



ERPI 2018 International Conference  
Authoritarian Populism and the Rural World

**Conference Paper No.72**

**After 'neoliberal developmentalism':  
thoughts on the space for a new emancipatory politics**

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17-18 March 2018

International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in The Hague, Netherlands

**Organized jointly by:**



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College of Agriculture and Life Sciences



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Institute of  
Social Studies



Institute of  
Development Studies



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**March, 2018**

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## After 'neoliberal developmentalism': thoughts on the space for a new emancipatory politics

*Andries du Toit*

### **Abstract**

*This paper suggests that one way of understanding the explosion of 'authoritarian populist' political formations from 2016 onwards is to explore their relationship to an underlying crisis in the organisation of transnational politics. It argues that an important role has been played for the last three decades by an assemblage of discourses, institutional arrangements that are linked to the project of 'neoliberal' or 'late liberal' developmentalism. The paper sketches out some key characteristics of 'neoliberal developmentalism' and identifies some of its implications for the scope of emancipatory politics in the last three decades. It suggests that the authority, hegemony and coherence of this assemblage is currently being challenged, and asks what this might mean for the prospects, and indeed the possibility, of emancipatory politics in the future.*

## 1 Introduction

How are we to understand ‘the current political moment’ and the global context in which we find ourselves, and what does this mean for the content and form of emancipatory politics?

This is, of course a trick question: if we were able to answer it, there would be no need for this conference. A useful answer can only be established together, through a process of debate, discussion, disagreement and the exchange of views. My purpose in this paper is to set out some theses and questions to help start off this discussion.

I am aware that in this discussion I am not speaking as an activist, or as someone actively or directly involved in contesting or resisting processes of resource appropriation or commodification ‘on the ground’. Nor do I think that academics should be treated as experts who automatically have the first (or last) word on how historical processes should be understood or strategic priorities defined.

This intervention is, rather, an experiment: an attempt to see to what extent insights and contributions that come from academic research, from theoretical reflection and understanding, can contribute to creative, inventive, thought-provoking conversations about the possibilities for rural politics today. For this reason, this paper is formulated in the form of a series of provocations - hypotheses, interpretations, challenges and questions - intended to evoke discussion and catalyse debate.

I make three arguments. Firstly, I suggest that discussion should be oriented, not only towards understanding the nature and the limitations of current forms of so-called ‘populist’ politics, but also at the underlying crisis in the systems and arrangements of transnational politics out of which these developments arise and to which they are responding. Secondly, I try to characterise some key features of these underlying systems and arrangements and suggest some ways of thinking about their implication for emancipatory politics. Thirdly I point out some important features of the current challenge to these systems, and ask what they mean for emancipatory practice.

## 2 A new political moment

*(1) 2016-2018 marks a moment of rupture that raises important questions about the nature and content of emancipatory politics.*

History, of course, is a seamless web; each moment has its own distinctive urgency and importance. At the same time it seems that from 2016 onwards - with the unexpected outcomes of the Brexit referendum and the American presidential election - global affairs have entered a particularly significant and historically important period. The sudden and unprecedented rejection of the authority of well-established institutions and powerful political elites by voters right in the heartland of the post-industrial North, based in the very countries that had been the birthplace of modern capitalism, seems to signal that ‘business as usual’ in global politics has been temporarily interrupted. We appear to have entered a time when power relations or arrangements that previously appeared settled are suddenly revealed to be fluid or contestable.

One way of thinking about the significance of this kind of historical moment is to conceive of it as a time of *action*: these are periods of great *strategic* significance, when much depends on courses of action ‘taken at the flood’ — or opportunities missed; when particular individuals or organisations can wield outside influence or leverage, or fail to use it and be forever marginalised; when it is possible to win lasting gains, or sustain losses from which it will be hard to recover. In field after field of political action and social concern — from the rise of automation to the course of climate change, from the fate of the European Union to the nature of Chinese hegemony; from the development of biotech to the health of our oceans — it is clear that the events of the next three to five years will be decisive, and choices made at this time are likely to cast long shadows.

I’d like to suggest, however, that periods like these are also critically important as moments of *thought*. They can also be moments at which the ideologies, discourses and interpretive frameworks

that we use to understand our social reality may turn out to be lacking or in need of reconstruction; when the public language that we use to describe or contest political relations no longer help to make intelligible the choices that lie before us; when in addition to intervening in the world, it becomes necessary to rethink the way in which we have been making sense of it and our choices.

It seems to me that this is particularly true at the moment. The significance of the current period is not only strategic. It is significant because events are confronting us with very particular political *questions* - questions about the social ordering of complex societies and our places within them; questions about the nature of social equity and social justice; questions about the form and content of political struggles. Many of these questions are not new at all: some, indeed, have been with us as long as we have had large, complex, settled, or spatially extensive societies. But it seems to me that this is a time when the established answers or ways of thinking about these questions are revealed as inadequate.

So: time to think.

*(2) The rise of 'authoritarian populism' an important indicator of this rupture, but it does not define it.*

In the 'think piece' which functions as the background to the ERPI meeting, Ian Scoones and his colleagues have sought to define the 'new political moment' by referring to the rise of a wide range of recent political developments that they group together under the notion of 'authoritarian populism' (Scoones et al. 2017). They use this term to describe political interventions and movements that have a strongly anti-establishment character — often taking the form of a critique of the political establishment, of the process of globalization, and of the central institutions of modern global governance — but which at the same time rely heavily on reactionary discourses and ideologies, and which sometimes seem to be captured by powerful elite interests.

This focus is understandable, particularly given the prominent role such forms of politics have played in the Trump and Brexit debacles, and the resonances between those developments and the rise of quasi-fascist, racist, chauvinist and similar movements elsewhere in the world (e.g. in the Philippines, in Brazil, in Poland and Hungary, and so on). At the same time, trying to make 'authoritarian populism' the central focus may not be the most fertile way of thinking about the issues facing those concerned with developing an emancipatory politics.

Firstly, while the strongly 'authoritarian populist' character of new political formations is clearly an important and distinctive feature of politics *in the global North*, it is arguably far from central in other political contexts. It would be a bad idea to try to define the meaning of a globally significant political moment in terms of the specific and privileged experience of politics as it is conducted in Europe, the UK, and the USA! Even in Europe, the term 'populism' may be a misnomer: the political scientist Cas Mudde, for example, has argued that what we are seeing in many parts of Central Europe and even in the USA is not accurately defined as populism at all: instead, 'populism' is increasingly being used as a synonym for political formations that are merely chauvinist, racist, nativist or nationalist. In fact he argues that many of these movements do not display the distinctive forms of organisation and discourse that are typical of populist mobilisation in the classical sense (Mudde 2017).<sup>1</sup>

More to the point, an overview of the wide range of interesting and problematic new and (sometimes) counterhegemonic political formations and developments that appear to be part of 'the current political moment' shows them to be enormously varied. They range from populist(ish) forms of nationalism and nativism (Brexit, the Tea Party) to illiberal authoritarianism (Orban, Erdogan, Duterte),

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<sup>1</sup> Scoones *et al* are in my view guilty of this: the definition of populism on which they rely, that of Stuart Hall (Hall 1985), is actually out of line with the way in which populism is generally understood in scholarly literature (see e.g. Laclau 2005, Canovan 2005, Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017, Molyneux and Osborne 2017). The phenomenon Hall described in his characterisation of Thatcherism is perhaps best thought of not as authoritarian *populism*, but rather populist *authoritarianism*. But this is a minor cavil, not central to the argument of the paper.

neofascism (FPÖ), elitist *neoliberal* nationalism (Modi), authoritarian *left*-wing populism (Malema and the EFF) or kleptocracy (the ‘Zupta’ cabal in South Africa, the vestiges of the Chavez regime), *democratic* left-wing populism (Momentum, Sanders supporters), and so on and so on. You might disagree with my characterisations, but the point remains that this is a highly heterogeneous, variegated political field, in which a wide range of often dissimilar elements are combined in often idiosyncratic alignments and juxtapositions in deeply dissimilar local or national political contexts: not a terrain that can be easily captured or typified by any simple characterisation or covering term.

A more productive and useful way to try to characterise what is distinctive or interesting or important about the ‘2016 moment’ may be not to focus on characterising the nature and the empirical complexity of the wide range of emergent political formations I have described here, but rather to take a step back and ask whether they are symptomatic of a deeper crisis to which they are all in some way responding, and which they in turn are exacerbating and shaping. Important and interesting as the rise of authoritarian populism is, we need to take a step back and look at the current political moment ‘negatively’: to look not only at what is *becoming* but also at what is *ending*.

***(3) One of the most important features of the 'new political moment' is the challenge to the hegemony and confidence of the transnational project of neoliberal developmentalism.***

Consider, for instance, how far we are today from the smug triumphalism of the turn of the millennium, when Francis Fukuyama announced the ‘end of history’ and the final triumph of liberal democracy, and when Thomas Friedman prophesied the universally levelling implications of economic globalization (Fukuyama 2006, Friedman 2007). Barely twenty years later, commentators are announcing ‘Great Regression,’ the demise of the ‘Washington Consensus’ and the retreat of ‘western liberalism’ (see e.g. Geiselberger 2017, Luce 2017). We might differ with Luce about the importance he describes to ‘liberal values’ and their place in ‘world history’, but it certainly seems true that, while the political movements and formations that typify the ‘2016 moment’ are highly diverse, there does seem to be one important cross-cutting theme: many of them, in one way or another, have challenged the authority and the legitimacy of the key institutions of what for want of a better word we might call the neoliberal world order.

Here it is necessary to proceed with caution. Many commentators have described the events of 2016 and after as evidence of a crisis in ‘the global neoliberal order’ or at least a setback for ‘neoliberalism’ itself (see, e.g. Jacques 2016, Fraser 2017). Whether this is so or not I am not sure, and I am even less sure whether it is a useful topic for discussion - in part because the notion of ‘neoliberalism’ itself is becoming so vague and general that some have argued that it has outlived its usefulness (see e.g. Venugopal 2015) and in part because many of the ‘technologies of power’ characteristic of ‘neoliberal’ or ‘late liberal’ forms to government are turning out to be much more adaptable and polyvalent than is usually assumed, and seem unlikely to depart from the political world (see e.g. Ferguson 2009, Collier 2011). But it certainly seems that elements of ‘neoliberal’ or ‘late liberal’ ideology, linked to Euro-centric narratives of progress and development, have for the last thirty years played a central role in the organisation of the relations between the ‘global North’ and the postcolonial world – and that the hegemony of these narratives and the self-confidence of the institutions that have deployed them are currently being challenged.

This might be a useful way of framing our story: For the last thirty years, an important role has been played in the government of subaltern populations and the ordering of politics in the ‘postcolonial’ world by a complex, heterogeneous but still relatively coherent assemblage of discourses, practices, institutions and projects that, for want of a better word, we could call ‘late liberal’ or ‘neoliberal’ developmentalism<sup>2</sup>. One of the things that is happening at present is that the power and coherence of

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Neoliberal’ is strictly speaking a misnomer. While the restructuring of national and international political arrangements that gathered pace from the 1980s onwards drew on many elements of neoliberal thought and politics, they also embodied many innovations and contained elements alien to the political and economic thought of mid-century neoliberal thinkers. For this reason, Nik Rose’s usage of ‘late liberal’ (Rose 1996) is probably more accurate. For simplicity’s sake, I am sticking to the less precise but more widely accepted usage.

this assemblage is being challenged. Understanding this challenge raises important questions around the content, the prospects, and even the possibility for emancipatory politics.

These are of course large and sweeping claims. My purpose is not to try to articulate final or authoritative interpretation of world events. Rather, I want to try to set out some signposts that can be used to orient and focus debate and enquiry. Hopefully this will create a basis upon which it will be possible to ask questions about the implications for emancipatory politics

### **3 Understanding ‘neoliberal developmentalism’**

*(4) The discourse and practice of ‘development’ as a discourse about global resource and power distribution was initially shaped by Cold War geopolitics. International development co-operation as we know it today only became possible with the end of that form of geopolitical polarization.*

One way to think about the significance and character of present-day development politics is to compare it with what went before.

‘Development’ as a way of thinking and talking about the global distribution of power and resources was of course closely linked to the end of the Second World War and the age of empire. In the period immediately after the Second World War, the flow of resources between ‘North’ and ‘South’ and the nature of ideas about government and policy in this realm were shaped by two powerful dynamics: firstly, global ideological and geopolitical polarization and competition between the USA and the USSR, and secondly, the rising tide of anti-imperialist, anti-colonial struggle. Crucially, these two dynamics were deeply entangled: anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles were often caught up in cold war polarization, in spite of energetic attempts to create a space of ‘non-aligned’ politics beholden neither to Washington or Moscow (Cox 1979).

One thing that is worth noting is that partly as a result of this, debates about the nature and direction of development were much more explicitly politicized than was later the case. ‘Development Studies’ was not during this time established as a realm of primarily technical, value free intervention. Development aid and advice were explicitly linked to underlying calculations about geopolitical influence; and radical and critical analyses were strongly aligned to international discourses of anti-imperial or anti-colonial solidarity. Politics grounded in radical and emancipatory traditions played a prominent role in the contestation about the content and direction of development, and a significant contribution was made by critical intellectuals from the global South (Amilcar Cabral, Steve Biko, Frantz Fanon, Walter Rodney, Paulo Freire and many others...). At the same time, the horizons of possibility and the orientation of emancipatory thought were given by these larger geopolitics. Emancipatory politics were directly linked to and seen as subsumed *within* questions of national, political or class liberation.

These dynamics were changed decisively by the end of the Cold War and the emergence of a more unipolar world. Clearly one of the most important consequences was the vastly strengthened hand of the most powerful capitalist countries, who took this as an opportunity to order international relations as they saw fit. But another important consequence was the emergence of a widely shared field of transnational work, research, co-operation and practice centred around notions of global development, poverty alleviation, public health and environmental sustainability. These were initially strongly shaped by agendas of international biophysical and biopolitical government (e.g. the management of HIV/AIDS and environmental threats), but a crucial role was also played by the Millennium Declaration and the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals, which installed poverty alleviation at the heart of the development project, something that would have been unthinkable at the height of the Cold War.

The end of the geopolitical polarization that had characterised the Cold War meant that it was now increasingly possible to conceptualise questions of development as lying ‘beyond’ ideology of politics, or at least as not entirely over-determined by them. The notion that the threat of nuclear war had been



left behind, and that it was now possible to address problems like poverty, inequality and political oppression in a way that was not constantly caught up in the bipolar antagonism between ‘Washington’ and ‘Moscow’ contributed greatly to the optimism of the time. But ironically, the way in which this shift happened also meant that many traditions of emancipatory politics that had been grounded in narratives of national or working class struggle became marginalised. The notion of emancipation itself became depoliticised, or subsumed within anodyne and often Eurocentric narratives of teleological progress and ‘Development as Freedom’ (e.g. Sen 1999).

*(5) While ‘neoliberal’ developmentalism was presented as politically neutral, it was in fact an ideologically heterogeneous field, characterised by political contestation and available for a range of competing political projects and agendas.*

The dream of leaving politics and ideological contestation behind was, of course, illusory. But the political terrain had certainly become more complex and open. ‘Neoliberal developmentalism’ does not describe a coherent or consistent ideological framework or shared project. Neither was it ever embodied in a widely shared political consensus. Political contestation continued, albeit in subtler and sometimes covert ways.

It is important not to oversimplify this process. The direction and the nature of these political contests clearly differed from context to context and shifted over time. In broad terms, however, it seems that an important role was played by two political and ideological traditions: on the one hand, a free-market commitment to economic growth and globalisation, embodied most clearly in the work of the World Bank and the IMF, and on the other, a political project focused on the internationalisation of human rights and democracy (pursued at the international level, for instance, by various organs of the United Nations). While both these traditions had deep roots in the cold war period, the relationship between them played out in much more complex and indeterminate ways. Very often, their differences were often papered over and fudged for the sake of convenience. In practice development projects and discourses drew opportunistically from a hodge-podge of distinct and often divergent ideological streams in an attempt to cobble together consensual frameworks that could co-ordinate co-operation across political divides (the MDGs are a good example). In practice, this meant that post- Cold War development politics and practice was complex and contested.

It’s important to note that the political ‘value’ of these combinatory processes could not simply be read off from their underlying component elements. Much depended on the particular way in which different elements were deployed in specific contexts. The discourse of human rights, for instance, could be used to ‘normalise’ or ‘launder’ capitalist exploitation, fixing attention on egregious exceptions (slavery, child labour) while directing it away from normal, run-of-the-mill exploitation (precarious work). But differently articulated, it could be used to support popular agency, highlight inequality, challenge unequal social relations, and support continued anti-colonial or postcolonial struggles. Similarly, approaches to market integration and arguments about competition that drew on ‘neoliberal’ roots could be used to consolidate and entrench corporate power ... or to push for the rights and interests of informal traders or support forms of pro-poor redistribution (Ferguson 2009, Collier 2011).

*(6) The process of rendering political questions ‘technical’ was central to late liberal developmentalism - and contributed to both its strengths and its limitations*

Some of the most interesting and complex of these processes of political contestation were related to the way that the ‘late liberal’ development discourse was organised around highly specialised and tightly policed forms of *technical* deliberation. In sub-Saharan Africa, a particularly important role was played by Blairite notions of ‘new public management’ and the way these notions were entrenched and disseminated by organizations like DFID. Here, the thought that ‘development’ and policy work could or should be done in a way that was not overdetermined by ideological or partisan commitment swiftly shaded into the notion that it should be politically *neutral* and guided by value-free, apolitical forms of scientific or quasi-scientific reason. In the language of the new orthodoxy of



‘evidence-based policymaking’, policy was about ‘what worked’ -- and what worked would be established by incontrovertible, objective, empirical ‘facts’. These forms of naïve empiricism and positivism became operationalised in an ambitious and far-reaching ‘meta-political’ project aimed at the ‘government of government’ and the disciplining of processes of policy making and decision in a wide range of areas. This was accompanied by an enormous investment in forms of positivistically conceived knowledge production that constructed poverty and poor people as objects of neutral scientific knowledge and managerial intervention. At the same time, governments, Universities and development agencies also invested significant resources into institutionalizing the power, voice and authority of a distinct cadre of technical experts and professional bureaucrats whose knowledge was held to be politically neutral and transportable from context to context (Kothari 2005, Du Toit, 2012).

This is, of course, a fairly familiar picture. Perhaps the most well known example of this analysis is provided by James Ferguson’s seminal work in *The Anti-Politics Machine*, in which he showed how development discourse obscured the nature of social change in Lesotho, entrenching a mystificatory narrative about the stakes and consequences of capitalist incorporation and presenting as ‘merely technical’ and ‘value free’ changes and decisions that were in fact deeply political in nature (Ferguson, 1990). Other critics of the depoliticising impact of development discourse have argued that these shifts are intrinsically anti-democratic, giving power to unelected officials or technocrats, marginalizing popular voices and spaces of democratic deliberation, and papering over processes of political struggle (White, 1996; Harriss 2002).

Valid though these critiques often are, I think they can also miss much of what is interesting and important about the increasing importance of technical deliberation in the field of development policy and projects.

- For one thing, the kinds of resources that could be mobilized and redirected within these spaces and through these forms of technical deliberation were often significant, and could make an enormous difference to the life chances or wellbeing of those affected.
- Secondly, the ability to frame a social question in terms that are not overtly political or ideologically overdetermined can play an important role in protecting vulnerable or marginal groupings, or in directing resources to groupings that are otherwise not powerfully represented. Overtly depoliticising an issue, and reframing it in technical terms that allow consequences to be assessed and impacts to be explored can make space for processes of political deliberation that can take into account the needs and priorities of poor, marginalised or subaltern populations.
- Thirdly the process of ‘rendering technical’ does not in itself end political contestation or make partisan or political challenges impossible. It merely means that political contestation and political challenge has to proceed in a different way. In particular, it depends on the development of forms of political brokerage, intermediation and translation that can *create connections* between popular mobilisation and the spaces and forums of specialised policy deliberation.

The ‘rendering technical’ of policy and governmental deliberation thus had complex and ambiguous effects. Most importantly, they posed significant challenges for emancipatory movements oriented towards social transformation via popular mobilisation. In some cases, popular movements were able to make effective ‘technical’ interventions - the Treatment Action Campaign in South Africa is one example (Grebe, 2011), as is organisations such as Shack Dwellers International, and Women in Informal Employment Globalising and Organising (WIEGO)). But very often the ‘technification’ of politics also simply led to marginalisation and demobilisation.

#### 4 Hyper-political anti-politics

##### *(7) Neoliberal 'techno-politics' is being questioned - but in ways that pose significant challenges to the scope and prospects of emancipatory politics*

Clearly this is not an exhaustive account of the nature, logic and limits of 'neoliberal' developmentalism. But it provides an interesting basis from which to consider the significance of political developments since 2016. This is because one of the most noticeable aspects of the rise of popular, right-wing, populist and anti-capitalist forms of politics since then is the extent to which they seem to involve a rejection of the privileged place of 'techno-politics.' The experts, professional advisers and technical decisionmakers who were empowered by the 'rendering technical' of politics are increasingly derided as an out-of touch or even corrupt elite, and the forms of technical deliberation on which they relied are rejected as irrelevant or inappropriate (see, e.g. Finlayson 2017).

What are the implications of the faltering of the power of 'neoliberal' discourse to discipline and shape the nature of political contestation? Does it mean, as Nancy Fraser has suggested, that the political field is wide open and that we are in "an interregnum, an open and unstable situation in which hearts and minds are up for grabs"? (Fraser 2017) Or does the ascendancy of the right rather indicate that contest for hearts and minds is over, and that racist, chauvinist, patriarchal and militarist discourses have decisively 'captured' the political terrain?

These are not questions I will try to answer within the scope of this paper. But I will make two broad comments:

- Firstly, it appears that the declining power of late liberal 'anti-politics' is not necessarily paving the way for a 'repoliticisation' of the public sphere; at least not in the sense of a reconnection between the public language of politics and earlier discourses of popular mobilisation. Rather, one of the most distinctive features of the politics of the current moment is a *deepening* of the disconnection between the public language of mobilisation and identification and the actual content of policy and legislative debates. Instead of a classically populist politics, one in which practices of mobilisation work to 'stitch together' a heterogeneous range of grievances into a discourse that creates broad popular alliances, many of the present challenges to liberal techno-politics take the form of what could be called a hyper-political anti-politics. Donald Trump's 'wall', the chaotic pronouncements of the British 'leavers' and, for example, the demands for expropriation and nationalisation of land by the South African Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) all have this in common: any engagement with the actual content of policy or legislation is replaced by a kind of perpetual political theatre focused on the celebration of idealised political identities and the enactment of authenticity. (This is a phenomenon not addressed by the contestation or checking of facts, because within the terms of this kind of symbolic politics, facts are strictly speaking irrelevant. In fact, by your ceaseless checking of facts, by your outrage at the lies of the Duterte or Erdogan or Trump you are merely indicating your membership of the liberal elite!)

One of the most alarming features of the new politics of the right is thus the extent to which it seems to involve a kind *nihilism*: it is characterised neither by the competition for global ideological hegemony that typified the Cold War, nor by the desire to stabilise the global order in the long-term interests of 'transnational capital that followed from its end. Rather, what typifies it is the abandonment of all but the thinnest pretence of coherent government. In its place there is an intensification of chaotic competition between various elites for short-term advantage via resource grabs, state capture, the extraction of illicit flows, infrastructural lock-in and the creation of geographic enclaves.

- Secondly, it seems that the emergence of this rather cynical and nihilistic 'anti-politics' is directly related to the decreasing credibility and believability of the optimistic master-

narratives of technological progress, economic growth and human development that underpinned the triumph of late liberal developmentalism. As Bruno Latour has rather bleakly pointed out, the problem is that ‘there is no longer a planet able to fulfil the dreams of globalisation’ (Latour 2017). ‘Fake news’ and the chaotic empty theatrics of the new chauvinists and nationalists are not a bug but a feature; as Latour points out, ‘it’s because the overall geopolitical situation has to be denied that an indifference to facts becomes so essential’ (p. 85).

The implications are chilling. I think Latour is correct in linking this realisation to the short-termism and chauvinism that characterises the politics of the right. The question, however, whether the progressive left can do any better. Is it possible to formulate an progressive emancipatory politics that does not depend on dreams of an infinitely exploitable planet ... or on equally impossible dreams of a retreat into autarky, or disconnection from global flows and connections?

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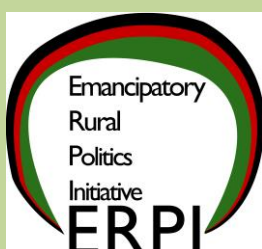
ERPI 2018 International Conference  
Authoritarian Populism and the  
Rural World

17-18 March 2018  
International Institute of Social Studies (ISS)  
The Hague, Netherlands

## About the Author(s)

**Andries du Toit** has a PhD in Comparative Studies from the University of Essex. His training is in political theory and in qualitative and anthropological approaches to social science research. He has done extensive research on the political economy of structural poverty and racialised inequality in a range of contexts in South Africa: his publications include work on the social relations of labour on commercial fruit and wine farms in the Western Cape, on chronic and structural poverty in the rural and urban Western Cape and in the Eastern Cape, and on the dynamics of marginalised livelihoods and informal social protection in the migrant networks of the Eastern and Western Cape.

At present, his work focuses on developing a critical understanding of the politics of knowledge production in the government of poverty and marginal livelihoods. His key interest lies in the ways in which development discourse and the production of technical 'poverty knowledge' can mystify and obscure the social relations of power that underpin persistent inequality and structural poverty. Here, his concern is to develop approaches and frameworks that can go beyond narrowly positivist and technicist approaches to the politics of use-oriented basic research. In this regard he has focused on developing a critical understanding of discourses around social exclusion and the uses of poverty measurement, and he maintains an ongoing interest in the use of critical social theory in the integration of qualitative and quantitative research approaches to poverty, vulnerability and marginality.



**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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