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Resistance: Towards a Rural Social Non Movement**

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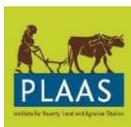


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Egyptian Rural Markets as a New Space of Everyday Resistance: Towards a Rural Social Non Movement

Sahar SafaAlah

"The market's day actually is one of the most magnificent & famous days, it is the crowd which occurs once periodically to declare – as a huge human watch – the end of seven days" (El Taboor " the queue" , Yusuf Idrees 1927-1991 , a famous Egyptian novelist)

Introduction

The Egyptian society witnessed a semi ideal political practice during the 25th January peaceful revolution. Few months later, many authoritative populist behaviors were apparently adopted by several political actors through their conflict on sharing authority , which finally led to the 3rd of July regime ,whose elite adopted a high populist political discourse, that securitized many critical issues under the umbrella of war on terrorism . In such closed public sphere, institutional political practice is expected to be very weak, and also the direct explicit resistance (demonstrations. Rebellions ...), so new mechanisms of hidden /indirect resistance are necessary for achieving little political change, especially in unbeaten/neglected tracks in rural world.

This paper basically focuses on the emerging of rural social non movements in Egypt, by studying rural popular markets as a new space of everyday resistance¹, and as a different area to study rural public sphere, taking in consideration the historical dimension of markets in the Arabic-Islamic civilization, where it wasn't just a trade area but a social, political & cultural arena.

In spite of the Egyptian accelerated social mobility in the last decade, the Egyptian political system is still a competitive authoritarian (hybrid) regime. So it offers different contexts to social mobility depending on the level of democracy versus authoritarianism, which leads to several combinations of social movements and non movements according to the interactions between the state and society .Then, studying rural markets as a space of economic , political ,social and cultural negotiations and interactions may tell us a lot about this point .

The basic research question of this paper is to know how the state intervention to organize markets as a rural public sphere may affect the transformation of rural non movements² in to movements (if state policies were emancipatory), or leads to the withdrawal of these non movements to more hidden resistance behaviors in everyday life(if state policies were regressive). In other words, this paper tries to know how the Egyptian rural periodical markets (as a space of negotiation that connects rural and urban worlds) can enable local societies to reallocate values , achieve more independence in front of the Egyptian neoliberal policies , and decrease the socioeconomic consequences of many national economic crises on rural world.

Finally, from a critical point of view, achieving **emancipation** for individuals and societies isn't isolated from the question of change towards justice, so the grand aim of this paper is understanding the participant role of rural markets in achieving a level of social change towards a more equitable and faire society in the future, which is intertwined with analyzing the historical and current status of this phenomenon.

¹ For more details about "everyday resistance concept " look: Scott James C., **WEAPONS OF THE WEAK , EVERYDAY FORMS OF PEASANT RESISTANCE** , Yale University Press, LONDON , 1987.

² For more details about "social non-movement" concept look : Bayat Asef, **LIFE AS POLITICS : HOW ORDINARY PEOPLE CHNGE THE MIDDLE EAST** , Amsterdam University Press , 2010.

Ethnographic Research: Difficulties & Facilities

I have visited 4 weekly markets in different 4 governorates. Thursday (Toukh City) market in Al Qalubia governorate , Thursday (Metobus City) Market in Kafr El Sheikh governorate, Friday (Rosetta city) small market in El Behira governorate, and a Friday small market in 6th of October city in El Giza governorate. The first two markets are bigger and more crowded than the second two markets. The three first markets are located in rural cities but the last small market is located in a new urban city which may help in understanding how markets are formed, as the three first markets are very ancient. (Toukh) and(6th of October) markets are more near to the capital (Cairo) than (Metobus) and (Rosetta) markets which means less direct interaction with central government in the last two markets .

I have interviewed more than 30 interviewee, including peasants, permanent and periodical market vendors, shop vendors, merchants, ordinary people in the market, local assembly employers and tellers. I had some difficulties in the field work , first I didn't have enough time nor fund to increase number of markets visited, or the number of visits to the same market , as I need to buy anything from the vendor to give me his/her attention in the interview . Second, the securitized political discourse made some people afraid of participating in the interviews(some vendors talked to me in a nervous way to leave them , one of them left his goods and escaped to avoid participating in the interview, some people participated but they looked very afraid or worried). Third, many people in the market are illiterate so they didn't understand what is (research).

Despite all these difficulties I had many facilities also , first I have lived in Toukh for 17 years and my family is still there , so I got a lot of important information from people who knows my family personally Second, my husband's family lives in a small village near Metobus and Rosetta , so they accompanied me in my visits . Third, the winter's unstable rainy weather affected the mobility of the market, which enabled the vendors to give me more attention during interviews.

General observations about field work

The **spatial division** of the visited markets is similar in many aspects. First, big markets consist of a center next to railway station or microbus station, and peripheries extend in the public streets. Second, the ancient markets are continuous many decades ago in the public space, the state tried to control it by moving in to different closed places, but these attempts almost failed and many vendors left , rented or sold their booths to others and continue their occupation of public crowded spaces. Third, most vendors prefer to offer their goods near stations, where the mobility of clients is higher.

The **temporal dimension** of the visited markets is very important; the weekly markets start after dawn and end by afternoon, as vendors need enough time to be ready for the next market. Feasts and holidays increase salability in the market that precedes them , but if the market day was a feast or holiday it might has been canceled .In small markets , peddlers may choose to offer their goods in Fridays(week end in Egypt) or very early in the rest days of the week to avoid paying fees to the responsible authority .

The **components of the markets** are very similar. it can be categorized it into: 1) permanent shops : the interviews with them was very fruitful , as they act like observers of the market society , 2) permanent illegal stalls : almost owned to fruits and vegetables grand vendors , they occupy the public street all the time , they interact or may clash with authorities more than other vendors , 3)temporal illegal stalls : these stalls are held in the day of the periodic market only , every vendor knows his place many years ago ,4) permanent illegal portable stalls (carts and tricycles...) : occupies the public street all the day , its owner may leave it at night or take it home ,5) temporal illegal portable stall : found only in the weekly market day , the vendors of portable stalls have more chance

to avoid authorities as they can turn quickly from occupying public street into ordinary citizen using it by moving his cart away (despite the difficulty of doing that because of the overcrowded routes).So, basically the clash with authorities is less than permanent importable stalls, 6) peddlers : small vendors move inside markets' streets , their interaction with authorities is very little as they don't occupy public streets and aren't supposed to pay fees , 7) ordinary people : they may be clients or they just cross the street during market day or they may live in houses inside market's streets , 8) legal permanent booths : almost built by authorities to move the market in , but most of them are disused.

The **interactions** between the components of the market illuminate power relations inside the market's society and with other markets. The interactions with policemen and local assembly employers illuminate the relation between market's society and the authorities. Kinship and geographic belonging must be taken into consideration during the analysis of power relations. So the next several points will discuss : **1) The market as a society** : is it open, flexible, coherent society? / How conflicts are settled? / How economic and financial transactions are managed? **2) The market's society and the state**: state attempts to control or move the market / the market and the grand revolutions/ economic & financial transactions. **3) The market as a rural public sphere; potential abilities of change**: what do history, literatures& fieldwork tell us?

The market(AL Suqe) as a society:

The high level of multidimensional interactions between the components of the market enables us to analyze it as a society. We may ask many important questions that field work tells us its answer. **First**, can we consider rural market as an open society? Generally , rural market is an open society because anyone can join it easily (the most repeated statement in the interviews was : selling in the market is the job of any jobless) but it is difficult to continue as a growing member in that society , as it depends on the balance of power inside the market , which related to several factors , such as kinship relations , sex , the ability to pay more informal fees to get better & bigger place , kind of goods will be offered, geographical belonging and the ability to ally with the authorities .

The **second** question is: can we consider rural market as a flexible society? In spite of the formal and informal organizing rules of the market, it is characterized with a highly developed level of flexibility and vitality. Roles can be changed momentary; vendors may turn to clients and vice versa. In the market society, people know each other well , everyone knows his place many years/decades ago , but this didn't lead to the congealing of the market society. The openness feature of the market is linked tightly with its changeability.

The **third** question is: can we consider rural market as a coherent / combined society? Basically, vendors compose a combined society against authorities (this point well be discussed in the next section) and against stranger vendors. This combination/coherence is linked to kinship relations and geographical belonging, and formed mainly to defend the economic interests of the rural city which hosts the weekly market; and also to increase the consolidation of the rules that regulate the interactions inside/outside market society. these rules basically concentrate on organizing the utilizing of market sphere , where spatial occupation is a key concept in understanding it ; as it is not just a matter of capturing a piece of public street to offer your goods , it is a matter of filling that space with your voice , your social /economic/cultural /hidden political/ human act. One of Toukh city permanent shop vendor told me this incident "*one day in a weekly market, fruits and vegetables vendors from neighboring village (Miet Kenenah) started to offer their goods in lower prices at the entrance of the market , which meant that clients will buy from them and won't log deeply inside the market , so the fruits & vegetables vendors of Toukh city met together and went to the entrance of the market and clashed with stranger vendors , as their lower prices in the entrance threaten the economic interest of the city vendors*".

Regulating the usage of public space can be considered as a form of reallocating public resources, which may include everyday conflicts /clashes. Generally, conflicts emerge about places & prices between market vendors, about prices and quality of goods between vendors and clients, and about place and its cleaning between market vendors and shop vendors. Conflicts settlement depends

basically on the efforts of market's members more than policemen. Many informal mechanisms are adopted such as mediation, traditional conventional assemblies (Majales Orfiah), paying more informal fees. One of Metobus market vendors told me this incident "*one day we went to offer our goods in a neighboring rural market , but the city vendors didn't let us to do , so a big clash was forthcoming , we decided to go back to our home city without fighting , as we adopt the principle (don't fight outside.. You will lose), then we prevented those vendors from selling in our city weekly market for three weeks, and we brought our proponent vendors to occupy the streets. The vendors of the neighboring city complained in the police station but the policeman told them to settle their disputes informally, so they had to negotiate with us to find a compromise "*.

That incident illuminates how the members of the market manage their disputes in different ways and according to balance of power. In addition to that, the regulations of the market society also organize economic and financial transactions. First of all, there is a grand family informally responsible for guarding vendors' goods in the night with particular fees. Some vendors see that this family collects fees in a coercive way, as they don't actually keep watch over goods all the night, and they don't own the public street to redistribute it on vendors. This way of reallocating was more apparent in Toukh city market, as population density is very high and vital public streets are limited and overcrowded, so it is difficult to find a suitable place to sell in. This status make the function of guarding /organizing family is more reasonable and acceptable and then profitable than in less crowded markets. According to this logic, many vendors (specially strangers) see this behavior as a form of market society rules (kol suq laho osol= each market has its rules) , as this organizing family provides an acceptable access for small and stranger vendors to join rural market easily .

Different patterns of economic/ financial transactions are also adopted in the rural market society , such as : a) tiny informal loans , wherein some vendors may lend money to other peers , or to some clients who they know personally , in some cases clients may lend vendors . These tiny loans facilitate market motion and show the level of social capital between market society members. b) Many clients go to market to sell their subsidized goods (offered by the state) and buy different things with the money, in rare cases they exchange this subsidized goods with other goods without using money (a semi barter economic transaction). c) New small vendors who have just started their work in the market could be guaranteed by older vendors to get an amount of goods from the wholesale merchant until they can sell it and pay its price. d) some vendors who may be temporally absent can rent their space to other vendors, in case of permanent absence they may sell their places (which is actually a part of public street) to others, "*in Toukh city market a permanent shop vendor told me that a watermelon grand vendor sold his place to another vendor for 26000 L.E !!!*". e) momentary deals are very common in the market society , any vendor or even client can negotiate to buy a specific amount of goods in a special rate and resell it in the same market or in smaller neighboring markets.

To sum up, rural weekly market is generally considered as an open, flexible and coherent society. It has private informal rules to manage conflicts, reallocate public resources, organize utilizing rural public sphere and regulate economic/ financial transactions. Despite the formation of these rules according to balance of power inside market society, the state / local authorities' intervention or even influence on composition of these rules is very slight or even scarce. Then, rural periodical market acts as a semi-independent society, which proved its existence in the public sphere as a challenge of the state hegemony/ intervention in rural areas. The next section of this paper discusses the interaction between market society and the state / authorities.

Market society and the state: Who encroaches the other?

The interaction between the market society and the state is related to three levels; **first**, the state attempts to control or move the market: Basically, each rural city should have a closed arena to hold the daily and weekly market in, but actually the population density, limited spaces in vital public streets, high level of unemployment and the flexible and openness of the market society led to increase the number of vendors and their spreading everywhere. So, it is difficult to move or even control this rooted growing society.

Despite all this difficulties, the local authorities (local assembly & police) tried to move or even control the market, we have two different cases: a) **Toukh city market**; the city is divided into two parts by the railway, the eastern part is more vital as it is closer to the main high way (Cairo *Alexandria agricultural high way), so the weekly and even daily markets are held in the public streets. Local authorities built open booths /stalls in the western part of the city, vendors moved there for a very short period of time and came back again to their previous informal places in the eastern part. One of the market vendors told me that they tried to propose moving the market in a wide arena but the representative of the city in national people assembly discouraged this proposal as he has (business to do in that arena). b) **Metobus city market**: ministry of irrigation and Local authorities piled a small canal to provide a small arena for daily market convening, simple booths were built and ministry of social solidarity distributed it on vendors according to a fixed rent, but this incident didn't pass easily, a lot of clashes and protesting demonstrations held by vendors to refuse market moving. Basically, local authorities forced vendors to settle in the market new place, but actually many vendors sold /rent their booths to others and came back to their previous informal places in public streets.

Second, rural markets societies are more associated with their private history than national history , so the incidents of moving markets is considered as a critical point in any market history according to interaction with local authorities, which isn't isolated from critical events of national history , especially grand revolutions. In Toukh city market for example, local assembly employer told me that *"before 25th Jan. revolution people in general and vendors especially were afraid of authorities & police men but after the revolution many things changed .Now policemen and local employers may be afraid of people & vendors especially grand permanent vendors."* In another interview with a permanent shop vendor he told me *"policemen are afraid of grand permanent vendors, they can't face them directly, so they fabricate official accusations to them in absentia to retaliate upon their riot & disobedience."* These unstable interactions between vendors & authorities have different levels depending on the balance of power inside market society, the market location from central government and vulnerability to national critical events. One permanent shop vendor in Rosetta small market told me that *"the society changed after the revolution, under Mubarak rule there was corruption, but everyone knows the maximum limits of his encroachment. Now no one knows the limits of encroachment from the state or even from people."*

Third, the local authorities' failure to move or even control rural markets led to the implied recognition of the existence of the market in public sphere. this recognition has two dimensions : 1) in case of visiting the city by a VIP, local authorities agree with vendors to take their goods and go away for a while until the VIP pass , and then they can come back again . 2) the financial interactions which considered as a pattern of the state slight management of the market , whereas local authority employer collects fixed fees from all vendors in the daily or weekly market , local authorities allege that these fees is for cleaning garbage at the end of the market day . Actually, these fees are considered as an income resource for local authorities especially in weekly markets where the number of vendors is greater than daily market. One of Metobus weekly vendors told me *" one day we came to the market to sell our goods , but our place in the street wasn't clean , so we refused to pay fees and the employer brought loader and prepared the place for us to be able to collect fees from us saying(we need fees to obtain money /wages/salaries)"*

This implied recognition isn't taken for granted all the time , many vendors in different markets told me that employers of local authorities or even some policemen in many cases cross the public streets suddenly and take anything from the vendor (umbrella , scale, weights..etc.) And run away. After that, vendors are supposed to go to police station or local authorities' site to regain their belongings after paying penalty/fine. Some interviewees in Rosetta small market told me that some vendors ally with authorities, so they become exempted from paying fees or penalties. The allies of those vendors with authorities may be too tight to lead employers/policemen to recommend their successors to ally with the same vendors or even with their sons or successors also.

To sum up, the local authorities failure to move or control rural markets led to the implied recognition of its existence in spite of the continuity of sudden unfair behaviors of the authorities, and its attempts

to weaken the market society by allying with a group of its members and give them some exclusive advantages. So, rural markets managed to consolidate its existence in public sphere despite the repeated attempts of the authorities to control it. Formally the vendors' /people's encroachment of public streets is seen as an illegal action, but actually this collective encroachment is a pattern of every day resistance /silent refusal of the unfairness of neoliberal policies, and considered as a societal creative strategies to decrease its negative effects on rural/local communities .Then, rural weekly markets can be seen as a local arena wherein politics are practiced by ordinary people in a different style. This point will be discussed in details in the next section.

Weekly markets as a formation of rural public sphere: potential abilities of social change:

Rural weekly markets have many potential abilities to achieve a reasonable degree of social change and reaching a little level of emancipation and justice , these abilities can't be isolated from studying local markets history , previous literatures , and deep analysis of current status .

In his study on history of domestic markets in the Middle East , Ilya Harik³ concluded that: the emergence of domestic markets was related tightly to the changes in world economy under the colonial era , in Egypt for example , the weakness of central government enabled foreign merchants to get exclusive financial and economic advantages , which led to their intervention in rural areas to get monetary cropping (cotton , wheat ..) . That intervention changed rural economy to be semi monetary / capitalist instead of whole substantial economy, and participated in the emerging of rural markets to exchange exporting crops with cities, which finally led to terminate the isolation of rural societies, and led consequently to the formation of national consciousness. This analysis confirms that rural markets had a significant role in social change in the past, but it didn't mean that this change acted for peasants/ rural societies sake all the time, as Barbra Larson⁴ in her study about rural marketing system in the last 3 centuries concluded that; most of changes occurred in this system was related to the state's or colonial authorities' interests. In additional to that, these two historical studies illuminated the national & transnational dimensions of rural markets, which were related tightly to changes inside these markets & its ability to achieve change.

The significance of rural markets in achieving social change has been analyzed in different case studies, in his study about rural markets & dynamics of time, space and community in Senegal,⁵ the author concluded that the emergence of rural markets -as a result of implementing WB & IMF conditions about structural adaption – didn't led to the dissolving of rural society, but unlike neoliberal arguments, rural markets led to reinforce societal relations or might have created new societies. This point is related to my paper argument about considering rural market as an independent society, which has the ability to resist negative consequences of national economic crisis.

Another study about the functional structure of rural market system in Kenya⁶, the author concluded that the integrated rural marketing system is the well connected one. The closed economic explanation of integration is confined to the follow of goods inside market system , which is well functioned by merchants & vendors , while the open explanation see that integration can be achieved by the follow of people through markets , as people's mobility is tightly associated with money , goods, news, gossip, rumors and ideas mobility between markets . This point confirms my paper argument about the potential abilities of weekly markets to form /demonstrate rural public sphere, these markets act as political arenas to discuss, negotiate, communicate, exchange different opinions and practice politics generally.

³ Iliya F. Harik , **the impact of domestic markets on rural urban relations** , international development research center , Indiana university , 1971.

⁴ Barbara K. Larson, **The Rural Marketing System of Egypt over the Last Three Hundred Years, Comparative Studies in Society and History**, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Jul., 1985), pp. 494-530.

⁵ Donna Perry, **Rural Weekly Markets and the Dynamics of Time, Space and Community in Senegal, The Journal of Modern African Studies**, Vol. 38, No. 3 (Sep., 2000), pp. 461-486

⁶ L. J. Wood , **The Functional Structure of a Rural Market System ,Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography**, Vol. 57, No. 2 (1975), pp. 109-118

To sum up, according to historical background, previous literatures on different case studies and analysis of data collected through my field work, Egyptian rural weekly markets are considered as a form of rural public sphere for many reasons, **first** weekly market is similar to (a general assembly), which convene and adjourn periodically by different people to exchange goods, news, ideas and discuss public issues in a specific human /spatial/temporal sphere. **Second**, despite the balance of power inside market society, its openness, flexibility, and coherence provide a minimum level of equality and accessibility for different people to express themselves, and to have an oral identity by joining market⁷ to practice hidden politics inside economic transactions. **Third**, rural weekly markets have the ability to participate in achieving: a) national social change by breaking the isolated attribute of rural areas and reaching national integration by connecting urban with rural societies, b) local social change by reinforcing societal relations or even creating new societies, enabling ordinary people to construct informal regulations to reallocate local public resources and providing informal channel for social & political mobility. c) individual emancipation , by acting as a different space for every day resistance and as an informal mechanism to achieve empowerment and inclusion for marginalized subaltern social subgroups like women(specially in conservative traditional societies), children , overages and disabled to participate in rural public life (giving a voice to voiceless).

Conclusion: authoritarian populism and rural markets: what is next?

As I discussed in the introduction of this paper, in a competitive authoritarian political system like the current Egyptian system , authoritarian populist behaviors are common in institutional & non institutional political practice , especially in rural areas which located far from central government , as ordinary people may avoid frequent direct interactions with authorities (semi substantial rural economic system is supposed to decrease direct dealing with the state) or even don't trust /believe in institutionalism , especially by the withdrawal of revolutionary enthusiasm under the rule of alleged democratic governments , which had semi theocratic/military non civic attitudes.

The study of rural markets as a resistant strategy against authoritarian populism poses the question of institutionalism. Those markets acts as a form of rural public sphere in which ordinary people trust/respect as a mechanism to reallocate resources and achieve many local implicit demands , so we can consider them partially as a rural social non movement . Then, is it possible or even better to transform this non movement in to movements? The answer has different dimensions, **first** the transformation of⁸ these non movements depends on the state policies towards rural societies, whether it is emancipatory or oppressive policies, second it depends on the level of state weakness or vulnerability to social mobilization. In his study about Arab spring plebeians, Asef Bayat concluded that non movements have better chance to turn in to movements during the state weakness periods, third it depends on political culture of ordinary people and their trust in institutionalism and their desire to turn into movement or formal practice in general or not, as in some cases the transformation to formal practice diminish the flexibility and vitality of social actions. In his study about rural markets in china Skinner⁹ predicted that the high level of modernization well increase the number of permanent shops and rural markets well disappear gradually, but that didn't happen, in another study¹⁰ about continuity and change in china's rural markets the author illuminated that many vendors prefer to practice their work informally as getting permanent shop well pose them under the state control,

⁷ For more details about rural markets' functions in Egypt look: Barbara K. Larson, The Structure and Function of Village Markets in Contemporary Egypt, **Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt**, Vol. 19 (1982), pp. 131-144.

⁸ Asef Bayat , Plebeians of the Arab Spring , **Current Anthropology**, Vol. 56, No. S11, Politics of the Urban Poor: Aesthetics, Ethics, Volatility, Precarity (October 2015), pp. S33-S43

⁹ William Skinner, "Marketing and Social Structure in Rural China, Part I", **Journal of Asian Studies**, Vol. 24, No. 1 (November 1964) pp. 3-43; "Part II", Vol. 24, No. 1 (February 1965), pp. 195-228; "Part III", Vol. 24, No. 3 (May 1965), pp. 363

¹⁰ Scott Rozelle, Jikun Huang and Vincent Benziger, Continuity and Change in China's Rural Periodic Markets , **The China Journal**, No. 49 (Jan., 2003), pp. 89-115.

they will pay more fees /taxations. Some incidents gathered from interviews confirm this argument, as vendors and even ordinary people refuse moving rural markets to new closed arenas. Toukh city local employer told me that **narration " one day the city governor wanted to help a poor peddler , so he ordered us to prepare booth for him , the peddler received the booth happily , but few days later we knew that he rented the booth to another person and went back to peddle in market streets !!!"**.

The significance and ability of rural market to regulate itself informally as an historical continuous society (which has a reasonable level of independence against the state), is not enough to achieve real/deep individual & societal emancipation , but mutual synergy between state & rural society is very important . To avoid sudden rural uprisings, the state may need to stop dealing with rural challenges partially and stop marginalize different political & social powers in the process of rural policies framing¹¹ (the Arab spring revolutions broke out because of a protester peddler).

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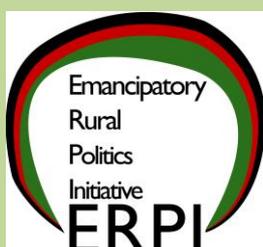
¹¹ For more details about rural markets as an approach for rural development look: R.J. Bromley , Periodic markets and rural development policy, **Ekistics**, Vol. 42, No. 248, TRANSPORTATION (JULY 1976), pp. 49-54

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The Emancipatory Rural Politics Initiative (ERPI) is a new initiative focused on understanding the contemporary moment and building alternatives. New exclusionary politics are generating deepening inequalities, jobless 'growth', climate chaos, and social division. The ERPI is focused on the social and political processes in rural spaces that are generating alternatives to regressive, authoritarian politics. We aim to provoke debate and action among scholars, activists, practitioners and policymakers from across the world that are concerned about the current situation, and hopeful about alternatives.

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