



Panel

8.4. Land rights and rural development in the non-European world in the long 20th century

Panel organiser: Vanhaute, Eric, Ghent University, Belgium

Land has always been a pivotal means of production in rural societies. Access to land, its exploitation and cultivation has generated income for the big majority of mankind. Also, land has always been much more than an economic asset. Historians have documented extensively the political, cultural and social importance of land. In this session we aim to explore further the role of land in the survival strategies of peasantries. More in particular, the role of land as a bargaining tool for intergenerational wealth distribution will be examined. In divergent societies, from medieval England to 20th-century central Africa, land acts as an important tool for securing welfare for the elderly. Ownership of land enables them to exchange their property rights or rights of access for material assistance. Maintenance or support contracts between older and younger social groups based on the exchange of land rights are found in many rural societies. Next to formal agreements, land rights are also used to claim assistance from family members. Early modern European farm servants as well as international migrants in the 20th century remit part of their wages to their parents to secure inheritance of land. Peasant land rights thus act as a powerful tool to secure welfare entitlements. Some of the themes we explore during this session are: a) the development and nature of maintenance agreements in rural societies, b) the informal use of land to secure assistance from family members, c) the relationship between patterns of landownership and systems of welfare provisioning/poor relief.

Chair: Langthaler, Ernst, Institute of Rural History, St. Pölten, Austria

Wednesday, 21 August 2013 // 1100 – 1300 // Session 8 – Room A 201

Paper

8.4.1. Regressive rights to personhood and property on the Canadian Prairies, 1870 to 1910

Ward, Tony, Department of Economics, Brock University, Canada

As the last vestiges of peasantry in the old western world ended, a new form of peasantry was imposed on the aboriginal populations of the New World. In the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, aboriginal populations were pushed from their ancestral lands to make way for incomers from Europe. First Nations peoples in Canada were subject to the 'Indian Act' of 1876, enacted without their representation. They were forced onto reservations, where they became wards of the Crown, with fewer rights and more restrictions than the incoming settlers. This paper examines the socio-economic position of First Nations people on the Ca-

nadian Prairies during the early years of European settlement, to analyse the origins of the extensive problems the aboriginals face today. These are in many ways similar to those of peasants in European countries during the Middle Ages — in some ways the Canadian aboriginals were in an even worse situation. Their main source of sustenance, the bison, was effectively extinct, so they had to develop new sources of food. Agricultural output from European peasants was not obstructed, they were able to buy any implements they could use profitably, and they could sell surplus production. The activities of the First Nations peoples, though, were at the whim of 'Indian Agents', with aboriginals unable to carry out any economic activity — buying or selling — without the permission of the Agent. Aboriginals had to carry passes just to leave the reservation.

8.4.2. Social Structure and Land Reforms in the Yangzi Delta between 1940 and 1980

Wang, Yang, Ghent University, Belgium

In this paper, I investigate China's social change between 1940 and 1980 from the perspective of the land system. China's rural economy has been facing continuous difficulties. The framework of successive land reforms has failed to give enough support for the small-scale peasant economy (household-based peasant economy). I focus on the systems of access to land and property of land in relation to the social power relations within rural societies in the Yangzi Delta.

8.4.3. Global land commodification, national land reform and communal land tenure in Carangas (Bolivia, 19th-20th centuries)

Cottyn, Hanne, History Department, Ghent University, Belgium

To date, the Carangas region (Oruro Department, Bolivia) remains one of the largest areas in the Central Andes where privatization pressures never managed to replace the communal land tenure system maintained by indigenous peasants. This has left a major mark on the region's historical trajectory. However, the formalization of land rights by legal state structures tends to push complementary community arrangements into a false dualist private-collective framework. Through a combination of detailed archival and field work results with a *longue durée* analysis, this research assesses the course of land titling procedures antecedent and subsequent to Bolivia's 1953 land reform. Over the last 500 years, the communities of Carangas have safeguarded a relatively high degree of autonomy by recurrently asserting collective land titles as a crucial negotiation tool towards governmental and intermediary actors. Particular attention is drawn to how Bolivia's most dramatic episode in land reform in the late 19th century failed to make its entrance in Carangas. Subsequently, this research examines the outcome of the mutual shaping between community-based land administration and successive reform projects in a region that has remained at the frontier of world-historical land commodification

Participants

Cottyn, Hanne

PhD Researcher, History Department, Ghent University Research Group CCC: Communities / Comparisons / Connections.

Langthaler, Ernst

Ernst Langthaler has studied Economic and Social History at the University of Vienna (MA 1995, PhD 2000, Habilitation 2010). He was Visiting Professor at the Universities of Innsbruck and Vienna and is currently Director of the Institute of Rural History in St. Pölten and Secretary of the European Rural History Organisation (EURHO). His interests cover agricultural and food history since 1800, regional and global history since 1800 and historical-anthropological theory.

Vanhaute, Eric

Eric Vanhaute is professor of economic and social history and world history at Ghent University, Belgium. He is head of the cross departmental research group CCC – Communities-Comparisons-Connections at Ghent University (<http://www.ccc.ugent.be>). He coordinates the collaborative research project "Trajectories of peasant transformation. A comparative and global research into the decline and disappearance of peasantries, 1500-2000". He is member of the board of the International Research Community CORN Comparative Rural History of the North Sea Area.

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