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# To Make Live or Let Die? Rural Dispossession and the Protection of Surplus Populations

Tania M. Li

My essay concerns the politics of making live, or letting die, and the struggles that shape the way the equation is resolved for different segments of the global population. While Foucault highlighted the general historical conditions for the emergence of biopolitics, that is, an orientation to intervene in populations to enhance their health and wellbeing, he had little to say about when or how this orientation would be activated.<sup>1</sup> Nor did he say much about the politics of let die scenarios: why governing authorities would elect not to intervene when they could, or select one subset of the population for life enhancement while abandoning another.

Letting die, I want to stress, is not a counterfactual. Abysmal life expectancy, below 55 in much of sub-Saharan Africa and in parts of Asia is sad testament to the fact that letting die is here.<sup>2</sup> Discrepancies within one city are another indicator: African-Americans on the South Side of Chicago are “let die” at around 60 years, while the mostly white, middle-class residents on the city’s Northwest Side can expect to live until the age of 77.<sup>3</sup> Letting die is also signalled by the presence of a billion people in the global south who must try to survive on less than a dollar a day, a sum that leaves them chronically short of food, shelter and health care. Letting die is not an apocalypse. It is not a media event, like a massacre, an earthquake, or a famine that kills large numbers in a compressed period of time. Nor is it a Malthusian problem of inadequate global food supply. It is a stealthy violence that consigns large numbers of people to lead short and limited lives.

Both letting die, and making live, have a politics, but I reject the idea that the two are in some kind of functional equilibrium – that it is necessary to select some to die, in order for others to live. No doubt such selections are made, according to a whole range of rationales (race, virtue, diligence, citizenship, location, age, gender, efficiency, affordability)<sup>4</sup> but if “the point is to change it,” we cannot concede that selection is necessary. It is possible for social forces to mobilize in a wholly make live direction.

Make live possibilities are highlighted by conjunctures such as the one that emerged in the state of Kerala in India, which has a predominantly rural population and no special natural endowments, yet has achieved an average life expectancy of around 73, 10 years longer than the all-India average of 63. This effect was produced by decades of investment in public health and education, together with rates of pay for agricultural workers that are 100% higher than elsewhere in India for the same tasks.<sup>5</sup> The social forces that put this regime in place included a strong labour movement, and a communist party held accountable through democratic elections. The way these forces came together in Kerala is the product of a struggle with its own, unique history that cannot be replicated in modular fashion. Further, the gains in Kerala are fragile, and incompletely realized.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, Kerala confirms that “making live” is more than a counterfactual – it too is here, and not just in the welfare states of the global north.

Make live interventions become urgent when people can no longer sustain their own lives through direct access to the means of production, or access to a living wage. In large parts of rural Asia, my focus in this essay, these conditions have become widespread as a result of two sets of forces: 1) a new round of enclosures that have dispossessed large numbers of rural people from the land and 2) the low absorption of their labour, which is “surplus” to the requirements of capital accumulation. For the 700 million Asians who live on less than a dollar a day, tiny incomes are ample testament to the fact that no one has a market incentive to pay the costs of keeping them alive from day to day, or from one generation to the next. Yet I am not convinced that their chronic under-reproduction is, as Araghi (2009:119) has argued, “a strategy of global capital.” I see their perilous condition, rather, as a sign of their very limited relevance to capital at any scale. If the population rendered surplus to capital’s requirements is to live decently, it will be because of the activation of a biopolitics that places the intrinsic value of life – rather than the value of people as workers or consumers - at its core. But what are the social forces that would activate such a politics? And why would they do so? I return to these questions later in this essay. First, however, I want to consider more fully the implications of the concept of surplus population.

## **Surplus Population**

When I use the phrase surplus population, my intention is to provoke some hard thinking. It is, of course, offensive to suggest that some people are surplus, yet as I argued above, the truth is that large numbers are in fact abandoned. Some are kept alive in prisons, refugee camps and ghettos, but they are not being prepared for work,

as they were in the workhouses of industrializing Britain (Bauman 2004). The key to their predicament is that their labour is surplus *in relation to* its utility for capital.

Marx used the term “relative surplus population” (Marx 1986: chapter 25), with the term “relative” serving, first, to distinguish his concept from that of Malthus, who argued that population would outstrip resources; and second, to highlight the continuous tendency of capital to concentrate labour’s productive capacity into labour-displacing technologies. Among the relative surplus population, Marx further distinguished between the floating part, people who were cyclically unemployed; the latent part, namely rural people not fully integrated into capitalist production; and the stagnant part, including people who are elderly or injured, and among whom the lowest stratum “dwells in the sphere of pauperism.” Pauperism, Marx argued, “is the hospital of the active labour-army and the dead weight of the industrial reserve army. Its production is included in that of the relative surplus-population, its necessity in theirs; along with the surplus-population, pauperism forms a condition of capitalist production, and of the capitalist development of wealth. It enters into the *faux frais* of capitalist production; but capital knows how to throw these, for the most part, from its own shoulders on to those of the working-class and the lower middle class” (Marx 1986).

Whether or not the pauperized population of the global south fulfils the same function in relation to capital as the paupers of industrializing England, described by Marx, is an urgent question. To answer it fully would require trying out his categories to see what they reveal, or what they occlude, in a range of contemporary conjunctures.<sup>7</sup> Minimally, we have to recognize that the spatial and temporal unevenness of capital investment, already present in Marx’s time, is far more prominent today, as capital incorporates some places and peoples, and ejects or rejects others. James Ferguson (2005) captures part of this dynamic with his image of transnational investment capital “hopping” over Africa’s useless people and places (*Afrique inutile*) to land in the few spots where superior profits can readily be made. There is another dynamic, however, that is potentially more lethal: one in which places (or their resources) are useful, but the people are not, so that dispossession is detached from any prospect of labour absorption. This is the dynamic that forms the core of my analysis in this essay.

Too often, hard thinking about the predicament of surplus population is avoided by the repetition of some remarkably resilient narratives about agrarian transition that assume a linear pathway, and a predictable set of connections. According to these narratives there will be – sooner or later – a transition from agriculture to industry, country to city, and peasant to entrepreneurial farmer or wage worker.

A recent example of the transition narrative is the World Bank's World Development Report (2008), *Agriculture for Development*, which organizes the nations of the global south along an axis that heads resolutely towards the city. According to the Report, the principal task of governments in the "transforming countries," a category that includes most of Asia, is to manage transitions out of agriculture for rural populations whose labour is surplus to the requirements of a more efficient agricultural sector, and to supply targeted "safety nets" for a residual few who cannot make this transition, namely the old and the infirm. Jarringly, despite the Report's recognition of a globalized regime of agricultural production and consumption, its framework for analyzing agrarian transition is national, as if rural dispossession and the generation of new jobs naturally occur within the same national frame, and unmarked, generic citizens have equal access to national jobs. Generalized welfare provisions to keep the dispossessed alive do not figure in the Report. A full chapter on "Reducing Vulnerability and Chronic Food Insecurity," anticipated in the Report outline, is not in the final version. Somehow, the Report assumes, hundreds of millions of deeply impoverished rural people will find their way onto the transition path.

A competing version of the agrarian transition narrative, that takes its inspiration from Marx, relates dispossession to the emergence of capitalism through three effects: a grab for land and other resources that furnish initial capital, so-called "primitive accumulation;" the production of proletarians; and the formation of a labour reserve.<sup>8</sup> In a recent re-statement of this narrative, that takes in a global scale, Farshad Araghi links "enclosure-induced displacement" to "camps of surplus labour in urban locations," and the conditioning of partially dispossessed peasantries as "a potential reserve army of migratory labour," or labour power freed "for global consumption" (2009:III-2, 134-5). Yet Araghi's narrative short circuits an important question: how much of this labour is really necessary for accumulation?

Confronting the concept of surplus population challenges the residual functionalism sometimes embedded in the concept of a labour reserve. In order to fulfil the functions of a labour reserve – that is, to depress wages, and be ready to work when needed - the population must not die. Yet accounts that stress the utility of a labour reserve for capital often fail to specify the causal mechanisms that would keep the members of this "reserve" alive, even on a minimal basis. The case for a labour reserve can be made, and the Bantustans of South Africa were a clear example: dispossession was designed to generate labour for the mines, and Bantustan land and remittances served to reproduce the reserve population (Wolpe 1980). But the Bantustans also became dumping

grounds, warehouses for surplus populations whose labour would never be required. To assume a link between dispossession, and the (re)production of a labour reserve is not just too linear, it is dangerously complacent.

Several scholars have provided useful correctives to linear notions of transition that link dispossession too directly, and too quickly, to employers' need for workers. Henry Bernstein (2004:204-5) describes the failure of the generalized capitalist system to provide a living wage to the dispossessed as the central agrarian question of our times. Cautioning against apocalyptic images of disposable humanity, Michael Watts (2009:283) argues for a "nuanced and place-specific mapping" of formations of labour, and the different ways in which capital takes hold. Jason Read (2002) argues persuasively for a non-teleological or "aleatory" reading of capitalism, also present in Marx's own historical writings, which examines how capital and "free" labour connect – or fail to connect – at particular conjunctures.<sup>9</sup> He points out that the movement to enclose agricultural land, which began in England in the fifteenth century, was driven by "improving" landlords, a social group quite distinct from the manufacturers who would later profit from the availability of landless people desperate for waged work. The class that required proletarians was different from the one that evicted peasants, and separated in time by several centuries. Examined retrospectively, it is true that capital and labour encountered each other. But looked at historically, a particular capitalist might struggle to find labour, and not all aspirant labourers were able to find capital.

For the dispossessed who needed to work but failed to encounter capital, the situation was dire. As Marx observed, state powers were used both to secure evictions and to discipline "vagabonds," yet these two interventions were not coordinated. Instead, legislation punishing paupers and obliging "vagabonds" to return to their places of origin seemed to assume that they could resume working under the old agrarian conditions, although these conditions no longer existed (Marx 1986:686). As I will later show, fantasies about returning surplus populations to "the village" recur repeatedly in colonial and contemporary Asia, where they play a similar role in legitimating abandonment.

In colonial Asia, as Jan Breman (1990) has explained, the potential disconnect between dispossession and rural labour absorption was both temporal and spatial. The major sites of industrial employment for unskilled, "coolie" labour were plantations and mines. These industries were situated in rural areas, where they dispossessed the *in situ* populations, but they seldom employed the same people they displaced. Instead, they

set up elaborate systems to recruit tens of thousands of workers from afar, often across vast distances of land and sea, people whose social isolation and dependence made them easier to discipline.<sup>10</sup> The migrant labourers in these massive enterprises had been dispossessed “at home” through processes quite unrelated to their eventual employment. For the most part, Breman stresses, new recruits were already involved in “coolie” labour, in city or country, having been landless or near-landless for several generations. Some were dispossessed by the contingencies of illness, bad weather and failed harvests that drove them into debt in their places of origin. Some were members of minority or “tribal” group that were dispossessed by migrants who grabbed their land by force, and cast them out, or entrapped them in bondage. Some were deliberately dislodged by colonial policies, especially taxes. Just as often, however, colonial authorities had little direct role in their dispossession, and their eventual employers, thousands of miles away, had even less. Employers and officials did have control over their fate, however, since they could turn off particular recruiting streams at will, abandoning would-be migrants and their families, out of sight, and out of mind.

Contingency plays a part in these misconnections between capital and labour, and for populations rendered “surplus” at a particular place and time, misconnection can be fatal. But it is not the case that anything goes. Tim Mitchell puts the matter this way: “A term like “capitalist development” covers a series of agencies, logics, chain reactions, and contingent interactions, among which the specific circuits and relations of capital form[ed] only a part”(2002:51). In these chain reactions, one set of events establishes the conditions of possibility for another set, but whether the possibilities will be realized depends on “a series of agencies” that do not necessarily pull in the same direction.

## **Rural Dispossession in Asia circa 2000**

There are three main vectors of rural dispossession in Asia today, none of which has any intrinsic link to the prospect of labour absorption. One is the seizure of land by the state, or state-supported corporations, a practice that is widespread in China, India, and Southeast Asia. The second is the piecemeal dispossession of small scale farmers, unable to survive when exposed to competition from agricultural systems backed by subsidies and preferential tariffs. The third is the closing of the forest frontier for conservation. I will discuss each of these, briefly discussing China and India before focusing on Southeast Asia, where all three vectors are operating in a kind of pincer movement, dispossessing rural people to a degree that is unprecedented in this region.

Land seizures have been widespread in China since the passing of a new land regulation in 1987. The result, according to Kathy Le Mons Walker, has been an “enclosure movement’ of unprecedented proportion worldwide, resulting in the dispossession – and in many cases impoverishment – of tens of millions of peasant households.” Official government statistics report that 40 million rural households had lost their land by 2005, while other experts find the number closer to 70 million, or about 315 million people (2008:472). Rural township officials are centrally involved in these seizures, backed by business allies and the private, mafia-style criminal organizations they employ as enforcers. The dispossessed do not go quietly. Mass protests are widespread, and violent on both sides: according to a government report, protestors attacked or killed 8200 township and country officials in 1993 alone (Walker 2008:469). A great many peasants – up to 150 million by 2003 - were absorbed as temporary labour migrants in the booming manufacturing sector, where employers prefer this highly exploitable labour force over workers with legal “urban” status, who are entitled to welfare benefits. In Shenzhen, for example, with a defacto population of eight million people, “unofficial” rural migrants comprise a staggering seven million (Chan 2009:208). However, large numbers of dispossessed peasants have not found work. They call themselves “a new ‘class’ of ‘three nothings’ – no land, no work, no social security” (Walker 2008:476). Chinese farmers have also been devastated by competition from cheap imported cotton, soybeans and sugarcane, as the government removed tariffs to increase global market access for Chinese manufactures (Walker 2008:465-6). Despite these dire conditions, 20 million migrant workers were returned “home” to the countryside in the 2008-9 recession (Chan 2009), as if there was land and a thriving agriculture ready to reabsorb them.

In India, rural landlessness has been entrenched for several centuries, but a new round of dispossession is currently underway, as investors eye land for conversion into “special economic zones,” or simply hold it for speculation (*Inter Press Service New Agency* 2009). Among small scale farmers, dispossession by debt has also intensified, resulting in an epidemic of farmer-suicides. Farmers who had been encouraged to buy productivity-increasing inputs on credit faced ruin when state subsidies were abruptly removed. As a result of the rollback of state support for farmers, and a 58% rise in the price of grain, the percentage of rural people consuming less than 2400 calories per day increased from 75% in 1994, to 87% in 2004.<sup>11</sup> As I noted earlier, the World Bank recommends that farmers unable to succeed in high value agriculture should exit. It suggests, further, that “in India, the low level and quality of education of most rural workers is mainly responsible for their inability to find jobs in the booming services sector” (World Bank 2008:36), as if everyone with a suitable education could find work



in a call center. In reality, much of the impressive growth in India over the past decade has been virtually jobless, as high productivity manufacturing and service work absorb very few workers.<sup>12</sup> Partha Chatterjee puts the point bluntly: “large sections of peasants who are today the victims of the primitive accumulation of capital are completely unlikely to be absorbed into the new capitalist sectors of growth”(2008:55). Irrelevant to capital, only make live provisions could save them – if such provisions were actually made.<sup>13</sup>

Landlessness in Southeast Asia has historically been high in the fertile lowland deltas and valleys, but overall, it has been less severe than in China or India as a result of a relatively sparse population, and a relatively open forest frontier.<sup>14</sup> Today, however, dispossession is progressing rapidly in Southeast Asia, through all three vectors I named earlier – large scale enclosures for agricultural expansion and conservation, and the piecemeal dispossession of farmers through debt.

The biggest enclosure for agricultural expansion has occurred in Malaysia and Indonesia, where oil palm has expanded rapidly from 3 million hectares in 1990 to 9 million in 2003, with much more planned, stimulated by high prices and anticipated demand for biofuels. About 60% of the oil palm area is under direct management by private corporations or parastatals, with the balance managed by smallholders, mostly under contract.<sup>15</sup> The legal status of much of the land converted to plantations is disputed, and tens of thousands of local landholders have been evicted, or incorporated on coerced terms, as protest movements attest. Many smallholders have embraced oil palm, however, especially where they have been able to retain control over their own land and sell the crop freely to a processing mill, or negotiate contracts for land development from a position of strength.<sup>16</sup> Rubber is another plantation crop that is expanding rapidly, especially in Cambodia and Laos, where corrupt officials in league with transnational investors and the military dispossess customary landholders who have little recourse.<sup>17</sup> The land area involved is not so huge, but the impact is severe because the potentially arable land is limited by rugged topography, especially in Laos.

Replicating the colonial pattern traced by Jan Breman, the people employed in Southeast Asia’s new plantations are seldom the people who were dispossessed on site. Instead, migrant labour is imported over large distances. As in the colonial period, labour importation is justified by myths of the “lazy native” – a reluctance to work, lack of skill, and failure to understand the requirements of labour discipline.<sup>18</sup> In Laos, the racialized stigma attached to highland minorities by the lowland Lao works against their employment on the plantations that now occupy their land, and when they are

employed, the terms are coercive (Shi 2008). Almost all the oil palm work in the Malaysian state of Sabah is carried out by migrants from Indonesia, many of them illegal. On the Indonesian side of the border in Kalimantan, workers are pulled in from other Indonesian islands, recruited by brokers to whom they are bound by debt, in the colonial style Breman describes. The Javanese often arrive through transmigration schemes that promise them title to a plot of land planted with oilpalm, after debts for the cost of land development are paid off, effectively bonding them to the oil palm scheme meanwhile. Javanese also work as contract labourers on privately owned plantations, with no promise of land. Often, they find themselves in conflict over land and jobs with the local population (Potter draft).

Oil palm plantations, it must be noted, absorb little labour. Ten thousand hectares of oil palm together with a processing mill employ one thousand workers, one person per ten hectares, much less than tea (2-3 people per hectare) or rubber (1-2 people).<sup>19</sup> Thus in the case of oil palm, the disconnect between land and labour is profound. For decades to come, the huge swathe of land under oil palm is guaranteed to generate very few jobs, and it is doubtful that much could be done with the land after the oil palm boom ends, so severely is the land modified by the bulldozers, chemicals, and intensive mono-cropping.

Smallholdings of oil palm are also powerful vectors of the “everyday” form of dispossession that works through debt. Many smallholders have prospered through oil palm, but it is not a crop for the poor. Unlike rubber, which will continue to produce at a low level even when neglected, oil palm requires constant attention and a high level of chemical input. Smallholders without the necessary capital quickly fall into debt, and their land is bought up by their more successful neighbours. They end up as wage labour, or indeed, out of work (*Jakarta Post* 2008b). This is a familiar trajectory that occurs whenever subsistence crops fail, or when the price fetched by cash crops does not match costs, and farmers are compelled to borrow money or mortgage their property as they enter a downward spiral (Hall 2004). Ruling regimes can intervene by calibrating tariffs, prices, taxes, rents, wages, and interest to adjust the rate at which farmers hold on to, or lose, their land. Put another way, the conditions governing the so-called “free market” are always set. When they are set to work against small scale farmers, currently the case in much of the global south, the result is pervasive land loss and “depeasantization.”<sup>20</sup>

Large scale enclosures in Southeast Asia took a new twist in 2008 when the global hike in food prices provoked China and other rich but food-insecure countries, especially

Japan and the Gulf states, to buy or lease land in Cambodia, the Philippines, Indonesia, Burma and Laos. The largest of these new enclosures, 1.6 million hectares in West Papua, was acquired by Saudi Arabia to grow rice, the preferred food of the Asian migrant workers on whom the Saudi economy depends.<sup>21</sup> But as Jennifer Clapp (2008) points out, the so-called “food crisis” was not caused by changes in demand for food, or the food supply, and Malthusian talk of global population outstripping food supply was misplaced. The main driver of the price hike was large institutional investors switching out of dollars and into commodities, among them oil and food. Nevertheless, as the “food crisis” receded, it left behind a powerful rationale for a new set of global land seizures brokered directly between governments, or initiated by corporations, and supported by the IFIs. Food-insecure governments argued that they could no longer put their populations at risk of hunger by relying on food imports, they had to engage directly in offshore food production to guarantee their supply. Corporations joined in these ventures in the expectation that increasing global food demand would yield profits. The World Bank increased its pressure on national governments to relax laws on landownership, arguing that foreign investment would bring development (GRAIN 2009:8).

The re-alignment between capital, land and labour in these offshore production regimes signals a new form of disconnect. The purpose is to control offshore land and resources. Offshore labour is optional. Some of the Chinese government’s offshore plantations export Chinese labour to do the work (GRAIN 2009:3, 10). China has also exported Chinese labour to staff mines in Papua, and proposes to do the same in Canada. Chinese corporations that have acquired Canadian mines argue that skilled mineworkers are in short supply, and they want permission to import Chinese mineworkers en bloc, so they can work as “an entire mine crew.”<sup>22</sup> They hope to make use of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, initially designed to enable Canadian agribusinesses to import Mexican and Caribbean migrant workers for seasonal farmwork under harsh contracts that would not be legal, or acceptable, for Canadian labour. In the farmworker program, the low price of the imported labour is key. Without it, Ontario farmers would stop producing tomatoes. If Chinese mineworkers are imported into Canada, however, the logic would be different. No doubt the use of Chinese workers would make the mines more profitable. But the critical shift brought about by the use of Chinese workers is the way it clarifies the disconnect between the Chinese government and the Canadian population. The Chinese government’s biopolitical priority is the provisioning of its own population. It is not responsible for the lives of Canadian mineworkers, or the Southeast Asian farmers dispossessed by its offshore enclosures.

Forest conservation is another field in which the disconnect between land and labour is profound. Conservation is supported by transnational donors and NGOs as a biopolitics of planetary survival. Although surrounded by a legitimating discourse of poverty reduction, the reality is that conservation routinely implicates donors in poverty production on a shocking scale. Globally, the number of people evicted from protected areas and deprived of access to land and former sources of livelihood over the past few decades has been estimated at 8.5 million (Cernea and Schmidt-Soltau 2006:1818). Obviously, conservation absorbs little or no labour, and the very presence of surrounding populations is viewed as a threat to conservation objectives. Yet conservation agencies and the donors that fund them make no commitment to resettle, compensate, or identify alternative livelihoods for the people their programs dispossess. They seem to assume these people will find somewhere else to go, and something else to do. Donors further sidestep their responsibility by devolving it downwards, onto the national governments that “volunteer” to extend their conservation enclosures, and the communities that “choose” to participate in “community-based conservation,” overlooking the role of donor incentives in creating the conditions under which national or local elites become implicated in dispossession (Li 2007b).

Race is a crucial dimension of dispossession in Southeast Asia, as ethnic minorities are most often the ones accused of forest destruction, and conservation becomes yet another reason to evict them.<sup>23</sup> The most egregious contemporary, life-threatening instance of racialized, conservation-backed eviction is Laos, where a program to demarcate forest boundaries in highland villages has forced the population to seek refuge “voluntarily” in lowland resettlement sites, where arable land is extremely scarce, there is little work, and hunger and disease prove fatal for many. Nevertheless, donors continue to support the resettlement program on grounds of conservation and for the benefit of the highlanders, since it will increase their access to services and markets. The phrase “policy induced poverty” has entered the critical discourse that circulates among some donors in Laos, but it has not interrupted the resettlement agenda.<sup>24</sup>

There is a further, dispossessory dimension to contemporary conservation enclosure in Southeast Asia that merits attention. This is the knock-on effect of cutting off access to the forest frontier that has long provided a “safety-valve” for the dispossessed – a place to find land and start over. Until the 1980s, many governments across the region either accommodated, or made deliberate use of this “safety valve” to meet peasant demands

for land (De Koninck 2006). Resettling landless people to the forest frontier was a way to avoid redistributive land reform, while abating a communist threat. Life on these frontiers was far from egalitarian: whether they arrived through state sponsored programs or on their own initiative, migrants with little capital were soon entrapped in new relations of debt by land “pioneers,” traders and money lenders, a problem already observed in the colonial period. Nevertheless, the existence of these frontiers in much of Southeast Asia enabled people ejected from lowland agriculture to survive, and sometimes to prosper. The possibility of exit also gave landless lowland population some bargaining power. Although there were forest boundaries dating from the colonial period, in many parts of the region these were poorly enforced until the advent of donor-dollars supporting conservation.

What happens to Southeast Asians dispossessed from the land? Opportunities for work are highly uneven, both between countries and within them. In Vietnam, for example, manufacturing has absorbed large numbers of former-peasants, while in Indonesia, manufacturing never quite recovered from the effects of the 1997 Asian economic crisis, and competition from China casts a long shadow. Demographer Graeme Hugo (2007) describes Indonesia as “a quintessential labor-surplus nation.” In 2006, “an estimated 11 percent of Indonesian workers (11.6 million) were unemployed, and underemployment was over 20 percent (45 million workers)”. Disparities within Indonesia are also marked. Manufacturing is concentrated in Java, but a person ejected from the rural economy in West Papua or Kalimantan has little chance of securing a job in Java, where competition is fierce and exclusionary barriers of ethnicity, locality and kinship keep labour markets closed. There are, in short, no generic citizens, or generic jobs.

Cross-border migration is an important outlet for labour, but as with domestic migration, its circuits are specialized and uneven. Recruiting agents select one village, or one ethnic, class, gender or age group, leaving others stranded. In 2008, two million Indonesians were working in Malaysia, mainly in plantations and construction, at least half a million of them illegal. In the Mekong region, 1.5 million Burmese and .5 million Laotians and Cambodians were working in Thailand, mostly in agriculture, and most of them illegal (*Migration News* 2008; *Migration News* 2009). Illegality makes workers especially vulnerable. A report on Indonesian plantation workers in Sabah described their conditions as “bonded labor ... a modern kind of slavery” (*Jakarta Post* 2008a). In Thailand, as the global economic crisis of 2008-9 caused a decline in the price of rubber, the response of plantation owners was to cut the wages of their Burmese workers by half, from two dollars per day to one (*Migration News* 2009). Needless to say, these plantation workers are barely able to stay alive. They do not send home

remittances, or take home savings for their old age. The only benefit to the sending household is one less mouth to feed.

Migration has its success stories. A large number of Filipinos have been able to parlay their education and English language skills into the transnational migration circuit; young people from across the region endowed with a secondary school education, who long to escape village life, find their way into urban employment. These successes are not random. Studies show, with unsurprising regularity, that the outcomes of labour migration are directly related to the land and capital assets of the migrant's family.<sup>25</sup> People who are dispossessed or marginalized in their villages of origin do not have access to the high income circuits. When they migrate, they do so on the most adverse terms, wholly dependent on labour brokers, and vulnerable to being cheated, trapped in debt, coerced, segregated, injured, and imprisoned in their places of work. Although these brokers offer them no security, would-be migrants attach themselves loyally, because the alternative – having no broker, and no work – is even worse.<sup>26</sup>

The processes of dispossession I have outlined in this section, when combined with the limits on labour absorption and some catastrophic misconnects affecting particular spatialized, racialized, or otherwise stigmatized populations, have produced the pattern of human suffering I outlined earlier: 700 million Asians who live very precariously, on less than a dollar a day. One obvious response to the problem of dispossession is to stop it in its tracks – not to add to the numbers. Much of the popular mobilization and some of the social movement activism in Asia is focused, rightly, on this goal. There are also attempts to reclaim land through distributive land reform, although the experience is that reform beneficiaries often lose their land again through the “everyday” mechanism of debt. For most of the people who have been dispossessed, and have no access to living wage, a different kind of solution is needed. In the next section, I consider some biopolitical assemblages that might address this problem, and use a recent example from India to think through the conditions under which a make live politics can be activated.

## **Biopolitical Assemblages and the Protection of Surplus Populations**

A biopolitical program, as I have argued in other work, can usefully be viewed as an assemblage of elements, pulled together at a particular conjuncture, in relation to a given ensemble of population and territory (Li 2007a; Li 2007b). Just as the connection

between capital and labour that constitutes “capitalist development” needs to be examined in all its historical and spatial specificity, so does the emergence of a biopolitical program that seeks to sustain life. Although situated within the broad historical trajectory Foucault (1991) described as the emergence of “government,” that is, the grounding of the rationale for rule in techniques for knowing and improving the condition of the population, the deployment of biopolitical programs to secure life is uneven, suggesting that a range of social forces is involved. What are these forces?

Karl Polanyi (1944) offers an underdeveloped but still fruitful way of thinking about the social forces involved in protecting life. He rejected an analysis based on a narrow view of class interest, or a concept of capitalism on auto-pilot that cannot be tamed or directed. Instead, he highlighted the role of cross-class alliances in promoting life enhancing interventions, their adoption by European regimes across the spectrum from left to right, and their emergence under authoritarian conditions as well as democratic ones. He also pointed out that many interventions arose as pragmatic responses to particular problems such as unemployment, and crises in public health. While the extension of market relations was planned, he argued, planning was not (1944:141). There are multiple social forces at work in a make live conjuncture. Polanyi wrote, for example, of the meeting of the justices of Berkshire at the Pelican Pub in Speenhamland in 1795, when they ruled that parishes should subsidize wages on a scale related to the price of bread, thereby countering the emergence of a “free” market in labour, and inventing the “right to live”(1944:77). He also traced the social forces behind this event, and this invention. Similarly, we can understand the emergence of Britain’s post-war welfare state as an assemblage of elements: post-war patriotism, the shameful exposure of malnutrition in the urban underclass, memories of suffering in the depression, pressure from organized labour, fears of the potentially revolutionary consequences of mass unemployment, and new expertise in planning, among others.

Sadly, the desolate data on life expectancy I cited earlier gives ample reason to question Polanyi’s confidence that “society as a whole” (1944:152) is equipped with a homeostatic capacity to protect “itself” from the risk of destruction. Clearly, in the history of life-preserving interventions, social protection has been racialized and spatialized. Not everyone has been able to claim a “right to live.” In the “late Victorian holocausts” described by Mike Davis (2002), market fundamentalism in colonial India dictated that Indians should be valued only as units of labour. There would be no Indian Poor Law. If there was no demand for Indian labour, Indians should be allowed to die, as they did in vast numbers in 1876-78 and again in 1896-1902, about twenty million people in all. Colonial authorities banned charitable efforts to supply food to these people as

interference in the natural law of the market. Such interference, the experts argued, would only make matters worse, not only for the British whose coffers would be drained, but also for the Indians, whose development would be diverted from its natural – though deadly - path. Letting die, though callous, was not an oversight. It was a calculated decision, rationalized in terms of the greater good.

Echoing the late colonial holocausts, as Davis (2006:174) observes, the structural adjustment programs of the 1980s and 90s deliberately exposed rural populations of the global south to the full blast of market discipline, while withdrawing social protections. “Letting die” was part of this biopolitical triage, not in its rhetoric – one of economic growth and development – but in its results. In the period 1990-2003, 21 countries experienced a decline in the Human development Index, which includes factors such as life expectancy and infant mortality (UNDP 2003). The effects of structural adjustment were horrendous, and policies of a similar kind are still promoted. Yet death and destruction were not everything. Even at their height, neoliberal attacks on social protection were tempered by countermoves such as safety nets, employment schemes, and Millennium Development Goals that pulled in the other direction. Likewise, colonial regimes often had protective aspirations that coexisted in uneasy tension with the search for profit, the need for stability, and other agendas (Li 2007b; Li 2009). How can we understand these contradictory formations?

One approach to the contradiction between dispossession and protection would be to look at how it is sustained by quotidian practices of compromise that enable, at the end of the day, a monstrous disavowal.<sup>27</sup> Or we could approach it as a matter of bad faith: dispossession is real, protection is just talk. Or protection is real but minimal, self-serving, and disciplinary: its purpose is to manage the chaos created by dispossession, and stave off revolt.<sup>28</sup> Another approach, the one I took in *The Will to Improve*, is to take make live aspirations at their word, while acknowledging the contradictions that cause them to fall short. There is, from this perspective, no master plan, only assemblages pulled together by one set of social forces, only to fragment and reassemble.

Some of the elements of a make live assemblage are located within the state apparatus. Writing about the rise of neoliberalism in Europe in the 1980s and 90s, Pierre Bourdieu (1998:2) distinguished between what he called the “left hand of the state, the set of agents of the so-called spending ministries which are the trace, within the state, of the social struggles of the past,” and the “right hand of the state,” often headquartered in ministries of finance. In a democratic system, and within the container of the nation state, tensions between productivity and protection may be worked out by means of the



ballot and embedded in laws that define entitlements and – just as important – a sense of entitlement that is not easy to eradicate. In Britain, as in France, decades of neoliberal government did not eliminate public expectations about the provision of public services, especially state-mediated social security for people facing hard times. As Janet Newman and John Clarke argue, announcements of the “death of the social” have been premature (2009). Nevertheless, under increasingly globalized conditions, it is less obvious that nation states provide containers for cross-class settlements, or command the resources to engage in projects of productivity *or* protection, as contradictory pressures operate at multiple scales (Swyngedouw 2000).

Echoing the left hand/right hand split at a transnational scale, the UN system, with its declaration on Economic and Social Rights, including a right to food, and a “rights based approach” to development, sits awkwardly alongside the IFIs, convinced that sacrifice is necessary in order to promote growth, from which the poor will eventually benefit.<sup>29</sup> The IFIs, unable to admit that their own policies are implicated in dispossession and abandonment, attempt to pass the responsibility on to national governments, obliged to prepare Poverty Reduction Strategies as a condition of receiving funds. Many national regimes, in turn, have been radically reconfigured by decentralization measures, making it difficult for them to deliver on national commitments, and devolving responsibilities downwards to districts, “communities,” groups of “stakeholders” and other weakly territorialized units with uncertain mandates and capacities (Craig and Porter 2006). To the left hand/right hand mix, then, is added the problem of territorial jurisdiction and scale, and the further problem of population mobility. As a result, it is often very unclear who is responsible for the fate of which ensemble of population, and what resources they could command to make the dispossessed live better.

The attempt to govern through communities, and make them responsible for their own fate, has been prominent in the era of neoliberalism, especially in the form of micro-credit schemes that require the poor to supply their own employment as entrepreneurs (Elyachar 2005). Variations on the theme of community self-reliance have reappeared with regularity in Indonesia for two hundred years, and appeared again in the 1997-98 economic crisis, when some experts argued that there was no need to supply a “safety net” for displaced urban workers since they could be reabsorbed into the village economy. There was a program to supply them with one-way tickets “home.”<sup>30</sup> The World Bank subsequently glorified this event with a label, “farm financed social welfare,” heralded as a remedy for “urban shocks” (World Bank 2008:3). The same discourse arose in 2009, as global recession set in. A news report about job losses in

Thailand anticipated an “exodus of workers back to the family farm,” waxed lyrical on the “bright green rice terraces,” coconut groves, and fishponds dotting “an exceedingly fertile countryside,” and quoted the country director of the Asian Development Bank on the virtues of the Thai countryside as a “social safety net” (*International Herald Tribune* 2009). A critical flaw in these observations, however, is that a large number of those who exit rural areas have no farms, and some of them have been landless for multiple generations. If “farm-financed social welfare” works at all, it works for prosperous landowners. For the poor it is a mirage, with potentially lethal effects.

In his recent book, Mark Duffield (2007:19) draws a stark contrast between “insured life” in the global north, and “non-insured surplus life” in the global south. The goal of transnational development intervention, he argues, is not to extend northern-style social protections to the population of the global south, but to keep the latter in their place – ensconced in their nations, communities and families, where they must be self-sufficient, and not make demands. I think the distinction between insured and insured life is accurate enough as a description of the status quo, but it is not the end of history. As I noted earlier, some parts of the development apparatus talk in terms of rights and entitlements, even though they do not have the means to secure them. More significantly, Duffield’s north-south division underestimates the aspiration for broader forms of social justice that exists within some nations of the global south, is nurtured in unions, social movements, left-leaning political parties and the “left hand” of the state apparatus, and can sometimes assemble a protective biopolitics, despite the odds. In the next section, I examine one such assemblage in India, that aspires to secure the “right to food” on a national scale, and contrast it with the situation in Indonesia, where movements for social justice are truncated, and the myth of village self-sufficiency leaves the dispossessed seriously exposed.

## The Politics of Entitlement

The “right to food” initiative in India took off in 2001, when a group of public interest lawyers from Rajasthan sued the government for its failure to meet its legal obligation to supply famine relief to people afflicted by drought, although government warehouses were well stocked with grain. The lawyers and their allies inside and outside the state apparatus then expanded the legal case to cover the much more pervasive problem of hunger and malnutrition, arguing that in permitting these conditions to persist, the government was in violation of its constitutional obligation to protect and enhance life of its citizens. The Supreme Court responded by *confirming* that citizens of India do indeed have a constitutionally-guaranteed “right to food.” In so

doing, it enfranchised the staggering 380 million people (35% of India's population) whose income - less than a dollar a day – leaves them chronically short of proper nourishment. The Court then appointed commissioners, and oversaw the development of national programs designed to follow through on the “right to food,” including free lunches for every school child, subsidized food for qualified applicants, pensions for the elderly, special care for the destitute and so on. It also implemented a system of “social audit” in which failures to comply at any level of the system would be made known to the court and redressed (Right to Food India 2005).

Needless to say, implementing a nationally-guaranteed “right to food” in India involves numerous difficulties, among which the relative autonomy of India's 31 states looms large. Some states have refused to acknowledge or act on the Supreme Court's orders. There are problems in identifying and registering appropriate beneficiaries; problems of corruption and quality control; and collusion between politicians, bureaucrats and labour contractors to exclude claimants or steal their allocation (Cheriyian 2006). There are also problems in reaching destitute families, since destitution strips away political personhood, while survival strategies (begging, prostitution, and itinerant trading) and vagrancy are criminalized, casting the destitute into the category of the undeserving and licensing brutal treatment.<sup>31</sup> So the aim of “making live” hundreds of millions of deeply impoverished Indians is very difficult to accomplish. It would be easy enough to give up, on the grounds that the situation is hopeless.

A close look at one of the “right to food” programs, the guarantee of a “right to work” for 100 days per year on a public works project at the official minimum wage, or receive an unemployment allowance in lieu of work, will give an indication of the social forces at work in this assemblage, and why it is still moving ahead. The government passed the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) in 2005, as a result of hard lobbying from activists and crucial support from the left political parties that used their leverage inside and outside parliament. Government officials have also been active in the assemblage, in some rather surprising ways. I was struck by a document on the “right to food” website, a report by the Government of India's Second Administrative Reforms Commission, a body dedicated to mundane (and neoliberal) matters of efficiency, accountability and audit in public service. Why, I wondered, would the commission select this potentially radical Act as a “case study” for *administrative* reform? The preface to the commission's report notes that the areas of rural India with the highest concentrations of famine and destitution are sites of “extremism and Naxalism,” (GOI 2006:preface). Yet there is little evidence that the Naxalites pose a serious threat to the wealthy population of India, or its ruling regime; nor are they

holding back India's remarkable economic growth. So why should administrative-reformers get involved? Speculatively, I can list a few factors that may have been at work here.

First, the fragility or, in some cases, the total absence of the supposedly standard, national bureaucratic apparatus in India's "Backward Districts" might offend bureaucratic sensibilities, while extreme social hierarchy, predatory labour contractors, and violent attacks that keep government officials away challenge liberal notions of citizenship that link individuals directly to the state. The report notes the importance of delivering the program with at least "a modicum of success in these backward regions" (GOI 2006:1). NREGA rules specifically ban the use of contractors, and administer the program through village councils (*gram panchayats*), highlighting the role of state as benevolent provider (Dreze and Khera 2009). Second, the report heralded NREGA as a pathbreaking demonstration of the government's new approach to poverty, one that would replace the inefficient rationing systems of the past with a universal entitlement. Everyone who presents themselves for work is guaranteed one hundred days. The report anticipates the use of computerized tracking, and a future in which program participants would swipe a card to log each transaction. Third, the program would be a pilot for a new relationship between national and state governments, in which the center supplies the funds, while making the state governments responsible for performance according to national standards. Responsibilization is a common tactic of neoliberal rule, as I noted earlier. Effective ways to monitor the performance of the government apparatus at each level, from the state to the village, were the main topic of the scores of detailed protocols in the tightly printed, III page report. Here was audit culture turned loose, in the service of the poor. Finally, and most broadly, if famine was the scandal that started the "right to food" movement, it was a scandal only because an entitlement to famine relief was already established in India. When the Supreme Court raised the stakes on what the government is obliged to deliver, it also increased the number of fronts on which the government could be found wanting, and embarrassed by public exposure. Indeed, the supreme court's insistence on "social audit" was designed for this purpose.

Early reports on the fate of the program, which is now being implemented, show that the uptake is uneven (PACS nd). The states in which the program is working well are those that have a track record of distributive intervention, sustained by strong support from the organized left, and traditions of popular mobilization. The states where these social forces are lacking have not implemented the program, or implemented it in a desultory and corrupt fashion. These tend to be the states with high concentration of

poverty. Although no doubt they have “left hands” within them, the ruling regimes in these states are not very responsive to Supreme Court orders, national law, media exposure, or even the threat of the Naxalites, who are active in these same places. Votes matter, but even when lower caste groups are well represented in parliament, entrenched inequalities prove difficult to shift (Jeffrey et al. 2008). Partha Chatterjee (2008) argues that “Indian democracy” and fear of producing “dangerous classes” will ensure that India’s dispossessed are protected, but I do not think this outcome can be assumed. As the activists of the right to food movement clearly appreciate, establishing a national “right to food” and some mechanisms to implement it is merely a first step. Making that right real across national space will be a long hard struggle (Dreze and Khera 2009).<sup>32</sup>

The social forces behind the “right to food” movement in India are strikingly absent in Indonesia. There is a specific historical reason for this. There was a clandestine but organized left stream in Indonesian politics from the 1920s, and visions of social justice were prominent in the anti-colonial struggle. In the 1950s, the Communist Party was legal, and was the biggest outside China and the Soviet Union (Cribb 1985). All this ended in 1965, when the army engineered the massacre of about half a million people, mainly members of the communist party or affiliated unions, and peasants involved in struggles to reclaim land. Leftists in the media, education and related fields were killed or imprisoned. These massacres, and the repression that followed, created a crucial gap in the parliamentary system and in public debate that has still not been filled, more than a decade after the end of General Suharto’s rule. There is remarkably little national debate about social justice or citizen entitlements. There is little faith in the parliamentary system as a vehicle to bring about change.<sup>33</sup> Important social movements have emerged to defend the land rights of people threatened with eviction, but these movements have stopped short of articulating a comprehensive program for social justice. There is no functioning welfare system, only some provisions for the hand-out of subsidized rice put in place as a “safety net” at the time of the Asian economic crisis, and renewed to balance the increased prices for fuel and food under structural adjustment (Husken and Koning 2006). In stark contrast to Kerala, where the poorest people are centrally involved in the defense of social rights and assume the “taken-for-granted legitimacy of making redistributive demands on the state” (Steur 2009:31), the Indonesian villagers I have come to know complain bitterly about corruption, and their exclusion from a share of poorly targeted state largesse, but they have little sense of entitlement.

As I noted earlier, an important rationale offered by ruling regimes in Indonesia for *not* providing protection for the rural poor is the notion that villagers have their own mechanisms to support their weaker members. Although many scholars have worked hard to rupture assumptions about the harmonious, moral and caring character of village life in general, and Indonesian villages in particular, the village myth is stubborn. Even Mike Davis falls under its spell, when he contrasts the vicious competition among the poor in urban slums to what he calls, far too optimistically, “the subsistence solidarities of the countryside” (2006:201). Clifford Geertz (1963) bears some responsibility for the problem. His much cited description of rural Java as an oasis of “shared poverty” and infinite labour absorption, where everyone is assured of a place, misrepresented Java in the 1950s and 60s, before the green revolution.<sup>34</sup> It would also have been an inaccurate description of village life early in the nineteenth century, when an estimated 30-50% of the population of Java had no land. Villages were stratified into caste-like estates, in which landholding families organized production by incorporating landless farm servants as permanent dependents, and employed roving bands of “free” coolie labour when needed. Thus in Java, as in India, a large section of the rural population has been landless, and living precariously, for many generations. Yet colonial officials clung doggedly to the village myth, and proceeded with dispossessionary policies on the comfortable assumption that villagers would take care of their own (Breman 1983).

To further the rupturing effort, I will take the reader briefly to the highlands of Sulawesi, among indigenous farmers, the kind of people often assumed to value collective harmony above individual profit. Since 1990, I have been tracking a process of dispossession initiated from below, when highlanders privatized individual plots from their common pool of ancestral land in order to plant a new boom crop, cacao. They had their reasons. Far from living in a state of primitive affluence, they felt their lives were insecure due to periodic drought, famine, and lack of medicine. They were also ashamed of living in unchanging poverty from one generation to the next, and more so as they saw others around them begin to prosper. Class formation proceeded with remarkable speed. By 2006, some of the highlanders had accumulated significant landholdings while their kin and neighbours became landless and mired in debt. The new landlords occasionally hired their kin, but did not feel obliged to do so, and readily replaced labour with chemical herbicides which, they argued, were more efficient. For the dispossessed, the only employment option for men was hauling rattan and timber out from the forest on a piece rate that barely covered the cost of their own food, and left them exhausted and often injured. Women, children and old people stayed in the hills, in their tiny huts, perched on borrowed land, eating very little.

My point in telling this story is that it is situated and specific, but not exceptional. As I noted earlier, colonial officials routinely reported rapid class formation on Southeast Asia's forest frontiers, when people started to plant cash crops and became indebted to co-villagers and traders. The story has echoes of that told by James Scott (1985) about a Malaysian village at the point when production was mechanized. As soon as combine harvesters made the labour of their co-villagers surplus to requirements, landlords stopped acting as patrons. On close inspection, patronage routinely includes an economic calculus centered on labour: if labour is short, especially at peak seasons, it may be necessary to bear the costs of reproducing that labour throughout the year, or across the generations. But if labour is not needed, or supply is super-abundant, the landlord has no need to reproduce it. It becomes surplus. As Jonathan Pincus (1996) showed, in his remarkable comparative study of the introduction of green revolution technologies in three adjacent villages on Java, there were important variations in how the gains from increased productivity were distributed, but these had more to do with the capacity of workers to act collectively than with shared values binding villagers into a moral economy, complete with subsistence guarantees.

## Conclusion

Although I began this essay with a critique of the linear narrative of agrarian transition, I want to stress that I do not counterpose transition to a rural utopia, in which people reject new products and labour regimes in favour of locally-oriented production on small family farms. As my own field research in Sulawesi demonstrates very clearly, and other studies confirm, the transition narrative corresponds closely to a popular desire to leave behind the insecurities of subsistence production, and enjoy the fuller life that better food, housing, education and health care can offer.<sup>35</sup> Yet the sad truth is that this desire is frustrated, especially for the poorest people, who are routinely dispossessed through the very processes that enable other people to prosper. Far too many of them cannot even access a living wage, because their labour is surplus to capital's requirements.

Whose responsibility is it, to attend to the welfare of surplus populations? "No purely selfish class," wrote Karl Polanyi, "can maintain itself in the lead" (1944:156). I fear this is not true, at the extreme. Burma's military junta is utterly selfish, and has maintained itself for more than four decades. Most regimes, however, wrestle with a more complex sense of "leadership" that involves some degree of balance between contradictory agendas (productivity, equity), and an obligation to make live that has become integral

to the modern sense of what it means to govern. Transnational agencies, charitable foundations, activists, experts, and social reformers of many kinds share in this sense of obligation. How the obligation is met, and for which sectors of the population, is a matter that is worked out in specific sites and conjunctures through means that are sometimes grandiose, and occasionally revolutionary, but just as often pragmatic, and unannounced. These conjunctures are worth attending to, however, because as Gillian Hart (2004:95) observes, “the ongoing tension between pressures for ‘economic freedom’ and the imperatives of welfare arising from their destructive tendencies opens up a rich vein of critical possibilities.” These possibilities are both analytical and political, and my essay has offered but a small glimpse of them.

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<sup>1</sup> The four terms, let live/make die, associated with the right of sovereigns, and make live/let die, associated with "government" are discussed in (Foucault 2003:239-264).

<sup>2</sup> (World Bank 2006b:292, 300).

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.chicagoreporter.com/index.php/c/Cover\\_Stories/d/Health\\_Watch:\\_Life\\_Cut\\_Short\\_for\\_City's\\_Minorities](http://www.chicagoreporter.com/index.php/c/Cover_Stories/d/Health_Watch:_Life_Cut_Short_for_City's_Minorities)

<sup>4</sup> See (Sider 2006)

<sup>5</sup> [http://labourbureau.nic.in/WRI-03-04table%20no-12\(a\).htm](http://labourbureau.nic.in/WRI-03-04table%20no-12(a).htm).

<sup>6</sup> (Paraiyil 2000; Steur 2009; Tharamangalam 2006)

<sup>7</sup> For example, (Quijano Obregon 1980) argues that people surviving at the “marginal pole” of Latin American cities during the 1970s contributed to capital accumulation through a) their savings; b) providing cheap goods and services; c) consumption. But not all marginal populations contribute in these ways, so his analysis cannot be generalized.

<sup>8</sup> (Glassman 2006; Harvey 2003; Moyo and Yeros 2005).

<sup>9</sup> See also (Akram-Lodhi and Kay 2009:16-7)

<sup>10</sup> Estimates of long-distance migration of Indian workers 1846-1932 range from 10 to 45 million (Breman 1990:14)

<sup>11</sup> (Davis 2006:171; Patnaik 2008)

<sup>12</sup> (Harriss nd) reviews the debate about jobless growth. See also (Jeffrey 2009).

<sup>13</sup> (Harriss nd; Patnaik 2008) find Indian government claims about welfare hollow.

<sup>14</sup> (Boomgaard 2006:117; Elson 1997; Fisher 1964:5n7)

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.pecad.fas.usda.gov/highlights/2007/12/Indonesia\\_palmoil/](http://www.pecad.fas.usda.gov/highlights/2007/12/Indonesia_palmoil/)

<sup>16</sup> (Barney 2004; Cramb 2007; Potter draft)

<sup>17</sup> (Barney 2008; Shi 2008; World Bank 2006a)

<sup>18</sup> See (Dove 1999; Potter draft:25, 27).

<sup>19</sup> Tunku Nazim Yakob (email 23 Jan 2009) supplied this data based on actual numbers from Malaysian plantations. Indonesia’s oil palm lobby claims the industry employs 5 people per hectare (Indonesian Palm Oil Board 2007:21). The numbers for rubber and tea are from (ILO 1991:43). The high-tech, genetically modified soy colonizing South America uses even less labour (Hetherington In press; Teubal 2009).

<sup>20</sup> See (Araghi 2009; Bryceson et al. 2000)

<sup>21</sup> See (GRAIN 2009:10). Laos is reported to have signed away 15% of its viable farmland (*The Guardian* 2008).

<sup>22</sup> (*Ernst & Young* 2008; *Mines and Communities* 2007; *The Globe and Mail* 2009)

<sup>23</sup> (Lohmann 1999; Vandergeest 2003a; Vandergeest 2003b; Wittayapak 2008).

<sup>24</sup> (Baird and Shoemaker 2007; Goldman 2005; Vandergeest 2003a)

<sup>25</sup> (Rigg 2006; Rigg 2007; White et al. 1991)

<sup>26</sup> (Mosse 2007; Rigg 2007).

<sup>27</sup> (Mosse 2008; Watts 2009:275)

<sup>28</sup> (Cowen and Shenton 1996; Peck and Tickell 2002)

<sup>29</sup> (Kanbur 2001; United Nations 2007)

<sup>30</sup> (Breman and Wiradi 2002:2-4, 306; Li 2007b).

<sup>31</sup> (Harriss-White 2005; Mosse 2007)

<sup>32</sup> (Agarwala 2006) describes demands for state-sponsored welfare as a front of class struggle, since 93% of India's labour force is "informal" and cannot press claims directly against employers.

<sup>33</sup> In the 2009 elections, 30% of registered voters did not vote, and 15% cast spoiled ballots. <http://www.pemiluindonesia.com/pemilu-2009/jumlah-golput-hampir-50-juta-orang.html>

<sup>34</sup> (Alexander and Alexander 1982; Husken 1989; Husken and White 1989; Pincus 1996; White 1983)

<sup>35</sup> (Ferguson 2005; Rigg 2006)