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Review of *Contesting Development: Critical Struggles for Social Change*. Philip McMichael, Ed. Reviewed by Andrew Gibbs.

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of the Chinese leadership. While the data must be taken extremely seriously, the conclusions the author draws from his data about the lack of social volatility are based in large part on oversimplifications and assumptions which merit more extensive consideration before the conclusions should be accepted.

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Philip McMichael (Ed.). *Contesting Development: Critical Struggles for Social Change*, (2009). Routledge. 274 pages. \$39.00 (paperback).

As with all of Philip McMichael's work, this thoughtfully edited collection forces a reconsideration of simplistic narratives of social change and development that identifies a long march to neo-liberal democratic hegemony. Building on a tradition of work including Wolfgang Sach's *The Development Dictionary*, Arturo Escobar's *Encountering Development* and, recently, James Scott's *Seeing Like a State*, this work—through focusing on those at the limits or boundaries of the development project—suggests that development is anything but linear and comprehensive in its scope.

The collection contains case studies of organizations and groups who have been excluded from the development project and have contested their exclusion—and more broadly development itself. Ranging from studies of *Abahlali baseMjondolo* (those who live voluntarily in shack settlements [shanty towns]) in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, through to Brazilian soy bean farmers, to the established Brazilian *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* (MST, Landless Rural Workers Movement), this collection provides a fascinating overview of current struggles for social justice. Raj Patel's chapter on *Abahlali baseMjondolo* describes a movement of shack dwellers who, through contesting housing policies and decision-making structures of the state, have sought to recreate an active and engaged form of citizenship that the African National Congress (ANC), since coming to power in 1994, has increasingly attempted to silence. The paradox of the ANC—that the party of liberation now plays a role in silencing

contesting views, through attempts to relocate the shack dwellers from their current location to 'formal' housing out of the city limits—is central to the chapter and remains a defining feature of South African politics today. Emelie Kay Peine outlines another paradox in her study of protests by soy bean farmers in Brazil. She elegantly demonstrates how soy bean farmers wrongly target the Brazilian state as their livelihoods are challenged, rather than the agribusinesses that control the market. In so doing, her study demonstrates how protest can serve to reinforce rather than challenge existing social relationships. In her chapter on *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra*, Hannah Wittman describes a movement that has been successful in redrawing the relationship between landownership and political power while working to mobilize landless workers politically.

Two strong narratives stand out throughout this book. The first—the idea that agrarian livelihoods are slowly going to erode through market encroachment and urbanization (the death of the peasantry)—is simply not the case. Rather, the book provides numerous examples of how agrarian citizenships are being recreated in ways that create new subjectivities and identities to reorder the relationships that they are embedded in, often in highly progressive ways.

The second narrative is the role of participation as a force for contesting dominant understandings of development and a potential for the realization of self and other forms of politics. Despite the hesitation by many to use the concept of participation for fear it has lost its underlying political meaning, this book helps reclaim the concept in its full political sense as a point of departure for effecting social change at the individual and collective levels, while still pointing to the ambiguity of the concept, including how it justifies existing social relationships.

The one minor criticism of the book is that the majority of case studies emanated from Central and Latin America. While all case studies are thoughtful, wider coverage of struggles both from Africa and those excluded from the development project in the global North might have provided a contrasting and illuminating perspective.

This collection is important, drawing on a strong theoretical and political positioning to understand social movements in

ways that outline their complexities, while providing deep and vivid portraits of their activities. Separated into three sections, including short summaries and a comprehensive introduction and conclusion that situate this work within the broader field, this book is useful for academics, students and others who seek to understand social change in its complexity. Providing such theoretically informed and thoughtful books is critical to demonstrating the rich subtleties and nuances of everyday life and struggle at the edges of the development project, rather than simply relegating these issues to overly simplistic understandings of social change.

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Alejandro Portes, *Economic Sociology: A Systematic Inquiry*, Princeton University Press, (2010). \$27.95 (paperback).

In *Economic Sociology* Alejandro Portes elucidates the core assumptions and explanatory concepts of economic sociology. He begins with a discussion of socially-oriented actors, unintended consequences, and power—what he views as the building blocks of economic sociology's explanatory concepts. The concepts themselves consist of: (1) social capital; (2) social class; and (3) social institutions. Portes puts these explanatory concepts into action by examining the socioeconomic activity in the informal economy, ethnic enclaves, and transnational communities—areas he calls the “strategic sites of research” for economic sociology.

Portes' discussion of social capital is grounded in the original sociological conception: the advantages that accrue to actors due to their social relations. Readers will find Portes' sensitivity to the ideological misuse of the social capital concept to be refreshing. Portes argues that scholars outside of sociology have failed to use social capital as an explanatory concept of individual advantage, but instead these scholars use social capital as a community value. This ideologized meaning is far different from the original explanatory concept of social capital. Portes also discusses the negative and perverse consequences of social capital. For example, white ethnics' social capital of