demarcated villages are an "essential underpinning" to moral economy theories.[78] But then Bates rejects the idea that pre-capitalist peasant villages of this type (what he calls "natural economy" or "peasant economy" models) ever had a meaningful presence.[79] This is a controversial claim, but the effort is laudable because it recognizes the conceptual problem that is central to the dispute.

The key issue Bates uses to make his point is a discussion of property rights. He understands the moral economists as contending that their culturally demarcated villages will be characterized by a tendency to support collective land rights. He argues that they see peasant revolution as village attempts to defend collective land rights against the individualization attendant upon capitalist transition.[80] He then goes on to show convincingly that in many cases traditional rural cultivators *supported* private-property expansion and engaged in trade. This is not quite the solution, however, that it at first appears to be. The existence of peasant preferences for private property does not entail the absence of the strong community norms and structures that are the core of the moral economy definition. It also does not contradict moral economy claims as to when revolution is likely (see Table 2).

Moral economy arguments make no assumptions about the presence or absence of individual private property (see Table 1). They only assert that in pre-capitalist villages, social and customary patterns produce a subsistence ethic that involves practices that prevent the poorest from

actually succumbing to starvation. This could take a variety of forms, including social pressure on the wealthy to hold feasts, to reduce rents in hard times, or to provide employment. It by no means entails the redistribution of land, or its collective ownership.[81] This is only one possibility among many, though it is a feature that was present in Scott's original case – Vietnam. To critique the moral economy definition of a peasantry on this basis is excessively narrow. The moral economists claim peasants revolt against extractions that place them at greater year-to-year risk of starvation, violating the subsistence ethic. They do not revolt against the market or capitalism per se, nor is the absence of collective landholding sufficient to establish the presence of rational individual decision-making.

Scott also on occasion takes moral economy to contexts where its definitions may not apply. He contends, in reply to political economy theories, that "any theory of revolution must make a place for the anger, revenge, hatred that are so obviously a part of the experience. Marketplace bargaining metaphors miss this entirely. If such emotions are not to be considered acts of pure madness, we are forcibly brought to the living moral economy of the participants."[82] But marketplace metaphors might be entirely appropriate where markets have thoroughly penetrated. And moral economies cannot be presumed where their sociocultural foundations are absent.

Hawes comes closest to recognizing directly the core conceptual difficulty in the moral economy/political economy debate. In his discussion of the applicability of Scott's theories to the Philippines, he notes,

> Though peasant rebellion has a long history in the settled, rice-producing regions ... it has not been an important form of peasant political action since the 1950s. Subsistence crises still threaten the poor, but the *political economy of these crises has changed since the earlier rebellions.*[83]

In particular, Hawes points to the commercialization of the rice economy, class differentiation, and the decline of traditional patron-client ties. It is a very small step from this recognition to note that what has changed is *the type* of cultivator. With the transition to stable capitalist social relations, the variables of importance to moral economy theory cease to be effective predictors of revolt. Once marketization is complete, perhaps it is Popkin's approach that is most appropriate. Neither theory has here been falsified.

To argue that moral economy and political economy approaches to peasant revolution are incommensurable is not to contend that there is no way in which proponents of the two perspectives can engage in debate. The necessary step, however, is to recognize that the core of the debate hinges on the nature of the peasantry, not the causes of revolution. If this is accomplished, the debate becomes centered on the domain of each theory, and the empirical issue becomes the nature of the peasantry: Community-centered and risk-averse for moral economy, individualistic and self-interested for political economy. If the theoretical debate is re-framed as an empirical dispute between conceptualizations of a peasantry, we may gain from the interaction.

Indeed, just such an empirical encounter occurs in discussions of the nature of pre-revolutionary French rural society. These disputes have explicitly been framed in terms of their implications for moral economic and more economistic conceptions of peasant society and culture.[84] The conventional wisdom has been moral economic in its understanding of peasant society. Marc Bloch is perhaps most emphatic, stating flatly that "early societies were made up of groups rather than individuals."[85] These communities – particularly their poorest members – resisted modernizing reforms such as enclosure and the abolition of collective property and customary rights.[86] For both Bloch and Brenner it was this stubborn adherence to tradition – rendered understandable in terms of its subsistence-guaranteeing functions – that for so long prevented the emergence of agrarian capitalism in France or any sort of economic modernization akin to that experienced by England at the same time.[87]

Hoffman, re-examining the case of Old Regime France, challenges this communitarian notion of the peasantry and its explicit connections to moral economic hypotheses. He correctly points out that moral economic positions assert that traditional property and customary regimes work as a form of social insurance for the poor, and that as a consequence "peasants resist the onslaught of capitalism."[88] But, Hoffman argues, peasant communities were actually deeply divided, and that the defenders of the commons were more often privileged strata, not the poor. His work shows the intense conflicts of interest within communities, rebutting the notion of a natural unity. Indeed, he points out that as a consequence collective action was unusual, and where it emerged it was frequently accompanied by coercive measures to enforce broad-based participation.[89] It is a short step from this point to Lichbach's selective-incentive approach to peasant collective action. Root similarly points out that village institutions in Burgundian peasant communities

did not level social inequalities, and that external pressures from both agricultural commercialization and the state served to strengthen, not weaken, customary practices.[90] Thus, both the underlying conceptualization and causal mechanisms central to moral economy approaches are challenged.

The point here is not to adjudicate among these works of social history. Rather, I seek to point out that this debate – framed in terms of what conceptualization of peasants is appropriate to the case – exemplifies the way that empirical evidence can fruitfully be brought to bear on the moral economy/political economy debate. And if the revisionist historians are correct that community-oriented peasants do not characterize Old Regime France, Scott and Thompson's work is rendered inapplicable; it is not, however, refuted. The latter would require evaluation in cases in which it can legitimately be applied. Crucially, conceptual clarity is essential to understanding where disputes lie, and the forms of empirical evaluation that can meaningfully be brought to bear.

When conceptual disagreement is not a problem

Are all theories of peasant revolution so different that meaningful debate is impossible? Thankfully, no. It is the moral economy/political economy debate that is most affected by conceptual differences. On the other hand, the arguments of Wolf and Scott could easily be tested against each other. Both locate the root cause of peasant mobilization in the capitalist transformation of pre-capitalist peasant villages. Wolf emphasizes landholding and social subordination in his definition, while Scott emphasizes village distinctiveness as an alternative to landholding. The range of cases covered by the concept is not quite identical for each. But given the historical boundaries that both employ, they overlap empirically to a great extent. Thus, the quite different predictions that their theories make can be tested in competition with each other. Wolf expects landholding middle peasants to be the locus of rebellion, while Scott expects villages under collective threats to their subsistence to be the rebellious actor. Empirical studies could certainly adjudicate between them.

Similarly, Popkin's arguments can readily be compared with those of some other scholars. The work of Jeffery Paige likewise situates itself in the post-capitalist transformation era. He explicitly bounds his theory

within the domain of modernized "agricultural export sectors [which] represent a sharp break with the pattern of subsistence cultivation."[91] And because of this it is quite comparable in its theoretical implications with the political economy approach of Popkin. While Popkin and subsequent rational-choice inspired theorists like Lichbach emphasize leadership and the provision of selective incentives to explain rebellion, Paige hypothesizes that a non-cultivating class dependent on control over land for its income, when coupled with a wage-earning cultivating class, will produce a revolutionary explosion.[92] Paige is careful to use the term "cultivators" to discuss his central actors, and his theory is broadly comparable to that of the political economists. While he may not call all rural actors "peasants," he has a theory of all rural cultivators, as do Popkin and others. His specific hypotheses are quite different, and these *are* amenable to adjudication on the evidence. Ironically, it is wage-earning cultivators, who for Paige are fundamentally proletarian, not peasant, who, in certain contexts, are the dynamite for "peasant" revolution.[93]

Paige's evaluation of the moral economy perspective is also carefully done within the range of cases one could reasonably include under the moral economy's definition of a peasantry. I emphasize, however, the empirical overlap between these two theories is exceedingly limited. Paige has selected one national case – Guatemala from 1940 to 1980 – that embodies both market-oriented agro-export production, social subordination, landholding, and the persistence of strong, culturally bounded Indian communities. These peasants – barely – fit both definitions, so something of a hypothesis test is possible here. But it is not, I would argue, a strong test. Most often these theories do not compete. Judging them on the basis of the exceedingly rare cases where they do indeed overlap does not provide a strong evaluation of their respective core propositions. The theory test is legitimate, but it is not a strong falsification.

Theda Skocpol long ago recognized that there were serious problems arising frm the differing treatments of the peasantry in theories of revolution.[94] The problem, from her perspective, was that scholars proposed competing universal definitions of the peasantry – a task she saw as hopeless. Her solution, rather than accepting any single conceptualization of the peasantry, was to wrest theoretical importance from the concept altogether. Indeed, the crux of her critique of preceding scholarship is its excessive emphasis on characteristics of the peasantry in the making of social revolutions.[95]

Instead, Skocpol proposes that "revolutionary situations have developed due to the emergence of politico-military crises of state and class domination."[96] She is more interested in the political contexts in which peasants find themselves, rather than characteristics of peasants per se. Whatever one may think of the theory proposed, its conceptual domain is not restricted by any particular notion of the peasantry. Skocpol's approach is commensurable with – and should be tested against – any and all of the extant theories of revolution. Since it locates relatively little causal weight on characteristics of the peasantry itself, its predictions can validly be examined in peasantries akin to those central to moral economy, political economy, or Marxian approaches.

The use of empirical "test" cases: The two Vietnams

In this section I explore further how two theorists like Scott and Popkin could both be centrally concerned with the Vietnamese case, and yet be so fundamentally at odds. How can both produce theories of peasant revolution tailored to this case and yet not be speaking about the same peasants? The fact that both studied the same country is, I think, part of the reason that so much dispute has emerged. But did they really study the same case?

Scott's analysis of Vietnam takes as its empirical outcome to be explained the rebellions of the Great Depression. These rebellions, as Scott points out, "delivered the *coup de grace* to an agrarian order already weakened by structural changes well before 1930."[97] His central exogenous causal variable is "the growth of the colonial state and the commercialization of agriculture," which took place well before these rebellions.[98] For him, peasants seek to defend a crumbling pre-capitalist economic and social order. Popkin's analysis, on the other hand, largely centers on post-W.W. II Vietnam. These are distinct cases. Scott is interested in transformations forty years before the period examined by Popkin, a system that was apparently in its essentials gone by the 1930s. Popkin analyzes a peasantry finally and forcibly drawn into full capitalist production. Popkin may well be right that the rebellions of the 1940s and 1950s were "not to destroy the market economy, but to *tame* capitalism."[99] What is not fully addressed by him is whether the movements of Scott's time period (the depression and before) were fundamentally restorative or not.

Neither theorist disputes the fact that colonialism and the advent of export agriculture decisively changed Vietnamese society and economy. But if this is so, why would it not also fundamentally change the bases and causes of "peasant" collective action? Analyses of Vietnam in these two very different periods are fundamentally analyses of different cases. They are not tests of different theories in the same case. In her study of Vietnamese rebellion, Wiegersma hits the nail on the head:

> Whereas others [moral economists] have seen peasants, including Vietnamese peasants, as a group caught in between old and new realities, Popkin saw them as small farmers operating according to new economic rules. Popkin viewed capitalism as having become fully established in Vietnam.[100]

The former was true of Scott's Depression rebellions, and the latter of the period that Popkin analyzes.

While the problem with the Scott-Popkin debate was that conceptual murkiness produced two theories about two different contexts, lack of clarity can also lead to the testing of theory in inappropriate cases. Jenkins, for example, examines the case of peasant rebellion in Russia in the 1905–1907 period forward, in an attempt to test the moral economy position of Scott against the Marxian approach of Paige.[101] The problem is that, although the case fits the conceptualization of peasant used by Scott, it is a poor match for that of Paige. As Jenkins notes, prior to the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, Russian agriculture was overwhelmingly oriented toward subsistence production. In large measure, it is an analysis of a precapitalist peasantry – famous for its distinctive community practices – that was undergoing a particularly rapid and extractive transition to capitalist production. But Paige's theory is of social structures in export-oriented agricultural sectors (or, more accurately, commercial sectors, following Somers and Goldfrank).[102] As a structural analysis, it is not well adapted to a case in which patterns of productive relations are undergoing rapid transformation. It is precisely the necessary social structures that are Paige's independent variables that have yet to become solidified. In addition, Paige explicitly restricts his theory to cases linked via export markets to the global capitalist economy. For him production need not be highly capitalist (hence Guatemala of the 1940s is a valid case), but the destination of production must be commercial for a case to fall within Paige's empirical domain. As a result the refutation that Jenkins presents of Paige's thesis is produced in a case to which Paige would not apply his theory.

Conclusions

This article has explored how a lack of consensus in conceptualization can lead to problems of theory testing and case selection. In examining the literature on peasant revolution, I find that at least five different understandings of the term "peasant" are common. They are not arbitrary, but rather employ different combinations of four defining properties – (1) status as a rural cultivator, common to all, (2) the presence of social subordination, (3) cultural distinctiveness of village communities, and (4) ownership or control over agricultural land. The differing definitions, because they have different numbers of defining properties, imply widely varying ranges of cases that would fall within their boundaries.

Since conceptualization bounds the range of real world cases covered by a term, differences in conceptualization can place strong limits on what empirical cases can be legitimate venues in which to test competing hypotheses. This problem arises in the moral economy/political economy dispute. Scott's analysis of Vietnam concerns the depression era rebellions of a pre-capitalist economy undergoing the throes of transition to market capitalism. Popkin's analysis is of a later period in which social structure has completed this transformation and market relations have been fully established. In analytical terms, this constitutes two very different cases, with two very different peasantries. Each falls within the empirical domain of only one of the two theories. For two theories to be tested against each other, the empirical case examined must fall within the empirical scope of *both* theories. This being said, important disputes remain to be adjudicated. For instance, Scott and Wolf, or Paige and Popkin, are commensurable, and we can advance our understanding through the comparative testing of their predictions. Moreover, all these approaches stand in competition with the state-centric approach of Skocpol, whose theory does not rely in important ways on particular conceptualizations of the peasantry.

What should we take away from all of this? Put simply, inadequate attention to conceptualization (both one's own and that of others) is risky. It can lead to false debates and the "testing of theory" in inappropriate settings. Just these difficulties have hindered progress in understanding the causes of peasant revolution. The sooner we recognize them, the sooner we can move forward. The lesson is also more general – since conceptualization is inseparable from hypothesis construction and testing, we should make greater efforts to integrate it explicitly into the design and execution of research strategies.

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Notes

1. See, for example, James Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976); Eric Wolf, *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper Torch Books, 1969); Jeffery Paige, *Agrarian Revolution* (New York: The Free Press, 1975); Samuel Popkin, *The Rational Peasant* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1979); Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Joel Migdal, *Peasants, Politics, and Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974).
2. See the recent works of Victor Magagna, *Communities of Grain* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); Robert Bates, "Some Conventional Orthodoxies in the Study of Agrarian Change," *World Politics* 36/2 (1984); or the strenuous debates between Mitchell Seligson, "Agrarian Inequality and the Theory of Peasant Rebellion," *Latin American Research Review* 31/2 (1996); Martin Diskin, "Distilled Conclusions: The Disappearance of the Agrarian Question in El Salvador," *Latin American Research Review* 31/2 (1996); and Jeffery Paige, "Land Reform and Agrarian Revolution in El Salvador: Comment on Seligson and Diskin," *Latin American Research Review* 31/2 (1996). In addition, efforts at empirical theory testing and refutation include Leslie Anderson and Mitchell Seligson, "Reformism and Radicalism among Peasants: An Empirical Test of Paige's *Agrarian Revolution*," *American Journal of Political Science* 38/4 (1994); J. Craig Jenkins, "Why do Peasants Rebel? Structural and Historical Theories of Modern Peasant Rebellions," *American Journal of Sociology* 88/3 (1983); and Leslie Anderson, "Agrarian Politics and Revolution: Micro and State Perspectives on Structural Determinism," *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 5/4 (1993).
3. The classic example of this is in the work of Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979). For her the critical causes of peasant revolution lie in changes in state-society relations brought on by defeats in the international state system.
4. Obviously, these literatures derive from the path-breaking works of James Scott, Samuel Popkin, and Jeffery Paige, respectively.
5. E.g., Moore, *Social Origins.* Even scholars like Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, who locate the causes of revolution outside the peasantry implicitly rely on a set of assumptions about what a peasant is, generally the Weberian one.
6. Paige, *Agrarian Revolution.*
7. Robert Redfield, *The Little Community* (Chicago: The University of Chicago press, 1955); Edward Banfield, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (New York: The Free Press, 1958).
8. Scott, *Moral Economy.*
9. See Popkin, *Rational Peasant*; Mark Lichbach, "What Makes Rational Peasants Revolutionary?" *World Politics* 46 (April 1994).
10. Carmen Diana Deere and Alain de Janvry, "A Conceptual Framework for the

Empirical Analysis of Peasants," *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 61/4 (November, 1979): 601.

11. See Judith Ennew, Paul Hirst, and Keith Tribe, "'Peasantry' as an Economic Category." *Journal of Peasant Studies* 4 (1977): 295–322; Beverly Chiñas, "Response to George Dalton." *Current Anthropology* 13/3–4 (June–October, 1972); Allen Isaacman, "Peasants and Rural Social Protest in Africa," in Frederick Cooper, Florencia Mallon, Allen Isaacman, and William Roseberry, editors, *Confronting Historical Paradigms* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993).
12. This is the intension/extension tradeoff of Giovanni Sartori, "Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics," *American Political Science Review* 64/4 (December, 1970).
13. James Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), chap. 1. Scott points out how implementing broadly transformative visions based on highly abstract understandings of the workings of society can produce unintended disasters.
14. Oxford English Dictionary, 404.
15. Throughout, where the intention is to speak generally about all rural producers who *might* be labeled "peasants" under some accepted definition, the term "rural cultivator" is used.
16. Sidney Mintz, "A Note on the Definition of Peasantries," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 1/1 (October, 1973): 93–94, has pointed out how this makes the process of classification difficult.
17. Viewed in terms of these dimensions, it becomes easier to understand some of the debates surrounding the "correct" definition of the peasantry. It can in part be seen as a struggle over the level of abstraction at which to use the concept. Sartori argues that concepts have two aspects – their extension and their intension. The extension of a concept refers to the "class of all objects to which that word correctly applies," that is, the range of empirical phenomena for which it can be used. Intension, on the other hand, refers to the totality of characteristics or properties of a concept (See Giovanni Sartori, "Guidelines for Concept Analysis" in Giovanni Sartori, editor, *Social Science Concepts* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1984) 23). The extension and intension of concepts are inversely related, and hence ascent to a higher level of abstraction implies an increase in extension (coverage) at the cost of a decrease in intension (the number or discriminating power of defining properties associated with the concept).
18. Popkin, *Rational Peasant*, 1.
19. Ibid., 35.
20. Ibid., 251.
21. Ibid., 9, 27.
22. See, for example, Robert Bates, "Lessons from History or the Perfidy of English Exceptionalism and the Significance of Historical France," *World Politics* 40/4 (July, 1988), 504–507.
23. Alfred Kroeber, *Anthropology* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1948), 284.
24. Robert Redfield, "The Part Societies with Part Cultures" in Teodor Shanin, editor, *Peasants and Peasant Society* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 60.
25. Robert Redfield, *The Little Community: Peasant Society and Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), 9–10.
26. Edward Banfield, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (New York: The Free Press, 1958).
27. E. P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present* 50 (1971).

28. Ibid., 78.
29. James Scott, "Protest and Profanation: Agrarian Revolt and the Little Tradition," *Theory and Society* 4/1 (Spring, 1977), 4.
30. James Scott, "Revolution in the Revolution: Peasants and Commissars," *Theory and Society* 7/1–2 (March, 1979), 101.
31. Magagna, *Communities of Grain*, 13–15.
32. Scott, *Moral Economy*, 5.
33. This becomes crucial because the political economy approach assumes that peasants live in more or less poorly integrated (i.e., individualistic) community systems.
34. James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 35.
35. James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 18–21.
36. See, for example, the discussion of Soviet collectivization in Scott, *Seeing*, chap. 6.
37. Karl Marx, "The Peasantry as a Class," in Teodor Shanin, editor, *Peasants and Peasant Society* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 332.
38. Paige, *Agrarian Revolution*, 27.
39. Ibid., 33–35. Indeed, he explicitly contrasts "peasants," seen as typically laboring as isolated, competitive individuals, with the agricultural wage laborer who is generally "completely dependent on his fellow workers" and therefore prone to solidarity and collective action (37).
40. Jeffery Paige, *Coffee and Power: Revolution and the Rise of Democracy in Central America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 30–31, 81, 93–95.
41. Deere and De Janvry "Conceptual Framework," 602, 607.
42. Max Weber, "Developmental Tendencies in the Situation of East Elbian Rural Laborers," *Economy and Society* 8/2 (May, 1979), 179.
43. Teodor Shanin, "Peasantry: Delineation of a Sociological Concept and a Field of Study," *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 12 (1971): 289–300.
44. Moore, *Social Origins*, 468.
45. Eric Wolf, *Envisioning Power: Ideologies of Dominance and Crisis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 19–20, chap. 2.
46. Carl Hempel, "Fundamentals of Concept Formation in Empirical Science," *International Encyclopedia of Unified Science* II, no. 7 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), 32.
47. Henry A. Walker and Bernard P. Cohen, "Scope Statements: Imperatives for Evaluating Theory," *American Sociological Review* 50 (June 1985), 291.
48. David Laitin, "Disciplining Political Science," *American Political Science Review* 89/2 (1995): 455.
49. Scott, *Moral Economy*, 5.
50. Scott, *Moral Economy*, 57. Magagna, *Communities of Grain*, 22–23; and Benedict Kerkvliet, *The Huk Rebellion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 250, similarly produce distinct theories of rebellion within the moral economy tradition, focusing on when outside actors challenge deeply-held village practices, or disrupt traditional patron-client ties.
51. Scott, *Moral Economy*, 9; and, Kerkvliet, *Huk Rebellion*, 17–25.
52. Popkin, *Rational Peasant*, 30.
53. See Ibid., 38, 55, 99, 108.
54. Ibid., 88.
55. Ibid., 88, 94, 99.
56. Ibid., chap. 4.

57. Jeffrey Alexander, *The Classical Attempt at Theoretical Synthesis: Max Weber* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 35.
58. Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, volume 1, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 30.
59. Ibid., 71.
60. See Arne Disch, "Peasants and Revolts" *Theory and Society* 7 (1979), 250, for an early attempt to focus on the different empirical scopes of competing theories of revolution.
61. Raj Desai and Harry Eckstein, "Insurgency: The Transformation of Peasant Rebellion," *World Politics* 42/4 (July, 1990): 458. Italics in the original.
62. Margaret Somers and Walter Goldfrank, "The Limits of Agronomic Determinism: A Critique of Paige's *Agrarian Revolution*," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31/2 (April, 1990): 444.
63. Ibid., 451.
64. Popkin, *Rational Peasant*, 3.
65. Eric Hobsbawm, "Peasants and Politics," *Journal of Peasants Studies* 1/1 (October, 1973), 5, is explicit about his focus on "what happens when traditional peasants get involved in modern politics."
66. Ibid., *Bandits* (London: George Weidenfeld and Nicolson, Ltd., 1969), 14.
67. Ibid., 15.
68. Popkin, *Rational Peasant*, 4.
69. Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966).
70. Popkin, *Rational Peasant*, 24.
71. Ibid., 257, 259.
72. Popkin, *Rational Peasant*, 108 comes close to conceding this when he points out that in pre-colonial Vietnam peasants avoided conflictual, self-interested action not out of altruism but out of fear of consequences for themselves. But what, other than community norms and sanctions, would cause such fear? Mark Lichbach, "Contending Theories of Contentious Politics and the Structure-Action Problem of Social Order," *Annual Review of Political Science* 1 (1998): 410, has recently explicitly suggested, but not developed, this line of thinking. Among the possible ways of overcoming collective action dilemmas is to "explore how common belief systems solve Olson's Problem . . . ."
73. Scott, "Revolution in the Revolution," 116.
74. Lichbach, "What Makes Rational Peasants Revolutionary," 389.
75. James Scott, "Peasant Revolution: A Dismal Science," *Comparative Politics* 9/1 (January, 1977), 232.
76. Lichbach, "Contending Theories," 411.
77. Ibid., 409–410.
78. Bates, "Conventional Orthodoxies," 240.
79. Ibid., 241.
80. Bates "Lessons from History," 501; "Conventional Orthodoxies," 242.
81. Indeed, for Kerkvliet, this can simply take the form of elites' willingness to reduce rents in times of dearth. It presumes no peasant landholding at all – collective or otherwise.
82. Scott, "Peasant Revolution," 240.
83. Gary Hawes, "Theories of Peasant Revolution: A Critique and Contribution from the Philippines," *World Politics* (1989) 269. Italics mine.

84. For example, see Philip T. Hoffman's *Growth in a Traditional Society: The French Countryside 1450–1815* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 17–18.
85. Marc Bloch, *French Rural History: An Essay on its Basic Characteristics*, translated by Janet Sondheimer (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 150.
86. Ibid., 224–225.
87. Robert Brenner, "Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe," in T. H. Aston and C. H. E. Philpin, editors, *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987 [1976]), 29.
88. Hoffman, *Growth in a Traditional Society*, 17.
89. Indeed, in a telling example, he points to an example in Brittany where villagers placed a mock gallows in the village to warn their compatriots of the consequences of any effort to abet an ongoing effort at land enclosure. Hoffman, *Growth in a Traditional Society*, 25.
90. Hilton R. Root, *Peasants and King in Burgundy: Agrarian Foundations of French Absolutism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 2–3.
91. Paige, *Agrarian Revolution*, 3.
92. Ibid., 58–59.
93. Ibid., 33.
94. Theda Skocpol, "What Makes Peasants Revolutionary?" in Theda Skocpol, editor, *Social Revolutions in the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 232, articulates the problem as a clash between theorists who see peasants as "reacting to encroaching world capitalism" and those like Paige who see them as "reacting from within the capitalist world economy."
95. Ibid., 226, 229.
96. Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, 17.
97. Scott, *Moral Economy*, 114.
98. Ibid., 57.
99. Popkin, *Rational Peasant*, 245.
100. Nancy Wiegersma, *Vietnam: Peasant Land, Peasant Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 14.
101. Jenkins, "Why do Peasants Rebel," 493.
102. Somers and Goldfrank, "The Limits," 451.