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# Agrarian class mobilisation in Burkina Faso's cotton production

Bettina Engels\*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Freie Universität Berlin – Allemagne

## Résumé

This paper addresses a longstanding and prevailing question within critical agrarian studies: In how far are agrarian societies characterized by class structures? And if they are, how does the development of capitalism in agrarian settings impact on class dynamics? I will approach these questions referring to debates from critical agrarian studies, including Henry Bernstein's concept of "classes of labour". It emphasises that labour is fragmented and hierarchically and unequally structured along gender, race, ethnicity, caste, kinship, etc.; and that this potentially hampers the emergence of class consciousness and class identity. Distinct from Bernstein, I take up an understanding of class following E.P. Thompson: class is a social category that ultimately becomes important through people's all-day experiences within the relations of production, rather than a given social structure along these relations. How people experience their position within the relations of production is obviously shaped by their position in the social field in general, and by political-institutional influences (such as social policy, agrarian policy, existing social organisations and institutions, mobilisation and repression). I argue that such a phenomenological concept of class is suitable to analyse class mobilisation in agrarian settings: Why and how do people mobilise for collective claim making with regard to the modes and relations of production? I illustrate this in an empirical analysis of recent mobilisation of cotton producers in Burkina Faso.

**Mots-Clés:** Agrarian change, class, mobilisation, cotton, Africa, Burkina Faso

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\*Intervenant