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Rethinking globalization: the agrarian question revisited

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ABSTRACT

The agrarian question, like most questions about the trajectory of (capitalist) development, was framed as a national question about a national process. This article critiques the latter assumption, arguing, as Karl Polanyi did, that the classical agrarian question was a national interpretation of a global process. It also argues that the current processes of globalization crystallize the agrarian question in new and challenging ways. The key to these arguments is that the capitalist organization of agriculture is a political process, and is central to the dynamics of an evolving state system (including supra-statal institutions). The discussion contextualizes agricultural developments within the contradictory dynamics of the two main periods of world capitalism over the last century: the national (developmentalist) and the global movements. The crisis of developmentalism coincides with the crisis of the post-Second World War food regime. It is currently generating new social movements that combine original and tenure questions with food and green questions, reversing the anti-agrarianism of the development, or productivist, paradigm.

KEYWORDS

Agrarian question; globalization; agro-food systems; Chiapas.

INTRODUCTION

The recent rebellion in Chiapas serves notice of a new angle on the agrarian question. On New Year's Day, 1994, hundreds of impoverished campesinos rose up against the Mexican state's continued violation of local rights – most recently embodied in the newly implemented North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). NAFTA is the vehicle of wholesale liberalization of agricultural land and commodity markets – both of which adversely affect the Mexican campesino. However one interprets the significance of this rebellion, in my view it symbolizes the new terrain of the late-twentieth-century agrarian question: the terrain of post-developmentalism.

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The late-nineteenth-century agrarian question (what are the political consequences of capitalist transition in the countryside?) was formulated within the metropolitan political framework of nation building. Barrington Moore's *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (1967) is the classic comparative treatment of this. Moore considers British democracy as the model of a completed agrarian revolution in which the peasantry disappeared. His implicit approval of wholesale expropriation as the foundation of democracy is telling in two senses. First, it superimposes the problematic of national development on the marxist scenario of proletarianization as the measure of capitalist development. In this respect Moore affirms the liberal/marxist principle that democratic rights depend upon a certain balance of class power.¹ Some 'new social movements', *basismo* for instance, embody a different conception of the conditions necessary to secure individual rights, which is understood within the liberal paradigm as the reduction of class inequalities via formal democracy (Lehmann, 1990). The alternative conception accords a relevance to peasant and community politics hitherto ignored by the liberal paradigm.

Second, the violence of nation building – especially the process of depeasantization, for Moore – is understood solely in domestic terms. While such violence is instructive, it needs to be complemented, and indeed contextualized, by the violent global encounter within which it occurred. This is especially true for Moore's model case of Britain, whose liberal democracy was anchored in colonialism. Time has begun to reveal this historical truth, as the ex-colonial 'have-nots' challenge democratic 'civilization' via migrations to the metropolises,² or providing cheap labour for enterprises moving 'offshore'. That is, one long-term consequence of colonialism (including post-colonial 'urban bias') – the massive dispossession of rural producers – has begun to subvert the tidy foundations of metropolitan social democracy (McMichael, 1995). Arguably, colonial chickens are hatching, as the process of nation building has begun to unravel.

Nation-state formation is a profoundly world-historical process (Wallerstein, 1974; Tilly, 1975; Davidson, 1992; Hobsbawm, 1993). Barrington Moore implicitly understood this, but failure to allow it to inform his analysis means that the world-historical impact of the British 'case' on successive state building is virtually ignored, beyond its status as a model case. It was precisely this impact that stimulated the politics of the agrarian question, since the competition of cheap exports from the settler regions of the New World compressed the agrarian transition for European late-starters like Germany and France. The issue became how to manage that transition within the framework of an increasingly urban-based politics.

Not only shall I argue that this world-historical context gives new content to the agrarian question. I shall also argue that as world history

has changed, so have the terms of the agrarian question. Briefly, the classical agrarian question occurred at a time of nation building, while the current agrarian question occurs at a time when the nation-state is itself coming under increasing question. Part of this new ferment restores the initiative to rural peoples at the end of a period of world history during which the 'rural' was regarded as a mere residue of pre-modern life. Its stimulus is the phenomenon of 'globalization'.

Globalization is currently a fashionable topic. Studies of the new internationalization of agriculture, of the global food system, of transnational food companies and so forth, have appeared recently and shape our understanding of the agro-food system (see, for example, Sanderson, 1985; Goodman and Redclift, 1989; Friedmann, 1993; Le Heron, 1993; Raynolds *et al.*, 1993; Bonanno *et al.*, 1994; McMichael, 1994; Fine *et al.*, 1996; Burch *et al.*, 1996). It has been claimed that the late-nineteenth-century 'agrarian question', the concern with the role of rural classes in emerging capitalist democracies, is dead (McMichael and Buttel, 1990). A claim such as this stems from the observation that a century after the rural sector was a key element of the project of nation building, this project has been superseded, because of rural demographic decline under industrialization, and the erosion of sectoral and national boundaries with agro-industrialization and globalization of food systems. These changes have accelerated a profound 'de-peasantization' in the latter half of the twentieth century:

the period from 1950 to 1975 . . . saw the most spectacular, rapid, far-reaching, profound, and worldwide social change in global history . . . [This] is the first period in which the peasantry became a minority, not merely in industrial developed countries, in several of which it had remained very strong, but even in the Third World countries

(Hobsbawm, 1992: 56)

– in fact everywhere but South and East Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

THE 'AGRARIAN QUESTION': NATIONAL INTERPRETATION OF A GLOBAL PROCESS?

Conventional wisdom understands the 'agrarian question' as an ingredient of national politics, concerning the political outcome of the process of incorporation of agriculture into capitalist relations. According to William Roseberry, the 'agrarian question' was a political question given primarily an economic answer: that is, attempts to define the peasantry and its input into national politics usually generated analysis of its class location (1993: 336). In this article I want to explore two alternative propositions: first, that the agrarian question has always been a national

interpretation of a global process; and second, that current processes of globalization crystallize this issue in new and challenging ways.

This exploration implicitly addresses Roseberry's concern with the 'capital-centric' epistemology of the classical agrarian question, superimposing a Eurocentric history on non-Europeans. A world-historical interpretation subordinates the class-analytic frame to a political understanding of 'capitalist history', rejecting a capital-logic approach. The goal is to situate localism within changing fields of power, understood as global relations embedded within state practices. It identifies successive state-sanctioned projects, including state-system regimes, that organize commercial agriculture, and in so doing implicate adjacent rural communities and natural resources within broader political and ecological relations. Local agricultural communities may retain a local dynamic, but they must negotiate retention of that dynamic with various 'instituted market' processes as the reach of states and international agencies expands. It is these overlapping relationships, inhering in specific ways in local communities, which constitute the field of negotiation/resistance, and through which communities confront their (ongoing) history (Scott, 1985; Roseberry, 1989, 1993).

There is no doubt that the configuration of agrarian classes, and their relationship to the industrialism in nineteenth-century nation-states, were politically consequential (Moore, 1967; Rueschemeyer *et al.*, 1992). However, from a different perspective there were conditioning global forces. These were identified by Karl Polanyi in his juxtaposition of markets and agrarian protectionism in Europe:

International free trade, if unchecked, must necessarily eliminate ever-larger compact bodies of agricultural producers. This inevitable process of destruction was very much aggravated by the inherent discontinuity in the development of modern means of transportation, which are too expensive to be extended into new regions of the planet unless the prize to be gained is high. Once the great investments involved in the building of steamships and railroads came to fruition, whole continents were opened up and an avalanche of grain descended upon unhappy Europe. . . . Central Europe, facing utter destruction of its rural society, was forced to protect its peasantry by introducing corn laws.

(1957: 182)

In Polanyi's account the peasantry, along with the landed aristocracy, formed the backbone of the protectionist counter-movement across Europe, in the face of cheap grains from the New World. This was a reactionary movement that paradoxically performed the 'socially useful function' of 'stabilizing the European countryside and . . . weakening that drift towards the towns which was the scourge of the time' (Polanyi,

1957: 185). The reactionary character of this late-nineteenth-century counter-movement crystallized in post-First World War Europe, when agrarian counter-revolutionary politics were deployed by the business classes against the growing working-class movement that threatened the attempt to reconstitute market economy. Within the literature and politics of the 'agrarian question', the political potential of the peasantry was largely understood in terms of its imminent expropriation by capitalist market processes (Lenin) or preservation (as a 'disguised proletariat') in tenant-like relations with large capitalist farmers (Kautsky). In other words, a political question was understood in economic terms that were inadequate in scope – not only because the economic sphere was global, but also because it was politically mediated.

Whether we examine agrarian relations as conditioned by global forces, or as intrinsically political because states are institutions of the world market (McMichael, 1987), the 'agrarian question' has always been situated globally. Furthermore, from Polanyi's perspective, the 'fierce agrarianism of postwar Europe' and 'the "reagrarianization" of Central Europe started by the Bolshevik scare' (1957: 188) were keys to understanding how the liberal market project came, paradoxically, to depend upon agricultural protectionism. In other words, the fiction of the self-regulating market (i.e., its commodification of the social fabric: money, labour and land) was revealed in its historic institutional requirements – whether central banking to regulate currencies, labour legislation to stabilize the proletariat, or Corn Laws to regulate the supply of wage-foods. In each case, for Polanyi, the political by-products were: national-constitutionalism, labour-aristocracies and liberal, rather than social, democracies, respectively. These were the foundations of nation-statism. The 'great transformation' was, then, the crystallization of this movement into a set of relatively coherent national-states with the collapse of the world market in the inter-war years. This was the set of social democracies that formed within an autarkic movement. Autarkic tendencies, and the growing political weight of organized labour, gave rise to the Fordist-Keynesian national political-economic contract of the post-Second World War era. This was the era of managed capitalism, organized along distinctly national lines (within the international framework of the Bretton Woods system of national currency regulation). It modelled the integration of agriculture and industry, and was buoyed by a protected, high-wage economy based in mass production and consumption.

The so-called 'self-regulating market' was a hegemonic construct of the nineteenth-century British state, using its military and commercial power in addition to the discourse of economic liberalism. It embodied two contradictory movements: (1) the attempt to secure a non-territorial global market system in the manner of a colonial system writ large –

with Britain as the 'workshop of the world' complemented by the colonies, including settler colonies, as global sources of food and industrial raw materials; and (2) a related nationalist mobilization in the metropolitan world (McMichael, 1985). Rival metropolitan states, through which some of these global circuits passed, reorganized their economies along similar lines in a protective movement designed to secure national and overseas territories. In regard to the competition from cheap grains, for example, Polanyi remarked: 'it had been forgotten by free traders that land formed part of the territory of the country, and that the territorial character of sovereignty was not merely a result of sentimental associations, but of massive facts, including economic ones' (1957: 183–4). Each movement clearly conditioned the other, and, to cut a detailed story short, Polanyi's 'great transformation' was the resolution of the contradiction, elevating the cause of national-statism in the inter-war years of the twentieth century.

In this resolution lay the seeds of a new, late-twentieth-century project of liberalization that is generating a new kind of agrarian question. These seeds were: (1) the decolonization movement that was the non-European analogue of the national movement in the centre, but unfolding within a particular world-historical context that subverted southern nation-building; and (2) an embedding in the inter-state system of 'managed' agriculture that has become increasingly unmanageable.

THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT AND ITS LIMITS

(1) Decolonization

Decolonization unfolded via the completion of the nation-state system as a historical movement rooted in European imperialism. The construction of national (developmental) states emulated the western experience, whether capitalist or socialist. Embraced by indigenous elites, nation-state building was framed by the neocolonial structures of the Cold War – including retention of an international division of labour favouring metropolitan states (the North Atlantic capitalist states and the Soviet Union) underwritten by foreign aid programmes and the Bretton Woods monetary and trade regimes (McMichael, 1996a). Within this framework, decolonization simultaneously promoted and impeded nation-state building in the south.

While biased towards the industrial model, western developmentalism included the goal of constructing nationally organized farm sectors. These were based in rural reforms designed to secure national hinterlands and to build self-sufficiency in basic grains, via green revolution technologies, to accommodate growing urban populations. The capitalized family farming model associated with this form of agriculture

(Llambi, 1988) coexisted with, and in many cases depended upon, the tropical export sector established under colonialism (for hard currency to purchase technology). But as the global scale of agro-industrial technologies has matured, these two forms of agriculture, tropical exports and basic grains, have been progressively displaced, as this section outlines.

During the nineteenth century, under Britain's liberal trade regime, the composition of agro-exports from the colonies changed, as industrial commodities displaced luxuries such as silks and spices. The new industrial commodities entering world trade were for consumption by Europe's emerging industrial proletariat (sugar, coffee, tea, cocoa, vegetable oils) and expanding factories (cotton, timber, rubber and jute).³ As this colonial complementarity deepened, another pattern of trade with the ex-colonial settler states (USA, Australia, New Zealand, Canada) emerged which would transform the shape of world agriculture in the twentieth century. Exports of temperate products (grains, meat) from these regions supplemented, and then competed with, metropolitan agriculture, provisioning the staple diets of European labour forces (Friedmann, 1987). Whereas colonial agro-export production expressed tropical ecologies, settler agro-export production in temperate lands replicated metropolitan agriculture, but at lower cost given the new agricultural frontier and the flexibility of family farming (Friedmann, 1978).

In the late nineteenth century, settler farming formed the new agricultural core of the world economy, fuelling industrialization in Europe as well as in the settler states. With the relatively low frontier person-to-land ratio, this strategic provisioning role nurtured a highly productive energy- and capital-intensive agriculture (Goodman *et al.*, 1987). In fact, this form of industrial agriculture became the model for agricultural development in the twentieth century, first in Europe and then in the post-colonial world (Friedmann and McMichael, 1989; Burbach and Flynn, 1974; George, 1984). The model is significant because it required continual external inputs provided through the market, whether technological inputs such as oil, inorganic fertilizers, hybrid seeds, machinery, pesticides, etc., or speciality agricultural outputs such as corn and soy feeds for the new intensive meat sub-sector, for example. On a national scale, the model was a vehicle for the integration of industry and agriculture, fuelling the prosperity of what has been termed the 'Fordist-Keynesian' national economy (Kenney *et al.*, 1989). On the transnational scale, large agribusiness firms coordinated exchanges of these inputs across national boundaries, the exchanges originating in the post-war settlements in Europe and East Asia, whose reconstruction depended on US trade and export credits (Block, 1977; Cleaver, 1977; McMichael and Kim, 1994). The agro-industrial complex thus was simultaneously nationally organized and internationally sourced.

In the meantime, agro-industrialization intensified the global division of labour associated with colonialism. While industrial uses of rubber, fibres and some vegetable oils (for soaps, lubricants and paint) had expanded since the late nineteenth century, in the mid-twentieth century diets of processed foods expanded dramatically, deepening the demand for certain tropical products such as vegetable oils and sugar. Fats and sweeteners were the key ingredients of so-called 'durable foods' (Friedmann, 1991), the analogue of manufactured consumer durables associated with industrial Fordism. These tropical commodities, as exports, underwrote post-colonial development projects for a time. However, the role of tropical commodities as exports became increasingly precarious as agribusiness technologies matured. Following metropolitan substitution of rubber and fibres (Mann, 1987), the search for substitutes for tropical food products began as the agribusiness complex matured and corporations sought to use by-products of metropolitan agriculture (e.g. corn syrup, soy oils) as alternatives.

While food substitutes appeared during the post-Second World War period they did not seriously affect trade volumes until the 1970s and beyond, when the terms of trade for tropical products declined significantly, as 'import substitution of tropical exports' matured (Friedmann, 1991: 74–5). For example, in the USA, the world's largest sugar importer, sugar's share of the domestic sweetener market declined from 72 per cent to 43 per cent between 1978 and 1985, during which period sugar imports fell by half. By 1985 all US soft drink sweeteners were supplied by sugar substitutes. Meanwhile, the EC, with its highly protected sugar producers, became the largest sugar-exporting region in the world. Producers in Brazil, India, the Philippines, Thailand and several poor African and Caribbean countries consequently lost considerable ground in the world market (Hathaway, 1987: 40–1). The same pattern emerged for tropical oils (palm, coconut, peanut, cotton), which have yielded ground to temperate oilseeds such as soy beans, sunflower, canola and mustard (Friedmann, 1991: 77). The moral of this part of the story is that substitution has considerably eroded the agricultures fostered by colonialism, upon which southern states depend for export earnings.

Meanwhile, post-colonial developmentalism depended on programmes of rural reform to stabilize peasantries: both land and credit reform. Land reforms sought to *replicate* the American family farm model. More often than not, land reform was a counter-insurgency strategy of rural stabilization – often in the wake of policies privileging urban classes. East Asian (Japan, Taiwan and South Korea) land reforms, instituted in the late 1940s, were a model in two senses: (1) peasant and tenant militancy was considerable before the American Military Government land reforms; (2) the reforms reduced tenancy and promoted owner-occupancy on a small-holding basis (McMichael

and Kim, 1994). From then on, land reforms 'came on a "first struggle, first served" basis', revealing their conservative thrust (Araghi, 1995).

Agrarian reforms generally bypassed commercially developed farm lands (Araghi, 1995). Accordingly, reforms reconstructed subsistence producers as petty-commodity producers at the same time as they sanctioned agro-industrialism (de Janvry 1981: 203). Varying by crop, ecology and region, much of Third World agriculture has an unequal, or bimodal, pattern, where ratios of scale of farming and percentage of landholding population have been quite inverse. Even so, incorporation of petty producers into commodity circuits often exposed them to market forces and episodes of large-scale expropriation.⁴ For instance: 'In Brazil, the government's planned, concerted efforts to modernize and rationalize agriculture from small holdings producing food for domestic consumption into a capital-intensive, export-oriented machine for earning foreign exchange resulted in the uprooting of 28.4 million people between 1960 and 1980 – a number greater than the entire population of Argentina' (Rich, 1994: 155).

The World Bank's new poverty alleviation programmes, begun under Robert McNamara in the 1970s,⁵ also exacerbated peasant deprivations, allegedly displacing 'hundreds of millions of peasants around the world' (Rich, 1994: 91). In internal reports, the Bank acknowledged that nearly 45 per cent of its eighty-two agricultural projects (1975–82) were unsatisfactory in alleviating poverty (Rich, 1994: 97). Feder suggests that the fallacy of the World Bank's scheme was expecting credit funds channelled into inequitable social settings to remain in the hands of the smallholder, and concludes that the (un)intended consequence was to undermine subsistence agriculture and integrate all agricultural production into commercial cropping rather than food cropping (1983: 222).

Re-peasantization did proceed in some regions on the basis of land redistribution and settlement of new frontiers. The World Bank financed large resettlement schemes, notably in Indonesia, Brazil, Malaysia and India. Such schemes often simply relocated poverty and have been characterized as resembling 'a war against the earth's rapidly dwindling tropical forests' (Rich, 1994: 95). Nevertheless, in Latin America two-thirds of the additional food production between 1950 and 1980 came from colonization of new land (Grigg, 1993: 185), during this period the number of petty commodity producers with an average of 2 hectares increasing by 92 per cent (Araghi, 1995). In Africa, traditional colonial exports such as tea and coffee were reorganized along smallholder lines in Kenya and the Ivory Coast (Grigg, 1993: 145). Overall:

In Latin America, arable land increased by 94 million hectares or 109 percent; in Asia by 103 million hectares or 30 percent, [while in Africa] it seems likely that there was an actual decline. . . . In

the 1970s new land in the world was being settled at the rate of 4–5 million hectares per annum, an addition to the arable area of 0.3 percent per annum; but in the 1980s less than 3 million hectares were being added, at 0.2 per cent per annum.

(Grigg, 1993: 103–4)

Within the developmentalist framework, then, agrarian reforms juxtaposed capitalist farming and petty commodity production in various combinations with varying outcomes for the peasantries concerned. Arguably, the ultimate goal was extending the 'reach of the state' (Shue, 1988) by incorporating peasantries into market relations. Developmentalism also depended on the cheap food policies made possible by the US food aid programme. Over time, the low prices of the food regime threatened peasant farming through the price mechanism – whether directly through food markets or through industrial policies geared to lowering wage costs via cheap food imports (de Janvry, 1981: 160, Friedmann, 1982). The transformation of large parts of the Third World into food deficit regions is the measure of this phenomenon.⁶ In Latin America, other than Argentina and Uruguay, all countries switched from being grain exporters to grain importers between the 1930s and the 1970s (de Janvry, 1981: 70). Across the Third World as a whole, the ratio of food imports to food exports increased from 50 per cent in 1955–60 to 80 per cent in 1975 (Araghi, 1995). And while the Third World accounted for 10 per cent of wheat imports in the 1950s, by the 1980s this measure had risen to two-thirds (Grigg, 1993: 241).

Third World food dependency has grown in spite, and perhaps because, of the green revolution.⁷ The green revolution represented a form of agricultural import-substitution, corresponding to the nationalism of the decolonization movement. However, it also introduced the agro-industrial dynamic into Third World food production. This dynamic extended from basic grains to other agricultures, leading to what Ernst Feder termed the 'other green revolution' (1983) and Billie DeWalt termed the 'second green revolution' (1985). It involves, notably, the substitution of feed crops for basic food crops – for example, in Mexico sorghum displaces maize, Brazil's black bean crop loses ground to soy crops, and in Thailand feed corn and cassava pellets displace rice and cassava root crops. The 'indirect versus direct consumption of cereals' (Yotopoulos, 1985: 477) involves an elemental competition among social classes over food resources that has spread globally (Barkin *et al.*, 1990). It also involves conversion of arable land into cattle pasture, as grazing has expanded in step with rising affluent diets. Indeed, the new green revolution applies the technologies of the original green revolution to the 'new agriculture' (Rama, 1985), now geared to markets for high-value foods, such as fresh fruit and vegetables and animal proteins.

These markets are both domestic and global, expressing a process of generalization of affluent class diets, which condition the global restructuring of agricultures.

In sum, decolonization (as an extension of the state system and its neocolonial framework) has altered significantly the social landscape of agriculture on a global scale. Developmentalism embodies the contradictory principles of replication and substitution. Third World states have sought to *replicate* the metropolitan model, with tropical exports underwriting construction of a basic grains farm sector rooted in green revolution technologies. At the same time, land reform has been deployed to stabilize the peasantry as petty-commodity producers, incorporated into the national project (but also into the uncertainty of credit and commodity circuits). Continuing agro-industrialization has resulted in a dynamic of *substitution*: displacing tropical exports and converting basic food cropping to commercial cropping to provide agro-industrial inputs and luxury foods for affluent urban and foreign diets.

On a world scale, a new division of agricultural labour pivoted on a complementary specialization in high-value 'non-traditional' exports from the south and low-value cereals exports from the north, reinforcing southern food dependency (McMichael, 1992).⁸ The apparent comparative advantages in this relationship have come to inform multilateral policies of 'structural adjustment' and the visions of the global regulators: proponents of a corporate-based GATT regime. At the base of this edifice stands the remaining peasantry, threatened with direct expulsion from the land, or transformation into contract labour for agribusiness firms (Little and Watts, 1994), which, in regions of rapid economic growth (e.g. Thailand and Malaysia), is proving to be impermanent (Glover and Lim, 1992). In this manner, national developmentalism has served to intensify global integration.

(2) Managed agro-industrialism

The story of 'managed agro-industrialism' is the other side of decolonization. It concerns the competitive, rather than complementary, aspect of globalized agriculture – in particular the destabilizing effects of the extension of the American model of agro-industrialization, and its food surpluses, in the post-war era.

Political management of surpluses underwrote the post-Second World War food regime. It restored and stabilized metropolitan agro-industrial complexes, and incorporated Third World states and consumers within concessional circuits of food aid (Friedmann, 1982). That is, the food regime was a political construct, managed by states across the north/south divide. The transitory character of this food regime derived from the contradictory national and international movements around

which it was constructed (see Friedmann and McMichael, 1989). The national movement elaborated national farm sectors, geared to food security goals and agro-industrial development strategies modelled on an *ideal* perception of the US national economy (as a balanced articulation of industrial and agricultural economic sectors). The international movement reconstructed metropolitan agricultures via inputs from US agribusiness, and diffused the biochemical technologies of the green revolution to the Third World.

As the American dietary model spread, with animal protein at its core, so did the global sourcing of local livestock industries with specialized feedstuffs.⁹ In this specialized exchange lay the rise of what Friedmann (1991) has termed the New Agricultural Countries (NACs) such as Brazil, Thailand, Argentina and Hungary. Replication of the agro-industrial model in the south is at best a partial process. Like Lipietz's concept of 'global fordism' in manufacturing (1987), the transfer of agricultural technologies has not guaranteed a high-wage consumer society in the south, where extreme social inequalities encourage agro-exporting to capture affluent markets overseas. Indeed, the Brazilian adaptation of agro-industrialization, from the management of surpluses to subsidized agro-exporting, is a model of this strategy (LeClercq, 1989; Friedmann, 1993: 46). The GATT Uruguay Round originated in the trade instabilities arising from the proliferation of competitive agro-exporting.

The most dramatic example of this was the subsidized rivalry between the USA and the EC in agricultural commodity markets. In effect, 'over-managed' agriculture underwrote a massive dumping of commodities on the world market in the 1980s as these two farm blocs competed for market share with their agricultural surpluses. In general, world agricultural production increased considerably between 1970 and 1989: with world cereals increasing by 50 per cent, and agriculture in centrally planned economies in the south by 100 per cent, in Africa by 40 per cent and in the Near East by 60–80 per cent. Arguably, 'Increases in Southern production should have been the golden opportunity for Northern states to pull out of much intensive farming and, by the careful use of taxation, to encourage a range of environmentally sound practices' (Middleton *et al.*, 1993: 127). However, farm subsidies quadrupled in the USA, and doubled in the EC, in the early 1980s. The resulting surpluses substantially depressed world agricultural prices – from a mean of 100 in 1975 down to 61 in 1989 (a decline of 39 per cent). In this instability lay the origins of the Cairns Group of agro-exporting nations that have sought to abolish subsidized agriculture through GATT. For example, one member, Argentina, found that its earnings in cereals and vegetable-oil seeds (accounting for 50 per cent of its export earnings in 1980) fell by 40 per cent in the 1980s as a result of US and EC dumping (Middleton *et al.*, 1993: 129).

Agro-exporting intensified under the dictates of the 1980s debt regime. The multilateral institutions fostered agro-exporting as a debt-servicing strategy, depressing commodity prices as exports flooded world markets. The consequences have been declining terms of trade for southern states, fiscal stress for the 'breadbasket' states (European states and the USA in particular) as subsidies escalated, and prosperity for the food traders. Under these circumstances, momentum gathered to liberalize the world food economy in the name of comparative advantage. This scenario, coordinated by transnational firms and regulated by the World Trade Organization, subordinates agro-ecology (and place) to the abstractions of the world market.

GLOBALIZATION AND THE POLITICS OF AGRICULTURE

As Polanyi reminds us, market rule requires institutional mechanisms, otherwise the process of commodification is unsustainable. The nineteenth-century variant of market rule generated national institutional agencies (central banking, constitutional politics, tariff structures, national labour legislation). In the late twentieth century, market rule implies a more complex institutional anchoring. It is more complex because 'efficiency' is a more abstract slogan than 'nationalism'. In my view, institutional anchoring involves legitimating the power of global institutions in the state system itself. The mechanisms involve a combination of coercion (e.g. IMF loan conditions imposed on indebted states) and consent (e.g. acceptance of economic liberalism as a political programme).

The GATT negotiations exemplify the links between the rhetoric of liberalization and the reality of strengthening global regulatory mechanisms that compromise national and local sovereignty. The politics of the Uruguay Round concerns the challenge by the Multinational Trade Negotiations (MTN) Coalition¹⁰ to national trade controls that regulate import quantities, farm subsidies that inflate prices for agricultural commodities, and supply management policies that restrict the demand for farm inputs such as fertilizer and chemicals. These regulations all compromise the flexibility of transnational corporations to use world market relations against high-priced producers and to consolidate market and production spheres globally (McMichael, 1993).

While the terms of the challenge concern the principle of market versus institutional forces in shaping economic relations, the substance concerns food security. At its inception, GATT's Article XI included food security provisions permitting member nations to implement 'export prohibitions or restrictions temporarily applied to prevent or relieve critical shortages of foodstuffs or other products essential to the exporting contracting party' (quoted in Ritchie, 1993: 11). The Reagan

administration's proposal to the Uruguay Round directly challenged this provision on those grounds of economic orthodoxy proposed by the MTN. Neoclassical economic theory posits the superior efficiency of free world markets in food, supplied by breadbasket regions and organized by transnational food corporations. As the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) claimed:

The U.S. has always maintained that self-sufficiency and food security are not one and the same. *Food security – the ability to acquire the food you need when you need it – is best provided through a smooth-functioning world market. . . .* In the food security context, we have also proposed that the permission to restrict or inhibit exports of agricultural food products to relieve critical food shortage be removed from Article XI.

(quoted in Ritchie, 1993: 25, emphasis added)

The *realpolitik* behind this espousal of economic orthodoxy exemplifies the coincidence of state and corporate interests central to American 'green power' (Revel and Riboud, 1986; McMichael, 1994). The green power project emerged out of a confluence of a profitability crisis in American agriculture in the late 1960s (de Janvry, 1981: 177), and an agro-export strategy recommended in the Williams Report to President Nixon in 1971. The report included a plan to reorganize world agriculture, explicitly recommending a division of world agricultural labour in which the Third World would specialize in labour-intensive crops such as fruit, vegetables and sugar to finance their balance of payments, and the USA would in turn supply these regions with cheaper grain (de Janvry, 1981: 179). As a result, the USA switched emphasis from concessional to commercial food exports, cornering 60 per cent of a rapidly expanding world grain trade by 1980 (Insel, 1985: 897).

This successful agro-export policy in the 1970s was institutionalized in US farm policy. As such, it possessed an inertial power when President Reagan's counter-revolution began in the 1980s. A centrepiece of this was the Reagan administration's deployment of the Uruguay Round to rewrite domestic policy (Paarlberg, 1992; Ritchie, 1993: 7) – using the rhetoric of loyalty to GATT liberalization measures to dismantle social policies and governmental regulations that 'distorted' US trade relations. Not only did the Reagan administration see the Uruguay Round as a vehicle for rewriting US farm and food policy, but also it 'planned to trade away a number of important domestic industries, including textiles, auto, steel, and forestry in exchange for improved market access for US-based finance and service sector transnational corporations' (Ritchie, 1993: 7).

Dismantling US regulations was also linked to the removal of trade barriers and farm subsidies elsewhere in the world. The dispute over

Japanese rice import liberalization is part of this story (see McMichael and Kim, 1994), just as was the successful demand by US fast-food corporations that Japan should open its market for beef, as a pretext for challenging US import controls on lean beef for hamburger meat (Ritchie, 1993: 35). Similarly, the US linked green power, based in an increasingly internationalized (i.e. specialized and concentrated) American farm sector, to Third World food dependency. The 1985 Farm Bill was aimed at restructuring the world food market by drastically cheapening prices of US agro-exports. As US Agricultural Secretary John Block said in 1986:

The push by some developing countries to become more self-sufficient in food may be reminiscent of a bygone era. These countries could save money by importing more food from the United States. . . . The US has used the World Bank to back up this policy, going so far as making the dismantling of farmer support programs a condition for loans, as is the case for Morocco's support for their domestic cereal producers.

(quoted in Schaeffer, 1995: 268)

The challenge to the EC's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), a rival for agro-export markets, derived from a US domestic proposal for decoupling price supports and supply management from farmer subsidies.¹¹ The CAP programme of 1992 incorporated the decoupling demand of the USA, which not only compromised the CAP but also precipitated mass protests within the EC against the Uruguay Round and unravelled the member-state coalition (Ritchie, 1993: 39).

Opposition to the Uruguay Round ranged across the world from East Asian rice farmers, through Indian farmers' dramatic protests against the corporate use of GATT to appropriate control over seed patenting, to divisions within the EC. In the initial year of the Uruguay Round, a farmer-consumer-environmentalist-NGO coalition cited GATT's response to the *phenomenal* aspects of the farm crisis, namely trade issues, as inadequate. Export dumping and the challenge to food security, food safety and the environment were identified as more fundamental issues (Ritchie, 1993: 43). The following year family farm, consumer and environmental leaders from around the world began regular meetings, enunciating seven principles of 'fair trade' that have become the foundation of opposition to the corporate GATT regime: (1) national food security; (2) the principle of 'embedded liberalism'¹² in formulating national farm policy; (3) price floors for agricultural products; (4) national supply management; (5) outlawing of export dumping; (6) recognition of special needs of developing countries; (7) global management of world grain stocks to maintain fair farm prices and incomes (Ritchie, 1993: 44-5). In 1989, coinciding with the official

GATT mid-term review in Montreal, all major farm organizations from the north, with considerable representation of southern groups, drafted a document entitled 'Building a world agriculture', in which they challenged the economism of the GATT proposals, arguing that such multilateral agreements should also view agriculture as a social, cultural and political activity, restating the fair trade provisions, including a demand to maintain the 'family farm' model (Ritchie, 1993: 44-5).

Such collective opposition to the GATT programme is, of course, a reappearance of Polanyi's cycle of regulatory responses to the self-regulating market fiction. However, unlike the national counter-movements to Britain's free trade regime, this current opposition is locally based but typically globally coordinated and informed. It pursues national political strategies because the globalization project must, in the first instance, be anchored (legitimated) within the state system. Whereas the GATT project is global in scope, facility (e.g. the World Trade Organization) and consequence, it is nevertheless institutionally bound to operate through its member states. Organizational renewal requires ratification, and compliance, by member states and their constituencies. The relative organization of rural constituencies across the north/south divide, of course, is quite uneven, which is one reason why the Chiapas 'rebels' have projected their political demands so broadly, beyond local protectionism.

SPECIFYING GLOBALIZATION

One common image of globalization is that of the diffusion of a singular market culture. In this formulation, globalization is depicted (and/or advocated) as a process of growing economic and political integration. Rather than conceive of globalization phenomenally, as a trend, it is more usefully conceived of as a contradictory historical project – a mechanism of political and economic restructuring (see McMichael, 1996b). It is a response to, if not a cause of, the breakdown of the Bretton Woods system of national regulation. The globalization project is manifested in a variety of ways, unified by the belief in market liberalization. The belief is projected at the international, *as well as the national*, level by ideologues, administrators and development strategists. It gives licence to schemes for privatization, dismantling of the social infrastructure of Third World states, deregulation of investment, trade and banking laws, dilution of environmental and employment protections, reductions in social entitlement, social subsidies (e.g. food prices), and wages and so on. The outcome is to strengthen market forces, meaning those institutions and corporations that organize circuits of labour, money and products. As a historical project it is by no means inevitable, and is already generating new forms of opposition.

What does the 'historical project' of globalization mean? Globalization has always been a substantive tendency in modern capitalism. There have been global civilizational projects like colonialism, but they were embedded in the expansion of rival nation-states. Only now is globalization conceived of explicitly as a *universal* way of organizing the social and natural world. If modernization was the touchstone of US hegemony in the post-war nation-state system, globalization plays a parallel role in the post-hegemonic era of corporate world market rule. Each discourse embodies a conception of world order. For modernization it was 'learn from, and catch up with, the west', while for globalization it is 'find your niche in the global economy'. The former held out replication as the key project, the latter holds out differentiation as the path to economic glory. Of course there are subtexts. Modernization theory was deployed as a tactic of decolonization and the institutionalization of western rationalism to secure the geopolitical frontiers of the Cold War. Globalization, on the other hand, is a tactic of recolonization, niche building being a polite way to restructure economic sectors, labour forces and nation-states to serve global investors.

The attempt to establish world market rule requires not only an institutional framework, but one anchored in a powerful state – as in Britain's free trade regime in the nineteenth century. Having lost the unqualified commercial and financial supremacy of a hegemonic state, the United States has sought other enforcement mechanisms to assert/retain its power in the world (see Arrighi, 1994). In particular, in the 1980s it led the struggle to instrumentalize GATT as the third leg of a powerful New Institutional Trinity (as the recent chair of the G-77, Luis Fernando Jaramillo, called the World Bank, IMF and GATT) dedicated to establishing a neoliberal discipline in the interstate system. In the 1990s, as undisputed military superpower in the post-Cold War era, the USA set in place a tributary system, led by Japan, to offset its recently acquired financial deficit, while other states submit to the discipline of finance capital (Cox, 1992: 37). The structure of global power, at this level, embodies a contradictory juxtaposition of power. On the one hand, the G-7 assert world market rules in the exercise of collective world-economic management, while, on the other, a recalcitrant United States remains undisciplined by these rules. Neo-mercantilist threats by the USA to deploy Super-301¹³ against Japan, hard on the heels of the provisional completion of the Uruguay Round, illustrate the dualism of global power.¹⁴

Such dualism allows the rhetoric of economic liberalism to obscure the politics of global restructuring – understood as a northern, corporate¹⁵ project framed by the tensions of the interstate system, in which rivalry is increasingly expressed in regionalization (Johnson, 1991). At the global level the universality of market rule is proclaimed as the

operational principle of globalization. But the distinguishing feature of globalization is precisely its non-universalist implications. In particular, it explicitly transcends the universalism of 'national developmentalism'.

In international fora the challenge to national developmentalism has taken various forms – symbolized in the 1992 UN Earth Summit in Rio. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) was supposed to review progress on the recommendations of the 1987 Brundtland Commission (a World Commission on Environment and Development established by the UN Secretary-General), which linked environmental degradation to poverty. In fact, the Earth Summit deviated from the question of global inequities, stressing the priority of environmental problems but 'without distorting international trade and investment' – as stated in Principle 16 (quoted in Middleton *et al.*, 1993: 25). The Earth Summit expressed two shifts in emphasis: (1) the call for global management of the environment, necessarily overriding local/national politics; and (2) the related concern with maintaining the viability of the 'global economy', rather than addressing deteriorating economic conditions across the world, in the south in particular.

Northern concern with southern competition for resources and global waste sinks represents a narrowing of focus. Instead of a broader linking of environmental concerns and social justice (at the national and sub-national level), 'global ecology' concerns converged on greenhouse gas emissions, protection of biodiversity, reduction of pollution in international waters, and reduction in ozone layer depletion. Subordinating southern development initiatives to these global environmental goals, while not unreasonable in principle,¹⁶ reflects two things: (1) the general reversal of the post-war development project; and (2) the new global ecology that consolidates northern power to manage consumption and exploitation of global resources. As Sachs commented: 'The rational planning of the planet becomes a matter of Northern security' (1993: 20).

In place of national development initiatives, the institutional fallout from UNCED is the creation of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), geared to helping southern states to 'contribute towards solving global environmental problems' as detailed above. In fact, 50 per cent of the projects approved in the GEF's first tranche were for 'biodiversity protection' (Hildyard, 1993: 33–4). The point is not that 'development' *per se* is rejected, but that it is undergoing a redefinition. The detour is from a belief in unrestrained growth, sanctioning the concept of universal (national) replication of the western model, to recognizing the finiteness of natural resources and the need for 'sustainable development' via global regulation. As presently framed, global ecology would preserve northern lifestyles through judicious stewardship of the global commons.

This movement towards global regulation follows hard on the heels of the debt regime of the 1980s, managed by the IMF and the World Bank through conditional lending to indebted states concentrated in the south. Imposition of global austerity restructured power relations across the interstate system. The debt crisis (as an individualized crisis) enabled debt managers to end the 'illusion' of national development (Arrighi, 1990), to institute export-led growth in the service of repayment, and to reorganize political and economic power within individual states (McMichael, 1995). In particular, Structural Adjustment Policies required dismantling of social infrastructure, significant privatization and deregulation of protective laws regarding foreign investment, national banking and trade policy.

The attempt to standardize political and economic reforms and financial packages across the south reconstructs regions and locales which submit to market rule: from the removal of Mexican campesinos from long-held communal lands, to the proliferation of Export Processing Zones and agro-export platforms, many of which suffer the instability of 'flexibility' strategies of footloose firms. Under these conditions, globalization is everything but universalist in its consequences. It assigns communities, regions and nation-states new niches, or specialized roles (including marginalization), in the global economy. Whereas the development project involved the replication of national social-economies, producing national products, the globalization project would differentiate states and their constituent regions as producers of a 'world product' (Harris, 1987: 167).

RETHINKING THE AGRARIAN QUESTION

The classical agrarian question concerned the political consequences of the subordination of landed property to capital within a problematic assigning rural society a declining importance. If we reconceptualize the agrarian transition within a world-historical context the problematic becomes more complex. Thus, the classical nation/class problematic is contextualized, and becomes increasingly residual in (or at least subordinate to) an emerging global/peasant problematic. Neither an assumption of linearity in capital's subordination of landed property, nor the assumption that the assault on rural cultures is inevitable or desirable, is sustainable. The political counter-movement – in both proliferating social movements and in the declining legitimacy of 'developmentalism' – is generating alternative paradigms (however utopian) that acknowledge the destabilizing impact of rural assault, and privilege the voices and practices of those who experience the assault. What were once perceived as residual political and social phenomena – e.g. ethnicity (vs. citizenship), rurality (vs. urbanity) – have emerged as social

forces and/or social calamities, necessarily re-evaluating national political landscapes.

The new agrarian question is situated within this process of re-evaluation. I say re-evaluation as there is a multitude of local and strategic considerations, just as there are some dramatic global considerations. How to protect and restore local and national food systems from the forces of globalization is perhaps the central issue. At present this is highlighted by the potential disaster of the GATT proposals, addressed by European MP James Goldsmith (1994: 39):

It is estimated that there are still 3.1 billion people in the world who live from the land. If GATT manages to impose worldwide the sort of productivity achieved by the intensive agriculture of nations such as Canada and Australia, then it is easy to calculate that about two billion of these people will become redundant. Some of these GATT refugees will move to urban slums. But a large number of them will be forced into mass migration. . . . GATT, if it 'succeeds', will create mass movements of refugees. . . . We will have profoundly and tragically destabilized the world's population.

In relation to this, it is widely acknowledged that passage of the Uruguay Round will (in the immediate future) raise prices of commodities such as wheat and corn, and continue the price decline of cash crops such as coffee and cocoa: the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has estimated, for example, that sub-Saharan Africa would suffer a net loss of \$2.6 billion a year under a GATT regime (GATT Alert! Fair Trade Campaign, 26 August 1994). The FAO reports that agricultural modernization has reduced national food production in favour of agro-exporting, intensifying land concentration, food dependency and hunger (cited in Wiehoff, 1996).

The threat of a GATT regime, involving the global centralization of public and private authority (Gill, 1992; McMichael, 1992), is matched by 'green globalism' (Lohmann, 1993). The latter – bureaucratic fallout from the adoption of Agenda 21 at Rio – portends an enclosure movement on a world scale. While this would continue World Bank lending patterns, in subordinating natural resources to large-scale development projects, it is likely to be the next step in generating a universal facility for managing the global commons. Just as the GATT regime, via the WTO, is geared to universalizing IMF procedures of case-by-case subordination of states to market rule, so UNCED (via the FAO) has plans to zone southern land for cash cropping with the assistance of national states. Under this regime, subsistence farming would only be allowed where 'natural resource limitations' or 'environmental or socioeconomic constraints' prevent intensification. And

where national governments deem marginal land to be 'overpopulated', they are encouraged to consider transmigration programmes. As Hildyard observes:

The global managers thus threaten to unleash a new wave of colonialism, in which the management of people – even whole societies – for the benefit of commercial interests is now justified in the name of environmental protection. Whereas in the past 'crown sovereignty' and 'poverty alleviation' were used to legitimize the appropriation of local resources and the dismantling of local institutions for the national good, under the new regime, integral local practices are to be broken down yet further in the service of systemic goals. This time these goals are not simply to provide raw materials, cheap labour, and markets to an international economic system, but also to supply environmental repair or caretaker services to mitigate the problems that system itself has created. Carbon-dioxide-absorbing tree farms will supplant peasant fields and fallows, tropical forests will be taken away from their inhabitants to provide services to Northern industry, researchers and tourists, and population control efforts will be redoubled as a way of taking pressure off northern-controlled resources.

(1993: 33)

Whether and to what extent the globalization project succeeds, it has already generated alternative movements, not the least being the revival of questions of cultural sovereignty long suppressed by the promises of the development project. Paul Vieille (1988: 237–8) captures this in describing development 'mimetism' in the Third World:

While affirming their nationhood, States could see no other way of developing as nations except by imitating States which had been successful, ie, western countries; popular culture was seen as unfitted for development, as primitive and irrational. . . . The rejection of popular culture by the nation State was accepted for some time by the peoples concerned because it was underpinned and counterbalanced by the promise of development.

With the crisis of the development project, this mimetic moment unravels, generating movements of cultural identity and informalization in a general withdrawal from the state (Cheru, 1989; Rau, 1991; Latouche, 1993). While political instability and chronic impoverishment often accompany these movements, it is also the case they can be grounds for renewal of local rights, claims and community politics – as the recent¹⁷ Chiapas revolt demonstrates so well.

The Chiapas revolt marks a new kind of political action, precisely because it links the struggle for local rights to the historical process

whereby the Mexican state has facilitated the exploitation of the region. As Subcomandante Marcos, the Zapatista spokesperson, characterized the Chiapas condition:

Oil, electric energy, cattle, money, coffee, bananas, honey, corn, cocoa, tobacco, sugar, soy, melons, sorghum, mamey, mangos, tamarind, avocados, and Chiapan blood flows out through a thousand and one fangs sunk into the neck of Southeastern Mexico. Billions of tons of natural resources go through Mexican ports, railway stations, airports, and road systems to various destinations: the United States, Canada, Holland, Germany, Italy, Japan – but all with the same destiny: to feed the empire. . . . The jungle is opened with machetes, wielded by the same campesinos whose land has been taken away by the insatiable beast. Trees fall and dynamite explodes in lands where only the campesinos are prohibited from felling trees to plant crops. . . . Poor people can not cut down trees, but the oil company, more and more in the hands of foreigners, can. . . . Fifty-five percent of the nation's hydroelectric power comes from this state, as well as twenty percent of all the electric energy of Mexico. Nevertheless, only a third of all Chiapan houses have electricity. (Communique 1, 1992)

The EZLN rejects the elimination from the agenda of all questions about national politics. We are not trying to force national agreements, but we have the right to make our opinions known about the diverse aspects of public life in Mexico, as all members of the EZLN are Mexicans by birth. (Communique 19, 24 January 1994)

Why does the federal government take the question of national politics off the proposed agenda of the dialogue for peace? Are the indigenous Chiapan people only Mexican enough to be exploited, but not Mexican enough to be allowed an opinion on national politics? does the country want Chiapan oil, electrical energy, natural resources, labor, in short, the life blood of Chiapas, but not the opinions of indigenous people of Chiapas about the future of the country? what kind of citizens are the indigenous people of Chiapas? ('Citizens in formation?', Communique 22, 31 January 1994)

(Quoted in *¡Vivan Los Zapatistas!* 42 (31) (1994): 1)

These communiqués suggest that the EZLN movement expressed a curious coincidence of decline and renewal of Mexican civil society. On the one hand there was the dismantling of the communal tradition of the Mexican national state – symbolized in the infamous reform of Article 27 of the Constitution.¹⁸ This reform privileges private (foreign)

investment in land over the traditional rights of campesinos to petition for land redistribution within the *ejido* framework. The related tilt to market rule, under NAFTA, imposes macroeconomic criteria on the Mexican political-economy to the long-term detriment of the Mexican smallholder and the basic grains sector. This was dramatically exposed by the modern-day Zapatistas, who understand that the US 'comparative advantage' in maize production (6.9 tons vs. 1.7 tons per hectare, including infrastructural disparities) seriously threatens Mexican maize producers, now that the Mexican government, under NAFTA, has agreed to a phase-out of guaranteed prices for staples such as maize and beans (Harvey, 1994: 14).

On the other hand, there is a renewal of (hinterland) 'citizenship' demands embodied in the Chiapas movement. This includes, formally, a challenge to a centuries-old pattern of *caciquismo*, in which federal government initiatives have been thwarted by local political and economic interests (Hernández, 1994: 51) – most recently in the Chiapas patronage system whereby the governor has channelled federal government welfare funds (Solidaridad loans) to local political allies (Harvey, 1994: 20). In challenging local clientelism, the Zapatistas have simultaneously elevated the demands nationally for inclusion of campesino organizations in political decisions regarding rural reforms, as well as advancing the cause of local and/or indigenous development projects that sustain local ecologies and cultures (Harvey, 1994: 36–7) – such as the La Selva Cooperative of Comitán, Chiapas, which comprises small cultivators (1–5 ha) who 'form part of a national small coffee producer network that has penetrated the international coffee market, despite adverse conditions' (Myhre, 1994a: 32).

Arguably, the Chiapas rebellion is a model of the post-national developmental era. This has several elements, many of which have been associated with the so-called 'new social movements' that emerged early in the post-war era, but have only recently gained the attention of western scholars. Actually, these mark the *dénouement* of liberalism, as the framing ideology of modern national political-economic institutions accompanying the rise of the labour movement and citizenship politics (Wallerstein, 1992). These social movements express a variety of political trajectories (feminism, greens, ethno-national, regional associations, NGO politics, etc.), but what is distinctive about the Chiapas rebellion is the *texture* of its political action. Timed to coincide with the implementation of NAFTA (1 January 1994), it wove together a powerful and symbolic critique of the politics of globalization – in both senses: (1) opposing the capitulation of national elites and governments to neoliberalism and market rule on a global/regional scale; and (2) asserting a new political agenda of renewal of previously suppressed cultural practices.

The opportunity for such political renewal lies, paradoxically, in the weakening of the nation-state via globalization. The opportunity is that as states divest themselves of their public largess, patronage politics loses its financial foundation, the 'bureaucratic-authoritarian state' loses salience, and austerity policies force scrutiny of governmental legitimacy from the economically disenfranchised (Walton and Seddon, 1994: 335). The danger is the loss of sovereignty by states as more powerful global private and public authorities gain leverage over policy and institution building (Gill, 1992; McMichael, 1995), and the rise of right-wing sectarian politics as developmental coalitions formed around working- and middle-class politics erode under the austere conditions of structural adjustment (see Gibbon *et al.*, 1992).

How these proliferating movements (from regional cereal banks in Zimbabwe, ecological campaigns by women's groups in West Bengal, campesino credit unions in Mexico, to growing networks of NGOs)¹⁹ interconnect and/or aggregate politically (at the national/regional and/or global level) is part of the new problematic (McMichael, 1996b). Another part is how these movements negotiate with *extant* states over the terms of local and/or cultural sustenance. Potentially, these movements breathe new life into the concept of the 'public interest state', transcending the centralizing thrust of the developmental states of the post-war era, and presenting generalizable possibilities for reclaiming local forms of social organization.

These movements also portend a post-development consciousness, outlined dramatically in a draft document from 'The Alternative Forum: the other voices of the planet':²⁰

To overcome the myth of development, to develop more locally self-sufficient economic systems and to disassociate from traditional technocratic and economic indicators, does not imply perpetuating the status quo between the supposedly developed North and the supposedly underdeveloped South. Obviously, the production of goods and services in the South has to increase and must be directed primarily towards meeting the enormous number of basic needs that are not being covered. With or without the permission of the North, the countries of the South have to use up the world natural resources needed for this increase in production. However, out of pure self interest they should try to adapt their productive systems as far as possible to local ecological conditions, rather than copying the irresponsible and unsustainable models of the North. This, above all, means generating and using as much of production locally as possible because this is the level at which real human needs are most clearly expressed. . . . The end of the Development Era will be harder for the North than for the South.

THEME SECTION

In fact if we take the level of social conflict, the fear of the future and the social fulfilment of people, as general indicators, the North is probably already starting to experience this process.

(*Borrador Conclusiones*, Madrid, May 1994)

CONCLUSION

The argument presented here has explored the possibility of identifying distinctive conditions for the agrarian question in the late twentieth century. This involves reconceptualizing the classical agrarian question and its consequences for twentieth-century agrarian politics from a world-historical perspective, which understands that agriculture is a political construction. The story begins with the late-nineteenth-century agrarian question being posed within the novel dynamics of comparative advantage as an initial food regime emerged. In the twentieth century, the key political episodes are the undermining of colonial agricultures by *substitution*, of national agricultures by the process of *replication*, and, potentially, of global agricultures by *reclamation*, as a melange of local movements recoupling and redefining economics and politics (which liberalization symbolically decouples).

I have argued that the distinctive conditions of the late-twentieth-century agrarian question lie in the reformulation of the politics of agriculture. The reformulation addresses the opposition between globalization and rural and social stability. Reformulation includes the following, contending, themes: (1) reorientation to questions of food security as agriculture has been increasingly subordinated to profitability criteria, generating southern food dependencies (in particular); (2) reversing environmental deterioration resulting from agricultural intensification; (3) the elevation of management of agro-food exchanges, and of the commons, to the global arena; and (4) a growing rejection of agro-industrialism, including its links to global ecology.

All of these elements of reformulation pose the problem of the political organization of agriculture, i.e. who governs decisions about land use and its product? Market rule comes up against substantivist concerns, as farm, local, consumer and environmental constituencies begin to formulate a post-developmental vision of social life in the wake of economic and social crisis and environmental degradation.²¹ In a world in which the limits of the industrial paradigm are fast becoming apparent, we are rediscovering the historic fact that control of land and food has been fundamental to the political equation – within and among states on the one hand, and through the construction and reconstruction of diets on the other hand. The passage, through this century, from the land tenure question (the classical agrarian question) to food and green questions²² now appears to be undergoing recursion. That is, global

movements resisting the corporate-sponsored self-regulated market ideal are seeking to reintegrate these historically separated questions. In this movement of integration, the food and green questions have the potential to challenge the productivist paradigm which stood behind the nineteenth-century agrarian question. And, one would hope, the renewed interest in rurality and sustainable agriculture may yet reverse the anti-agrarianism of the development paradigm before it is too late.

NOTES

The author wishes to thank the members of the Program of Agrarian Studies, Yale University, for useful feedback on an earlier version of this article. The architecture of this article follows Fernand Braudel's notion of three overlapping social times: the (short-term) event (e.g. the Chiapas rebellion), the conjuncture (the demise of developmentalism/post-war food regime), and the *longue durée* (formation of the world economy). In addition, it should be noted that this essay does not offer a comprehensive account of all of world agriculture; rather it proceeds at the level of abstraction necessary to forming an interpretation of the world-historical conditions structuring agro-food systems, understood as political-economic systems.

- 1 There is historiographical (Lipset, 1963; Hartz, 1964) and theoretical (Therborn, 1977; Hirschman, 1982) literature that argues for the salience of (commercial) family farmer (cooperative) movements in stabilizing modern democratic polities, as against the classical European view that urbanity is the fount of democracy.
- 2 Edward Thompson presaged this when he wrote:

Clearly, in the nineteenth century, and still in my youth, the history schools of Britain or America were staffed by people who have never doubted that their history was the most significant history in the world. But if you are now living on a post-imperial island, which in the conventional terms of capitalist economy is fading rapidly, and if you are aware of the future, in which the emergent nations are going to demand not only a greater presence in the world but also a greater presence in historical consciousness, [then you] are going to turn around and ask what does this peculiar culture of Anglo-Saxon eighteenth-century constitutionalism mean? Wasn't it in fact more important that England was engaged deeply in the slave trade?

(1984: 9)

The film *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* depicts the political-economic consequences of such in-migration (from peripheral to metropolitan regions). Wolfgang Sachs articulates the broader, post-colonial view thus:

for the first time the Northern countries themselves are exposed to the bitter results of Westernizing the world. Immigration, population pressure, tribalism with mega-arms, and above all, the environmental consequences of worldwide industrialization threaten to destabilize the Northern way of life. It is as if the cycle which had been opened by Columbus is about to be closed at the end of this century.

(1993: 20)

- 3 This section paraphrases McMichael and Raynolds (1994).
- 4 In an argument such as this, in which a world-historical view appears to override local history, it is important to keep in mind that we are focusing on dominant policies and institutional practices that have the kinds of large-scale consequences being described. Clearly these arguments do not hold for those socialist regimes during the post-war 'development era'. Nevertheless, market liberalization (coupled with intensification of an animal protein diet) in China, for example, is producing similar results now: such as de-ruralization of the population as millions of peasants transfer to urban/industrial employment, inflated grain prices, and increasing ecological stress (Smith, 1993; Tyler, 1994).
- 5 Ernst Feder has argued that the World Bank's *Assistance to the Rural Poor Scheme* – professing to assist 700 million smallholders (not the landless) with credit – integrated smallholders into the green revolution, the technologies of which were applied to developing new agro-exports in livestock, animal feeds, fruits and vegetables, forestry and so forth, drawing on labour and/or products of the peasantry (1983: 169–70).
- 6 Such food dependency was an intentional outcome of the food aid programme (see Watkins, 1991). It is interesting now (that the PL-480 food regime has collapsed) to note the comment of Allan Mendolwitz, managing director of the US General Accounting Office's international trade, who, commenting on the changes in international trade patterns *vis-à-vis* the PL-480 programme, said it is 'difficult to transform the concessional market share' established under the PL-480 programme into a 'commercial market share', as most countries tend to buy wheat from the cheapest supplier, regardless of whether or not they are former food aid recipients (quoted in IATP Farm Bill Review electronic communication, 24 August 1994).
- 7 The major wheat-growing areas of the south (Mexico, India, Pakistan, Turkey and Argentina) switched 84 per cent of their total area planted to green revolution semi-dwarf varieties, displacing rain-fed crops such as coarse grains, oilseeds and pulses, and dramatically reducing food imports. However, in the tropical regions (sub-Saharan Africa, Central America and the Caribbean, Brazil and the Andean area) little commercial wheat production currently occurs beyond Sudan, and these regions account for one-third of all southern wheat imports. Overall, wheat imports into the south have doubled since the early 1960s, even though southern wheat output rose more than 150 per cent (Vocke, 1987).
- 8 One measure of the long-term growth of food dependency in the south is provided by Grigg: 'the developing countries – including China – took 1.5 percent of world cereal imports in the 1930s, 20 percent in the 1950s, 44 percent in 1980 and one-half in 1988' (1993: 241).
- 9 The grain-livestock complex first appeared within the nineteenth-century exchange between the corn-belt states and the western grasslands, organized by British capital (Rifkin, 1992: 96).
- 10 Comprising a range of TNCs, agribusinesses including Cargill, Ralston-Purina, ADM, General Mills, Continental Grain, RJR Nabisco, and ConAgra (Ritchie, 1993: 9fn).
- 11 Decoupling is advocated by the food companies as it renders commodity prices flexible, even as farm welfare is maintained (Kneen, 1990).
- 12 The term 'embedded liberalism' derives from Ruggie (1982), and refers to nation-states retaining the right to determine their own farm policies, within a framework of international agreements.

- 13 Super-301 is a clause of the Omnibus Trade Act of 1988, allowing the USA right of retaliation against what it deems unfair trade practices. It includes the possibility of cross-retaliation: linking trade retaliation in one sector to perceived violations in any other sectors of goods, services and intellectual property rights.
- 14 Such 'dualism' of world power suggests that the globalization project can be interpreted as a hegemonic endeavour by the United States, in so far as subscribing to liberalization policies supports the Anglo-American conception of political economy, which logically nurtures transnational corporate power. The contradictory aspect of this – where firms override state sovereignty – is discussed in McMichael (1995).
- 15 The corporate nature of this northern project is evident in the influence of TNCs in the Uruguay Round as well as in the power of the corporate lobby to block discussion of the environmental impact of TNCs at the Rio Summit – as Hildyard (1993: 28) reports:

recommendations drawn up by the UN's own Centre for Transnational Corporations (UNCTC), which would have imposed tough global environmental standards on TNC activities, were shelved and instead a voluntary code of conduct, drawn up by the Business Council on Sustainable Development, a corporate lobbying group, was adopted as the Secretariat's input into UNCED's Agenda 21. The UNCTC's carefully crafted proposals were not even circulated to delegates. Meanwhile, a few months before the Rio Summit, the Centre itself was quietly closed down.

- 16 I refer here to the impossibility theorem of Herman E. Daly, which 'simply states that a U.S.-style high-resource consumption standard for a world of 4 billion people is impossible' (quoted in Friedmann, 1993: 123).
- 17 Of course the Chiapas people have been in rebellion for some time, over issues of identity – but the most recent form must be viewed within the conjuncture of liberalization.
- 18 Article 27 codified the gains made by the Zapatistas in the 1910–17 Revolution, and was the foundation for subsequent agrarian reforms in Mexico over the next seventy years. 'By 1991 there were a total of 29,951 ejidos and comunidades agrarias in Mexico, representing half of the country's land surface and 3.5 million families or 20 million people, equivalent to a quarter of the country's population' (Harvey, 1994: 21).
- 19 On Mexican campesino credit unions confronting globalization forces, see Myhre (1994b). Two examples of such grassroots movements of reclamation are: first, the 1980 land reclamation scheme organized by the women of Bankura in West Bengal – to reclaim land degraded by cash cropping, and restore it as productive land for collective and individual income generation (Middleton *et al.*, 1993: 125); and second, the challenge to development agencies by peasant groups in eastern Senegal, where the Federation of Sarakolle Villages has resisted the imposition of irrigated cash cropping in the interests of sustainable peasant farming (Rau, 1991: 156–67).
- 20 The Alternative Forum (of NGOs) derives from the Global Forum, which convened concurrently with the Earth Summit in 1992.
- 21 This renewal process is the subject of a new growth area in research, as the 'other development' and/or 'the archipelago of the informal' (LaTouche, 1993) is discovered. Esteva describes it thus:

Peasants and grassroots groups in the cities are now sharing with people forced to leave the economic centre the ten thousand tricks they

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have learned to limit the economy, to mock the economic creed, or to refunctionalize and reformulate modern technology. The 'crisis' of the 1980s removed from the payroll people already educated in dependency on incomes and the market, people lacking the social setting enabling them to survive by themselves. Now the margins are coping with the difficult task of relocating these people. The process poses great challenges and tensions for everyone, but it also offers a creative opportunity for regeneration.

(1992: 21)

- 22 The food and green questions typically differ across the geopolitical 'hemispheres'. In the north, these questions concern lifestyle and aesthetics more than in the south, where they concern basic survival issues, such as food security and preservation of the commons/local ecologies (see, e.g. Broad, 1993).

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