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Land Reform: Taking a Long(er) View

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The paper proposes a broad argument that the end of state-led development from the 1970s coincided with (i) the final wave of major redistributive land reform, and its place within transitions to capitalism, that lasted from about 1910 to the 1970s, and (ii) the beginnings of contemporary 'globalization'. Self-styled 'new wave' agrarian reform in the age of neo-liberalism, centred on property rights, is unlikely to deliver much on its claims to both stimulate agricultural productivity and reduce rural poverty. The reasons are grounded in the basic relations and dynamics of capitalism, and how these are intensified and reshaped by and through globalization. Understanding these processes, with all their inevitable unevenness, requires (i) recognizing that the historical conditions of the 'classic' agrarian question no longer apply, and (ii) developing the means to investigate and understand better the changing realities facing different agrarian classes within a general tendency to the concentration of capital and fragmentation of labour, including how the latter may generate new agrarian questions of labour.

Keywords: agrarian question, agrarian transition, land reform, globalization, neo-liberalism, agrarian political movements

INTRODUCTION: THE HISTORICAL CAREER OF LAND REFORM

This paper proposes a broad conceptual and historical framework, and suggests some speculative hypotheses, for debate of contemporary forms of the agrarian question. Some key ideas are stated and illustrated briefly rather than explored with the rigour, and in the detail, that the proper investigation of historical specificities demands. They are as follows:

1. The central problematic of the historic agrarian question is the transition from feudalism to capitalism, that is to say, from one mode of social property relations (in Robert Brenner's term) to another (distinguished by generalized

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commodity production), and from predominantly agrarian to industrial economy. Key to this problematic are the social and political processes and economic effects of the displacement or transformation of parasitic landed property, of which redistributive land reform has been a major, if not necessary or exclusive, mechanism. Likewise key to such processes and their effects/outcomes are questions of agency: the social characteristics and practices of classes of agrarian property and labour, of non-agrarian capital and labour, and of states.

2. The 'antecedents' or original reference points of this problematic were the divergent historical experiences (transitions to capitalism) of England, France and eastern Germany/Prussia from, say, roughly the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. By the turn of the twentieth century, different views of those experiences (and of the very different agrarian path to capitalism of the USA) shaped different understandings of the agrarian questions of the 'backward' peripheries of Europe (large areas of southern, central and eastern Europe) and, by extension, those vast colonial and former colonial zones of Latin America, Asia and Africa, where agrarian class structure was likewise held to be dominated by the (parasitic) extraction of rent and/or tax (feudal or feudal-like landed property and/or the state, colonial and [later] independent).
3. The (world-historical) project of agrarian reform in these conditions was understood very differently in terms of its agencies and outcomes by: (i) a classic bourgeois view in which agrarian reform engineered (and ordered) by an enlightened state allows/encourages the (capitalist) development (modernization) of farming; (ii) Marxist views of social revolution in 'backward' social formations in which the abolition of predatory landed property by the agency of proletariat and peasantry (the worker–peasant alliance) prepares the way for forms of agricultural production that combine the economies of scale, and technical advances, of capitalist farming with social property and planning *and* contribute to the project of industrialization and its accumulation imperative; (iii) populist views that attribute the central role in its emancipation to 'the peasantry' (understood as a social class), proclaim the superiority – on technical and developmental, as well as sociological and moral, grounds – of small-scale ('family') farming, and hence advocate policies to support such farming.
4. Elements of these three approaches to issues of agency and objectives/outcomes in agrarian reform informed the policies and practices of the post-colonial states of Asia and Africa in their developmentalist moment from the 1950s to 1970s, and also those of some Latin American states in the same period.
5. The end of 'developmentalism' from, say, the 1980s is followed by 'new-wave' (IFAD 2001, 84) agrarian and rural policy prescriptions, and their justifications. While these are easily observed (and decried) as elements of neo-liberal programmes, there is generally much less consideration of the possible effects of contemporary change in the organization of capitalist agriculture – and in capitalism generally – for the (terminal?) displacement of 'classic' models of agrarian reform, summarized (and located) above. In short, are possible ideological

(and political) reversals of, or shifts in, a currently dominant neo-liberal agenda likely to reinstate the concerns and practices of the 'classic' agrarian question? Or, put somewhat differently, have its historical conditions been transcended *without* its resolution in most of the poor(er) countries of the world, in an era of 'globalization'?

LAND REFORM IN THE 'CLASSIC' AGRARIAN QUESTION

The starting point, as noted, is pre-capitalist agrarian class structure rooted in the exploitation of (peasant) agrarian labour by landed property. Of course, there was great variation in pre-capitalist agrarian formations with this similar ('stylized') class structure, some axes of which are:

(i) Stronger or weaker identities of their classes of landlords, linked to their relations with states founded on landed property and its different forms of rent and taxation.[1]
(ii) More or less predatory forms of landed property, both landlord and state and combinations thereof, contributing less or more to the material conditions of existence of agricultural production (and trade).[2]
(iii) Forms and degrees of agricultural trade, of non-agricultural production and trade, and of the formation of an urban society.
(iv) Phases of expansion and prosperity and of contraction, linked (as cause and effect) to (often endemic) dynastic and territorial warfare and its fortunes, as well as to ecological change and technical innovation in farming (and their demographic consequences).
(v) Forms, patterns and degrees of social differentiation of peasantries.
(vi) More or less frequent and intense outbursts of class struggle between peasants and landed property.

The last of these, itself shaped in different ways by the other sources of variation noted, is evidently of crucial importance to the agrarian questions of transitions to capitalism. If the profound social disruptions and political upheavals of such (typically protracted) transitions were marked by peasant movements and rebellions (and 'peasant wars' as Wolf termed them) that drew on historic traditions of struggle – and their mobilizing ideologies, forms of organization and collective action – they did so now in radically different conditions. If France's revolution (with its unique significance for the political discourses of an emergent capitalist modernity in Europe) manifested this dialectic of discontinuity and (or through) continuity in peasant struggles against aristocratic/'feudal' landed property, this

[1] The referent here, in the broadest terms, is the (disputed) contrast between European (and Japanese?) feudalism with its rent-paying peasantries and 'parcellized sovereignty' (in Perry Anderson's term) and the bureaucratic agrarian states of Asia with their extraction of surplus labour through tax and their (relatively) centralized polities.

[2] And similarly to note 1, and linking with it – just as schematically – the referent here is the centrality of public authority to mobilizing and directing labour in the construction and management of irrigation works in the pre-capitalist formations of East and Southeast Asia (Bray 1986, and by contrast with the scope of activity of landed property in European feudalism).

would be repeated in many other places and times during the next 200 years or so, and especially during the twentieth century in the peripheries of industrial capitalism. Major instances of such struggles that led to fundamental changes in agrarian property regimes would include Russia and Mexico in the second decade of the century; eastern and southeastern Europe and China in the interwar period (continuing in China into the 1940s and 1950s); and in the postwar period Bolivia in the 1950s, Vietnam and Algeria in the 1950s and 1960s, Peru in the 1960s, and Nicaragua in the 1970s and 1980s.[3]

The range of social and historical variation suggested by these instances reflected changing agrarian class structures and their dynamics stimulated by the development of capitalism on a world scale, and in particular the growing ascendancy of industrial capitalism from the early nineteenth century and its associated features of massive growth of international trade, colonial conquest and expansion, and later imperialism of finance capital. Of course, the formation and continuous mutations of world markets and divisions of labour were highly uneven, with differential effects for agrarian classes in different places at different times. Those effects included, and might combine in variant ways, intensified exploitation by landed property now incorporated within (or established by) systems of colonial rule, including taxation; the impact of devastating famines on entire regional peasantries when the mechanisms of colonial and quasi-colonial imperialism combined with moments of extreme climatic conditions;[4] new forms of capitalist commoditization, and their labour regimes, frequently linked to export production for international markets on plantations (in colonial South and Southeast Asia and the Caribbean, and in colonial and independent Latin America), on peasant farms (throughout Europe and in colonial South Asia and Africa), *and* on the estates of historic landed property (for example, in western Asia and North Africa, and increasingly on Latin America's *haciendas* in the later nineteenth century) (Bernstein 1994).

Generally, the development of industrial capitalism, and the economic and political forms of its internationalization, generated new pressures on agrarian classes of pre-capitalist provenance as it brought them within its circuits of production, exchange and consumption. The reproduction of landed property confronted conditions of competition in agricultural commodity markets and for land, as well as political pressures from its subordinated peasantries and the 'national' modernization projects of urban bourgeois elements and states.[5] Following initial

[3] Omitted here are those important instances when intense struggles for redistributive land reform were defeated, e.g. parts of India in the late 1940s; or have continued over long periods without success, e.g. the Philippines; or were reversed by counter-revolution, e.g. Guatemala in 1954, Chile in 1973.

[4] As Mike Davis (2001) has recently demonstrated so powerfully.

[5] After the Second World War such modernization projects that produced more and less significant changes in agrarian property relations, with varying degrees of peasant support, included Japan and South Korea in the 1940s and 1950s; Egypt in the 1950s; Iran in the 1950s and 1960s; in the 1960s parts of Hispanic Latin America under the banner of the Alliance for Progress – with many of these instances (as that of post-Second World War Italy) driven by national and international (especially US) political agendas (i.e. anti-communism). Also of note in the 1970s, suggested here as the last decade of any significant redistributive land reform, were the (anti-feudal) land reform in Ethiopia and that in Portugal following its belated democratic revolution.

processes of 'forcible commercialization' (Bharadwaj 1985) generated by colonial states (sometimes through existing or adapted 'feudal'/feudal-like mechanisms of extra-economic coercion), peasant farmers increasingly had to reproduce themselves as petty commodity producers under 'the dull compulsion of economic forces' (in Marx's term) or join the growing ranks of the proletariat (or at least the dispossessed).[6]

If it is possible to suggest such general socioeconomic processes from which specific histories weave complex variations (to adapt from another context the fertile observation of Gilsenan (1982, 51)), how their effects are manifested politically requires, if anything, even greater attention to conjunctural specificities and how they concentrate many determinations (to paraphrase Marx).[7] This is the terrain of debate of the character and dynamics of peasant rebellions (and 'peasant wars'), of their potential contributions to and limits on social revolution and transformation in transitions to capitalism (and socialism). Models of, as it were, 'pure' peasant rebellion – and the historic instances held to exemplify it – resonate most clearly lines of continuity with forms of class struggle in pre-capitalist agrarian formations, carried into 'early' stages of modernization/transitions to capitalism.[8]

In such transitions, peasant political action is increasingly likely to be allied with other social forces – from landless workers in the countryside (whose social boundaries with the poor peasantry are typically so porous), to plebeian and radical petty-bourgeois elements in rural towns as well as larger cities, and an emergent organized urban working class, and elements of a 'progressive' (modernizing, and typically nationalist) urban bourgeoisie and intelligentsia. Simultaneously, the social base of agrarian political movements and collective action is likely to become more differentiated on class lines, for reasons noted earlier and with special intensity in areas of a dynamic peasant capitalism (cf. Banaji 1990), generating more or less overt tensions of ideological and political practice, of programmatic demands, strategies and tactics. Similarly, political practice tends to be channelled, with additional sources of potential tension, into more 'modern' forms of organization: peasant unions, leagues, '(new) farmers' movements' and political parties, as well as their formal alliances with, direct incorporation within, or 'front organization' links to, political parties of very different kinds – communist and socialist, radical and conservative (including xenophobic) nationalist.[9]

[6] Effects that provide an implicit key to new dynamics of class differentiation in the countryside, which often operated through ostensibly 'customary' forms of inter-household and intra-village relations, thereby suggesting another expression of the dialectic of discontinuity and (or through) continuity.

[7] One expression of the familiar issues of linking structural change and agency.

[8] Sometimes first experienced as primarily 'external' threats and disruptions that compounded the internal contradictions of pre-capitalist agrarian formations. The protracted history of decline of the Chinese empire during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – punctuated and eventually terminated by massive social upheavals – is perhaps the most striking example. J.C. Scott (1976) is a well-known argument for such continuity, manifested as peasant resistance to the rupture of (pre-capitalist) 'moral economy' by (early) 'modernization'.

[9] Agrarian/'peasant' political parties were especially significant in imperial Germany before the First World War, and in eastern and southeastern Europe in the interwar period. The notable chronicler and champion of the latter was David Mitrany in his classic *Marx Against the Peasant* (1961, first

The tensions and conflicts, actual and potential, generated by the processes of (structural) socioeconomic change and politics sketched, connect with productionist (or 'developmental') views of the agrarian question and the way forward. Pre-capitalist landed property had to be removed because of its unproductive character – the under-utilization of the resources of soil, water and forest it commanded; the ways in which exploitation via rent denied incentives to both tenant cultivators and landlords to invest in the development of the productive forces; and/or because the revenue derived from rent was squandered on luxury consumption rather than directed to productive accumulation (especially for industrialization). Redistributive land reform was thus a necessary, if not sufficient, condition of the development of agriculture (and hence of its potential contributions to the development of industry). And the pursuit, in both theory and practice, of appropriate forms and mechanisms of the development of agriculture added another set of epic tensions to those already noted: if peasant political action played a vital part in the overthrow of predatory landed property in many historical circumstances of transition, what was to be the place of peasant farming in subsequent processes of agricultural (and industrial) development?

At the core of this question there is a matter of epochal (and tragic) proportion. Whatever role peasants may play as grave-diggers of predatory ('feudal') landed property during transitions to capitalism, this is an effect of class conflict rooted in a *pre-capitalist* mechanism of exploitation[10] that has to be transcended in the interests of development and progress: once classes of pre-capitalist landed property have been consigned to the dustbin of history, what is the future of their antagonistic other, classes of agrarian producers of pre-capitalist provenance? This question extends to 'peasant' (or otherwise 'smallholder' or 'family') farming that lacked any historic relation to landed property in the sense sketched (in most of sub-Saharan Africa, for example), and brings us, of course, to the point of radical divergence of classic bourgeois, Marxist and various populist approaches.

These approaches have fundamentally different conceptions of the departure points and destinations of historical processes of development, and of the means of moving from the former to the latter, although – importantly – all share a conception of the fundamentally reactionary character of pre-capitalist landed property. These differences are also manifested, of course, in their divergent views of agency, and especially the agency of peasantries, in social and political struggles against landed property and in the paths of progress beyond its demise.

What I term here the classic bourgeois view centres on the unity of property in the means of production and management of the production process in conditions of market competition – conventionally markets for factors of production (not least land, of course), finance, labour and products – believed to generate

published 1951). Of particular note in the peripheries of imperialism during the half-century or so from the 1920s to the 1970s was the meshing of 'peasant wars' with national liberation struggles; Wolf was explicit that the Vietnamese struggle for national liberation was the stimulus to his seminal comparative study (1969).

[10] Albeit reshaped, and typically intensified, by processes of commoditization (and 'early' modernization, often in colonial conditions) indicated above.

allocative efficiency and thereby drive productivity growth in farming. Historic obstacles to the realization of this vision of (capitalist) agricultural progress can include both parasitic landed property and peasant farming, with both constructed in cultural and political as well as economic terms. The reactionary political and cultural character of landed property can be as offensive to bourgeois modernization as the deadweight of its predatory economic foundation. Similarly, the 'subsistence ethic', traditionalism, superstition, aversion to risk and so on, attributed to peasants likewise combines with and compounds views of the limitations of scale and technology (as well as imagination and ambition) of their ways of farming.[11]

The 'farmers', the classic bourgeois view champions (counterposed to both predatory *rentiers* and stereotypical 'peasants', as above), are efficient market actors whose supply responsiveness requires, *inter alia*, their capacity to manage the links between scale, technology and productivity, according to (changing) conditions of production and exchange in different branches of agricultural production.[12] Various sources of views about scale are instructive. One instance is English (and other European) constructions of the 'yeoman' as the exemplar of industrious (and progressive) farming combined with cultural and political conservatism (a counterweight to the growth of an urban proletariat and all its ramifications).[13] Another instance is an American version of the 'family farmer', extending from its eighteenth-century, anti-feudal Jeffersonian celebration through the epic conquest of nature as the frontier pushed westwards in the nineteenth century, to the highly capitalized, ostensibly 'family', farm of today with its capacity to harness economies of scale. What lurks within such constructions, then, is also a *sociological* (rather than purely physical or technical) notion of scale, often centred on the modest capitalist farmer rooted in family property, the

[11] Sometimes also combined, depending on historical conditions and memories (and analogies), with fears of peasant rebellion and *jacqueries* – let alone the mobilization of rural oppositional energies by radical political movements – with their violence and social disruption, and threats to property rights and political order. Such fears can motivate programmes of agrarian reform and land redistribution. The US-launched Alliance for Progress in Latin America in the 1960s, in the wake of the Cuban revolution, is one commonly cited example, with which other state-led, aid-funded programmes in Central America in the 1980s (Baumeister 2001) suggest an element of continuity. Interestingly, the 'lesson' of violent social conflict in Central America attributed to extreme inequalities of land distribution (and attendant rural poverty, oppression and reaction), was used by World Bank strategists to argue for redistributive (market-based) land reform in post-apartheid South Africa (Binswanger and Deininger 1993).

[12] The classic bourgeois view is also closer to Marxism in its appreciation of peasant class differentiation as a mechanism of the formation of capitalist farming, by contrast with agrarian populism, for which such differentiation constitutes an intractable problem (that it either ignores, or seeks to explain [away] by reference to the Chayanovian demographic cycle or by acknowledging only sources of differentiation 'external' to peasant economy/'community'). There is a nice expression of the classic bourgeois view by Jacques Chonchol (1970, 160), at one time head of land reform in the Chilean Christian Democrat government of Eduardo Frei: '. . . a certain proportion of the new peasant beneficiaries will probably fail as entrepreneurs . . . it will be necessary to caution against too rigid an institutional link between the beneficiaries and the land so that a *natural selection* may take place later which will allow those who fail to be eliminated' (my emphasis).

[13] Thus the caricatured transpositions of the 'yeoman' ideal in British colonial policy in India and sub-Saharan Africa.

patriarchal character of which embraces 'farm servants' as well as wife and offspring.[14] This kind of conception of scale links specific expressions of the bourgeois view to some versions of (petty-bourgeois) agrarian populism.

While it has a long history of its own, intense debates on such questions (notably inflected by Maoism in the 1960s and 1970s), the core and enduring notion of more orthodox Marxism is of the capitalist agricultural enterprise as the analogue of the industrial factory, that is, constantly seeking to extend its scale of operation – through economies of scale, technical innovation (of which mechanization is especially emblematic), specialization, social and technical divisions of labour, and so on.[15] Such capitalist agriculture is progressive relative to the pre-capitalist forms of farming (and property) it replaces, and can emerge by various paths of transformation, not least through the class differentiation of peasantries liberated from the exactions of predatory landed property by bourgeois (anti-feudal) land reform and compelled into capitalist commodity production and exchange.

In different historical conditions and experiences of socialist construction, the concept of, and commitment to, scale economies – virtually a synonym for the development of the productive forces in farming – provides the most common thread. Where large-scale capitalist enterprises existed, they were usually nationalized and managed as state farms of one kind or another (rather than divided), for example, in Cuba, Algeria, Nicaragua, Ethiopia, Mozambique. Where agrarian economy was dominated by landlordism and peasant production – the 'classic' scenario (of a 'feudal' dispensation) – land and labour were socialized through various means, in more or less draconian ways and sequences, in the form of (producer) cooperatives, communes, collective farms, and/or state farms, as in the Soviet Union, China and Vietnam. Together with the common rationale of the benefits of economies of scale noted, two other, and connected, factors are significant: the need to undertake socialist primitive accumulation, in Preobrazhensky's term, for industrialization, and the actual or potential threat to the project of socialist construction posed by the constitution of peasants as a class of petty *proprietors* following the overthrow of landlordism and redistributive land reform.[16]

If 'land to the tiller' – the clarion call of 'classic' redistributive land reform – is embraced in various political conjunctures by bourgeois modernizers and nationalists, socialists and communists, for agrarian populists it is the foundation of

[14] These ideological visions have a material basis in the centrality of 'family' farming (petty capitalist production), its reproduction and mutations, in transitions to capitalism *and* contemporary capitalist agriculture North and South (cf., amongst others, Mann and Dickinson 1978; Djurfeldt 1981; Koning 1994; Bernstein 1996/7, 2000).

[15] Ironically, as several authors have noted, the form of contemporary agricultural enterprise that approximated best the organization and labour processes of emergent industrial manufacturing was the colonial (slave) plantation.

[16] And the new or enhanced forms of class differentiation of the peasantry likely to ensue, generating and/or strengthening a class of capital – as well as private property – in the countryside, inimical to socialism.

their entire social project, fusing the two conceptions of scale noted. The (much contested) claim for a generalized inverse relationship between farm size and yield (productivity of land) is the central argument (or item of faith) of neo-populist economics, and combines with the sociological virtues attributed by populism more generally to 'family'/household production and to rural 'community' as moral universe. Neo-populism has probably never been better defined than by Aleksandr Chayanov, its greatest intellectual advocate: 'a theory for the development of agriculture on the basis of cooperative peasant households, a peasantry organized cooperatively as an independent class and technically superior to all other forms of agricultural organization' (Bourgholtzer 1993, 3, 16).[17] Among the notable features of this definition are its clear commitment to development, including what is 'technically superior';[18] its belief in the peasantry as 'a class', and aspiration to its 'independence' as a class;[19] and the emphasis on cooperation, a reference to organizational linkages and economies of scale, and their benefits, upstream and downstream of the peasant household as essential unit of production.

While Chayanov stands as an exceptionally rigorous figure in the tradition of agrarian (neo-)populism (and indeed an honourable one, cf. Harrison 1979), populism more generally has an intimate and continuing dialectical relationship with the history of capitalist development and the inequities and upheavals that always accompany its processes of accumulation.[20] The conjuncture at the beginning of the twenty-first century that combines the demise of 'developmentalism' (below), profound disillusion with socialism, *and* widespread scepticism about the ability of a globalizing capitalism to deliver the fruits of development to so many of the world's population, is especially fruitful ground for old and new populist motifs and manifestos.[21] Discourses and debate of land distribution and agrarian reform today are permeated with concerns about poverty and environmental conservation, with notions of 'alternative' and 'sustainable' development, 'community' and 'civil society', and the like.

[17] Chayanov's definition is from notes he wrote for the OGPU (Soviet secret police apparatus) during his first arrest in the early 1930s, as translated in Bourgholtzer's splendid edition (1999) of Chayanov's letters from his time in Britain and Germany in 1922–3. Also key to the elaboration of his ideas is Chayanov's strange novella, written in 1920 during the terrible period of war communism and set in a post-Soviet Russia of 1984, *The Journey of My Brother Alexei to the Land of Peasant Utopia* (Smith 1977). Here he set out a vision in terms at once strongly modernist, concerning the development of technology and social regulation, and also aesthetic and spiritual.

[18] And by contrast with currently modish versions of populism that champion anti- or 'post'-development.

[19] Independent of what? In this context, probably above all the state – but also, by extension, on one hand of the proletariat (and its interests and claims) and, on the other, of large-scale capital (see the interesting observations on the location of peasants in national and international markets and divisions of labour in Chayanov 1966, Chs 5 and 6).

[20] A relationship explored and illustrated with great clarity and effect by Gavin Kitching (1982).

[21] Although there are many varieties of populism, and one distinction relevant to this context is between *oppositional* (anti-capitalist) and *accomodationist* (to neo-liberalism) populist currents, of which the latter is evident in constructions of 'new wave' land reform exemplified in the report of IFAD (2001).

THE MOMENT OF 'DEVELOPMENTALISM'

So far, a number of paths of transformation of agriculture, and their locations in transitions to (industrial) capitalism,[22] have been indicated or implied. One set of paths comprises the development of forms of capitalist agriculture without redistributive land reform. This can happen in a range of historical conditions: in the 'old' world of feudal antecedents (England, Germany) and the 'new' world of European expansion and settlement (North America, South Africa, Argentina, Australia);[23] through the establishment and development of plantation production, initially in colonial conditions, or the transition to capitalist agriculture ('estate' production of crops and/or livestock) by landed property of pre-capitalist (including colonial) provenance;[24] or in those zones of peasant capitalism where possession of land as means of production is not primarily the result of redistributive land reform.[25] Another set of paths, however much they diverged subsequently, shared a common starting point in redistributive land reforms, albeit more or less comprehensive, more or less radical in intent, in conditions of greater or lesser political volatility, and marked by the visions, capacities and powers of different social forces and how they confronted or compromised with each other.

In relation to different historical starting points, or 'initial conditions', sketched so far, the moment of 'developmentalism' from the 1950s to the 1970s added two common elements (with their own complex variations, needless to say). One was the centrality of the state as guardian[26] and manager of 'national' development, with a range of policies and institutional means deployed to realize state-led agricultural and rural development;[27] the other was that the eradication of poverty now became a principle of legitimation in the rhetoric of development strategy.

Rather than catalogue the various, sometimes short-lived, fashions in agricultural and rural development policy that filled the moment of developmentalism, it is more fruitful to suggest their underlying dynamic. What virtually all shared

[22] Corresponding to 'agrarian transition' in the sense formulated and applied by T.J. Byres (1991, 1996; see also Bernstein 1996/7).

[23] Although in the colonial trajectories of these countries a type of redistribution via conquest and dispossession was necessary to the establishment of landed property and subsequent transitions to capitalist agriculture. The USA is a particularly instructive example, as so often: lacking a feudal provenance, and exemplifying a dynamic of frontier expansion into 'virgin' lands (both potent motifs in US liberal historiography), its path of capitalist development was enduringly marked by the dispossession of native Americans over nearly three centuries (pursued most systematically during the nineteenth century as the formation of a capitalist economy accelerated; cf. Byres 1996) and by plantation slavery (Post 1982).

[24] The analogue of Lenin's 'Prussian' or Junker path (Byres 1996) exemplified, *inter alia*, by parts of Latin America from the late nineteenth century (de Janvry 1981) and by South Africa in the twentieth century (Morris 1976; Bernstein 1996a, 15–6).

[25] Although a condition of effective possession (that is, in terms of the development of production rather than in a juridical sense) was often the elimination of, or capacity to avoid, the exactions of tax and/or usury.

[26] Or 'trustee' in the provocative argument of 'doctrines of development' elaborated by Cowen and Shenton (1996), of which 'agrarian doctrines of development' are a key subset (Cowen and Shenton 1998a, 1998b).

[27] Including instances of redistributive land reform, usually in cautious – and indeed conservative – fashion as in most of the instances given in note 5 above.

– regardless of their specific policy design and implementation, let alone their divergent outcomes – was *a logic of the extension and intensification of commodity production*. This logic was manifested in state, *and* donor, planned and directed programmes to promote (more) 'modern' farming through technical innovation (including mechanization), specialization (not least in export crops), supply of credit and extension, parastatal marketing and distribution, and in some instances state farms and joint ventures with international agribusiness capital.

Connected to this logic, if less remarked, during this period was the formation and development – likewise frequently under close state supervision – of cooperatives and other forms of agricultural association. These could be presented as farmers' organizations while serving as links in a state-managed vertical integration of farming, in which marketing boards, crop authorities, agricultural development banks, research stations and extension services substituted for the agribusiness corporations and banks that pioneered – and at this time were intensifying – such integration of agricultural commodity chains in North America and Europe (Bernstein 1994). Indeed, in sub-Saharan Africa the ubiquitous parastatal crop authority, incorporating a range of functions upstream and downstream of farming, could be interpreted as an attempt to move beyond control of the conditions of exchange (the colonial marketing board model, including its means of taxation) to control of the conditions of *production* of small farmers (Bernstein 1981).[28]

The logic of these kinds of developmental/productionist interventions interacted to varying degrees, and in varying forms, with distributional (including redistributive) measures. The latter included instances of land redistribution noted, as well as 'agrarian reform' more loosely defined as actions targeted on 'the rural poor' (defined as 'resource poor' farmers, in Robert Chambers' phrase, rather than the agricultural proletariat or semi-proletariat), such as the provision of special credit facilities, assets, appropriate technologies, and other employment- and income-generating resources. In addition, 'rural development' programmes and budgets focused on building social infrastructure (schools, clinics) as well as economic infrastructure (roads, bridges, irrigation works, marketing centres) in the countryside, and on the provision of public and merit goods (education, health care, clean water supply, electricity supply). Probably the most ambitious conception (if not result) of this moment of developmentalism, and most suggestive of its drive to comprehensive blueprinting, was the Integrated Rural Development Programmes of the World Bank and USAID in the 1960s and 1970s.[29]

The moment of developmentalism – the acceptance of and commitment to state-led ('national') development, across a wide ideological spectrum – may

[28] These observations imply that much 'developmentalist' agrarian policy, however wrapped in populist rhetoric, was hardly populist in substance; indeed it was commonly attacked by populists for its statism, and anti-peasant, anti-small farmer and 'urban bias' (e.g. Williams 1976; Lipton 1977; Bates 1981).

[29] Seen by some (e.g. Williams 1981) as a response to the 'lessons' of the Vietnamese war, personified in the move of Robert MacNamara from the US State Department to the World Bank, where he made poverty alleviation, above all in the countrysides of the South, a new headline item in the Bank's rhetoric (Finnemore 1997).

seem to have been as short-lived from today's vantage point as its dynamics were contradictory and its results mixed. In the longer view, it can be hypothesized that it represented the culmination of a particular wave of state activism in capitalism (the course of which was influenced by Soviet and then later state socialisms), from the First World War through the uncertain recovery of the 1920s, the Great Depression of the 1930s, the Second World War, subsequent reconstruction, and the decolonization of Asia and Africa, to the unprecedented growth of the world economy in the 1960s.[30] In an even longer view, it is suggested here that the moment of developmentalism incorporated the last significant examples of redistributive land reform in a period initiated by the French Revolution, and with its most intense struggles over (pre-capitalist) landed property concentrated between, say, 1910 and the 1970s.

Whether the latter is coincidence or the effect of complex determinations is not pursued here. It is useful to ask, however, why and how changes in capitalism since the end of developmentalism (and perhaps contributing to its demise) may have transcended the conditions of the 'classic' agrarian question that had persisted until then, at least in certain zones of the South. It is also useful to ask how those changes may underlie shifting discourses and practices concerning the direction of agricultural change in the South, the agenda of (rural) poverty alleviation, and the place in either or both of self-styled 'new wave' agrarian reform in the twenty-first century.

FROM DEVELOPMENTALISM TO GLOBALIZATION

The development of agricultural production, both socially and technically, in transitions to capitalism and thereafter – while inevitably uneven for reasons generic to capitalist accumulation, and especially so to farming – has long been shaped, of course, by the formation and mutations of a world economy, and by its constituent divisions of labour and patterns of investment, trade and consumption (Bernstein 1994, 2000). The internationalization of agricultural production and trade crystallized over the century from about 1870 in a global division of labour in which the grain and meat exports of 'settler' economies (with their vast internal frontiers) – Argentina, Australia, Canada and above all the USA – competed with the temperate farming of the European homelands of industrial capitalism (also supplying them with cheaper food), by contrast with the complementary tropical agricultures of Asia and Africa whose colonial subordination and world market incorporation were completed in the same period (Friedmann and McMichael 1989).[31]

[30] And it has been suggested that this wave of state activism succeeded and in turn was followed by phases of spectacular 'globalization', respectively from the 1870s to 1914 (also, of course, the period of the formation of modern imperialism as monopoly capital, in Lenin's analysis) and emerging from the economic and political turbulence of the 1970s as the mechanisms of accumulation and regulation of the postwar 'golden period' unravelled (cf., among others, Nayyar 1995; Ruigrok and van Tulder 1995; Hirst and Thompson 1996).

[31] Also from about 1870, there was a new, and intensified, phase of agricultural export production in Latin America. Utsa Patnaik (1996) argues the historic (and continuing) importance of tropical agricultural products in the diets of the North as a key factor in the formation of the international division of labour of imperialism.

In the 'golden age' of the long postwar boom (which coincided with the peak decades of developmentalism, above), agricultural production in the South was further shaped by international dynamics in various ways. One was through the quasi-public investment projects of aid agencies, notably the World Bank, in both infrastructural development (including hydro-electric power, dams and irrigation schemes) and programmes to create more systematically commoditized and productive export-cropping peasantries (as above, cf. Heyer et al. 1981). Another was through American (and later European) strategic food aid and/or commercial dumping of surplus grain stocks (Raikes 1988; Friedmann 1990). A third example, reflecting postwar Malthusian fears of mass famine (hence pursued alongside population control), was international research, development and diffusion of new high-yielding hybrid grain varieties: the 'Green Revolution' in rice, wheat and maize cultivation (see note 32 below).

Similarly shaped by the formation and mutations of the world economy, to varying degrees, were the fortunes, prospects and problems of different classes of landed property and of agrarian capital and labour in the various formations and spaces of that world economy. Why this global dimension has become even more central to current concerns is indicated next.

While controversy rages, and will continue to do so, concerning the causes, mechanisms and implications (including new contradictions), of changes in world economy, politics and culture since the 1970s – notably in debates about 'globalization' – there is little doubt that important shifts with far-reaching ramifications have occurred of which that decade, in retrospect, was a crucible. A familiar list would include the deregulation of financial markets; shifts in the production, sourcing and sales strategies and technologies of transnational manufacturing corporations; the massive new possibilities attendant on information technologies, not least for mass communications, and how they are exploited by the corporate capital that controls them; the ideological and political ascendancy of neo-liberalism in (a selective) 'rolling back of the state', including the structural adjustment programmes, economic liberalization and 'state reform'/'good governance' agendas imposed on the countries of the South (and former Soviet bloc). This is the context, and some of its key markers, that spelled the end of developmentalism (as sketched above) in its various manifestations of older and newer (state) socialisms, and of a wide range of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois regimes with more and less plausible strategies and practices (and politics) of modernization.[32]

In the sphere of agricultural production and trade, a number of notable features also had their crucible in the 1970s (even when their effects only became evident subsequently) or have emerged since then. Two of these features, with widespread ramifications for globalizing tendencies in agricultural investment, divisions of labour and markets, are identified in the remarkable work of Harriet Friedmann on the international political economy of food. One was the collapse in the early

[32] Arguably, one of the signal achievements of developmentalism in agriculture was the Green Revolution in India, registered in both national self-sufficiency in staple grain production within ten years and accelerated agrarian class formation in the Green Revolution heartlands of northern India.

1970s of the postwar 'international food regime' dominated by the export of US grain surpluses, and the domestic and foreign policies that underwrote it (Friedmann 1978, 1982). The other, connected, feature was the emergence of other 'national' agricultures, structured and regulated on similar lines to that of the USA, which thereby competed with the latter and undermined its dominance in world markets for grain (and other field crops, notably soya, which provide key inputs to industrialized livestock/meat production).[33] Competitors with US agriculture now included not only the European Union but also what Friedmann (1993) termed 'NACs': 'new agricultural countries'.[34]

The collapse of the postwar food order in the 1970s, contextualized and compounded by other sources of turbulence in the world economy (not least those of exchange rate and interest rate volatility) generated 'anarchy' in international food markets. Ironically, until then the postwar international food order was relatively stable, for the peculiar reason of its regulation by a uniquely dominant 'national' agriculture, that of the USA (and the 'Atlantic pact' negotiated between the USA and Europe, cf. Friedmann 1993). The end of that hegemonic regulation – as both effect of and further stimulus to new forms of competition noted, and their impact on the contradictions of American agriculture and its structure of regulation[35] – generated opportunities and spaces for global (rather than just *inter*national) regulation by transnational corporations as 'the major agents attempting to . . . organize stable conditions of production and consumption which allow them to plan investment, sourcing of agricultural materials, and marketing' (Friedmann 1993, 52). This globalizing tendency is manifested in, *inter alia*, new forms of internationalization of agricultural commodity chains;[36] marked by the high profile of agricultural trade and its regulation in the agenda of GATT since the mid-1980s and now in that of the WTO; and intensified by biotechnologies and the drive of agribusiness (chemical and seed) companies to patent and monopolize genetic (plant and animal) material.

The ramifications of these globalizing tendencies for the South are all the more potent because of the demise of developmentalism and the array of policy instruments and interventions it applied to promote, support, and sometimes protect, agricultural production, or at least particular groups of producers. However contradictory such policies and practices were, and however mixed their results, there can be little doubt that 'rolling back the state', combined with trade

[33] In so doing they not only replicated but overtook 'the American model of agriculture, which . . . comprised the subordination of crops and livestock into corporate, often transnational, agrofood complexes and the industrialization of agriculture' (Friedmann 1993, 45).

[34] By analogy with the more familiar 'NICs' or newly industrialized countries; some are both NAC and NIC, notably Brazil.

[35] Including the contradiction of structural over-production characteristic of US farming for much of the period since the 1920s, and more recently of European farming too.

[36] The topic of much current interest and research, as well as some exaggerated claims. The argument for very strong and encompassing forms of globalization (incorporating international commodity chains) is put by McMichael and Myrhe (1991); a more differentiated and nuanced approach is proposed and illustrated by Raikes and Gibbon (2000), the preliminary elaboration of a research project on globalization and African export production at the Centre for Development Research, Copenhagen, some of the results of which are presented in Daviron and Gibbon (2002).

liberalization, has had major (if not uniform) consequences for farming in the South and the modalities of its integration in commodity chains and markets, both national and international.[37] The same applies to those whose simple reproduction is derived, at least in significant part, from agricultural labour and capital (and their particular combinations in petty commodity production), to which I return.

'AGRARIAN REFORM' AFTER DEVELOPMENTALISM?

Markets and Poverty

Much of the discursive terrain of new, post-developmentalist, versions of 'agrarian reform' – as 'market-friendly' and/or 'community-based', and so on – has fast become familiar. Three quotes from recent publications help identify conceptual coordinates of the terrain. The first proclaims the 'return' of land reform to the agenda of development policy:

> Today, land reform has returned to national and international agendas as seen in the international summits and agreements of, amongst others, the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, the World Food Summit, the Convention to Combat Desertification and the Convention on Biological Diversity. (IFAD 2001, 81)

The second is explicit about the provenance of 'new wave' land reform, and usefully summarizes its rationale:[38]

> One of the pillars of neo-liberal thinking about the future of the agricultural sector is the need to provide security of tenure to producers to encourage investment and, hence, productivity and production increases. This is one of the main motivations behind land-titling projects and efforts to modernize cadastral systems and land registries. The other motivation is to foster a more efficient land market, making it easier for land to be purchased and sold. Almost every single Latin American country was undertaking land-titling programmes of some sort in the 1990s, with most of these projects partly financed by the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank . . . In a number of countries land is being titled on a massive scale,

[37] Indeed various forms of state support (*and* coercion), direct and indirect, often provided key conditions of the development – *and* reproduction – of agricultural commodity production, by capitalist as well as 'family' farmers. For example, the negative effect of the withdrawal of fertilizer subsidies on maize production in East and Southern Africa is documented in Byerlee and Eicher (1997), where it provides one source of tension (among others) for the generally neo-liberal tenor of the analysis (as well as for their book's upbeat title). Peter Gibbon (personal communication) observes that profound scepticism on the part of critical political economists (e.g. Bernstein 1990; Gibbon 1992) about structural adjustment as a 'reform' agenda for African agriculture – and a scepticism dismissed at the time – has now become a mainstream commonplace: see, for example, Ashley and Maxwell (2001) on 'rethinking rural development' in the light of the 'post-Washington consensus', with its qualifications of previous prescriptions championing small farmers, micro-credit etc.; Friis-Hansen (2000) provides a useful review of the evidence of African agriculture in the era of structural adjustment.

[38] That is, its ostensible rationale as articulated by its theorists and protagonists.

> making these projects the defining moment in terms of rural property rights. Once properties are measured and mapped and titles registered, land ownership will be more difficult to contest. (Deere and León 2001, 440–1)

The third quote is from the same source as the first, and signals its approval of the kind of 'land reform' it claims is now reinstated on the development policy agenda:

> Previous land reform programmes have been unduly confiscatory, statist or top-down. 'New wave' land reform, which is decentralized, market-friendly and involves civil society action or consensus is sometimes feasible and consistent with just and durable property rights. (IFAD 2001, 75)

If, as the first quote asserts, land reform has made such a comeback (after an unexplained absence), we have to ask what kind of land reform, why and how – also noting its quite exact coincidence with the more general 'return' of poverty to the agenda of development policy/rhetoric.[39] The second quote indeed suggests the return – at least to the centre of discursive/ideological prominence – of elements of what was termed above the 'classic' bourgeois view: that is, (full) private property rights in land, and deriving from them the full commoditization of land (active markets in land), as necessary conditions of efficient resource/factor allocation in agricultural production for competitive markets. The third quote indicates how this (neo-classical) productionist rationale is brought into the service of a manifesto/programme to 'end rural poverty' (in the title of IFAD 2001). Brief comment on these positions/claims is called for, in the light of the hypothesis proposed here: that a (world-historical) phase – of truly *longue durée* – of redistributive land reforms in transitions to capitalism came to an end in the 1970s, when it coincided with the accelerating collapse of postwar developmentalism (itself a moment in a longer phase of state 'activism') and the beginning of a new, world-historical phase of 'globalization' (restructuring of capital accumulation and regulation on a world scale).

First, the identity of 'efficiency' (competitive market production) and 'equity' (an egalitarian distribution of land holdings and rural incomes) is, of course, a longstanding, and defining, characteristic of neo-populism. It centres on arguments about the inverse relationship (as above) and the social forces that obstruct its (otherwise 'natural'?) realization, notably the 'urban bias' of state policies and expenditure (Lipton 1977 remains the classic reference), as well as non- or extra-state factors that give urban constituencies (and large landed property and agrarian capital) their power over small farmers. The latter may also be disadvantaged by the predations of *rentier* landed property, and money-lending and merchant capital – likewise confounding the proper functioning of allocative efficiency through, *inter alia*, the exercise of local monopolies in the supply of land, credit and crop

[39] The 'rediscovery' of poverty in the 1990s, following the first phase of neo-liberal triumphalism (the 'Washington consensus' and all that), received its *imprimatur* in the *World Development Report 2000/2001* (World Bank 2001). This has nothing to say about the causes of poverty other than the tautological: the poor are poor because they lack assets.

sales, market 'interlocking'/'interlinking', and (other) extra-market coercion (Griffin 1974). Both are instances of what C.D. Scott (1977, in a review of Griffin 1974) memorably called 'neo-classical populism'. The first instance, in effect, points to opportunities of development foregone (including overcoming rural poverty), due to the urban bias of cheap food policies and commitment to industrialization; the second instance points to persisting 'feudal'-like mechanisms of exploitation and oppression that prevent small farmers from exemplifying that combination of efficiency and equity of which they are (uniquely?) capable.

Second, the post-developmentalist/neo-liberal conjuncture[40] provides apparently favourable conditions for the revitalization (recycling) of the basic populist argument. Its more technicist (and 'accomodationist') version – that of (neo-)populist economics (the first instance above) – comfortably finds its place within the generalized (generic?) anti-statism of neo-liberalism, as long as developmentalist states were generally held to exhibit 'urban bias' and its 'exploitation' of countryside by town, (small) farmers by urban classes or constituencies. If this is regarded as one, albeit the most fundamental, axis of inequality in poor countries, the other axis for neo-populist economics concerns the distribution of land. Here its position is less consistent and comfortable: what if unequal distributions of land holdings/farm sizes express economies of scale (or other efficiencies) in agricultural commodity production, and associated processes of social differentiation/class formation in the countryside?[41] The tension this poses for the particular 'win-win' scenario that neo-populism proposes can be glimpsed in the third quote: property rights that are both 'just' and 'enduring'. It is difficult to see how there can be any content to a 'just' property right in capitalism, beyond that merited by the efficient disposal of that right in properly competitive markets.[42] And what is the implication of 'enduring'? Is it that property rights in land bestowed on the 'rural poor' by 'new wave' agrarian reform should last in perpetuity, thereby contravening the proper functioning of land (and other) markets?

Third are issues of agency. More technicist versions of (neo-)populism (those of economists) never drew on a strong sociology, their sociological vision limited to the thesis of 'urban bias' that prevents the realization of efficiency and equity combined in the enterprise of the 'small farmer' (individualized petty commodity production). It is not difficult, however, for such neo-populism to insert itself in the discourses of 'community' action (decentralization, civil society, and the like) currently favoured by neo-liberalism and that constitute its attenuated sociology of the 'space' between market and state. Other versions of populism have long appealed to peasant political action that challenges the established order of property. These forms of populism are more oppositional, and less accommodating

[40] In which I include the whole lexicon of governance, civil society, decentralization and the like, as defined and promoted by the World Bank, and (other) multilateral and bilateral aid agencies – the 'political settlement' held to complement (and indeed facilitate) the policy agenda of the 'new' microeconomics.

[41] As acknowledged – or embraced – by Chonchol, quoted in note 12 above.

[42] And which are likely to work against small-scale producers for a variety of familiar reasons. The (essentially petty bourgeois?) notion of a 'just' property right in contemporary capitalism seems like a quaint contemporary echo of the European medieval concept of the 'just price'.

of neo-liberalism, as they are more alert to certain forms of inequality and power, and tend to call for a return to the more heroic visions, and political mechanisms, of land redistribution characteristic of an earlier period sketched above.[43]

Beyond such observations, there are more basic questions: (i) what drives the policy agenda and practices of 'new wave' land reform and (ii) what are its effects? Ways of answering these questions can, at least, be sketched briefly. Answering the first entails a sociology of knowledge – indeed a political sociology of knowledge, and one applied to the institutions central to the production of doctrines of development – that can not be attempted here.[44] I would, however, suggest the following for consideration and debate.

First, I am sceptical that the neo-liberal productionist rationale, nicely summarized by Deere and León (in the second quote above), is so important a driver of the agenda of 'new wave' land reform, however convenient it is as intellectual justification. It is more plausible, in my view, that the 'new wave' of land titling, privatization, 'decentralization' and the like, is as much about claiming to do something about rural poverty, given the central legitimating function of poverty alleviation/reduction to development agencies. If the claimed commitment to rural poverty reduction can be combined so neatly with a view of property rights that allows for some market-friendly redistribution of land, so much the better – and not least in the face of challenges from the constitution of a new agrarian question of labour outlined below.

Second, in some regions property rights in land are complex and contested, with different individuals or groups making different kinds of claims, or similar (competing) claims, to the same land.[45] This may stimulate an impulse to 'reform'

[43] A good example is provided by the agrarian reform *équipe* of UNRISD, a number of whose recent papers – by such veterans as Solon Barraclough, M. Riad El-Ghonemy and Gerrit Huizer – are conveniently collected in Ghimire (2001). This collection has several instructive features: the sense of *déja vu* referred to; the belief that redistributive land reform has disappeared from the policy agenda (*contra* the somewhat triumphalist first quote from IFAD [2001] above); and, in one instance (El-Ghonemy 2001) a more general plaint about the commoditization of land in capitalism generally, and specifically in the land-titling and privatization programmes of so-called 'new wave' agrarian reform. Ironically, as this second type of populism tries to find its place within current discourses – for example, by giving a more radical edge to notions of 'civil society' – there is a kind of convergence with more technicist neo-populism, as the former scales down its horizon from peasant movement to community action and the latter scales up from farming household to 'community' as agency of 'new wave' land reform. In this regard the boxes in the 2001 IFAD report, illustrative of positive and negative examples – in the manner of the *World Development Reports* – deserve close attention; some of their positive examples dissolve into more generalized notions of 'community' action, for example, on sustainable resource management and income generation from non-farming activities.

[44] This should not reduce to a conspiracy theory approach, needless to say, nor forms of critique that view the World Bank, say, as *diabolus ex machina* (Toye 1989). A good example of the kind of approach recommended here is Gibbon (1993).

[45] I am more familiar with these issues, and their debates, in contexts of ostensibly 'communal' land tenure and its processes (including contestations), above all sub-Saharan Africa on which I touch next (Berry 1993 argues that even where private property rights in land in sub-Saharan Africa exist *de jure*, it is typically impossible to protect them against *de facto* 'customary' claims). Having said that, there might well be specific circumstances in which land demarcation, titling and registration reflect a desire to protect the boundaries and property rights of larger-scale capitalist farms. Relevant examples here include the emotive issue of 'squatting' on large farms in former settler colonies in Africa (Kenya, South Africa, Zimbabwe); there are Central and South American analogues.

away such social and political messiness around claims to land – and the negative effects attributed to it – in favour of clearly demarcated and registered private property rights as a condition of investment and efficient land use in farming. This has been a notable element in discussions of land or, more accurately, tenure reform in sub-Saharan Africa in the last ten years or so for several reasons. Sub-Saharan Africa generally is regarded as emblematic of an enduring 'crisis' of development since the 1970s, in which the pathologies of statism are particularly marked (World Bank 1997; Moore 1999). The conventional wisdom is that land availability (and distribution) is not a significant constraint on productivity,[46] while the 'crisis' of agricultural production and rural poverty has resisted major donor efforts to engineer a technical and/or market fix (the latter via structural adjustment) to overcome the problem of low productivity. Now a new factor is emphasized – insecurity of individual tenure in the absence of private property rights in land – which requires reform to resolve the 'crisis' of (small-scale) farming *without* land redistribution: in short, an 'institutional' fix.

Third, there may be specific contexts and instances in which the proclaimed objective of boosting (small) farmer productivity/efficiency is combined not only with the legitimating goal of rural poverty reduction but also with that of resolving, or pre-empting, rural sources of social unrest and political disturbance, of which Central America and South Africa (and Zimbabwe) – and probably Brazil – provide recent and current examples, as noted earlier.

In short, there are various factors in the return of land reform to the agenda of development policy, and the justifications and forms of 'new wave' reform that may be emphasized in particular contexts of intervention – including possible combinations and relative weights of productionist, welfarist (poverty oriented) and political reasons in both the underlying purposes and stated objectives of such interventions. What then of its impact? Here I move from scepticism about purpose to scepticism about outcomes. This is not to suggest that various programmes of land titling, privatization, decentralization and the like, do not have effects in practice.[47] It is to doubt that they are likely to have much significance in terms of their stated productionist and/or welfarist objectives. The broader reasons for this view are outlined in the next section, which also considers what may be symptomatic exceptions to the general (hypo)theses about 'agrarian reform' after developmentalism proposed in this paper.

[46] Although destructive land use practices associated with 'communal' or common property regimes, compounded by the pressure of population growth, are emphasized in standard neo-Malthusian accounts of a 'crisis' of (environmental) sustainability in sub-Saharan Africa (cf., among others, the critical discussions of Leach and Mearns 1996; Ross 1998; Woodhouse et al. 2000; Bernstein and Woodhouse 2001).

[47] Indeed, an interesting finding of the comparative study of 'new wave' land-titling programmes in Latin America by Deere and León (2001) is that rural women are more likely to benefit from them than was the case with previous land reforms. This is partly because women mostly acquire land through inheritance and (recent) inheritance law tends to be less gender-biased than other ways of acquiring land – the benefits are more marked in countries where women's political organizations have had a stronger impact on the state.

Commodity Relations in the Present Moment of Capitalism

A first argument, starkly put, concerns what I suggest is the agrarian question of capital, and specifically industrial capital. This 'classic' agrarian question, as suggested earlier, is that of the transition to capitalism and the logic of its various elements (e.g. reducing the cost of labour power through cheaper food staples; providing or facilitating the accumulation fund for industrialization, and so on). In the context of transition(s) to capitalism, this was also assumed to be the agrarian question of labour as well as capital, inasmuch as these two definitive classes of an emergent capitalism shared a common interest in the overthrow/transformation of feudalism, and of pre-capitalist social relations and practices more generally. The argument here then is that the 'classic' agrarian question is no longer a concern of capital on a global scale. Indeed, over-production with all its ramifications is now well-established as a key structural tension of contemporary capitalist agriculture.[48] In effect, the agrarian question of capital has been resolved on a world scale *without its resolution* – as a foundation of national development/accumulation, generating comprehensive industrialization and wage employment – in most of the poorer countries of the South. This is not to say that there might not be other sources and mechanisms of (industrial) accumulation (Bernstein 1996/7), nor that an agrarian question (or questions) of labour might not be constituted in novel ways in the current conjuncture of 'globalization' (see below). However, a basic proposition about 'globalization' applies here, albeit requiring careful investigation of its inevitably uneven and varied impact (alluded to earlier): namely that the circuits of domestic/'national' economies intersect with, and are increasingly shaped by, those of global patterns of production, divisions of labour, markets for finance and commodities, and forms of regulation by transnational capital. This is the terrain of investigation of global commodity chains for agricultural commodities, including the sourcing strategies of agro-food corporations, the contract farming debate, the course of WTO politics, and so on.[49]

The effects of such globalization, for all its unevenness and incompleteness, combine with those of the demise of developmentalism and with patterns of the development of commodity relations in the countrysides of the South (and their intimate interconnections with urban and migratory dynamics). While developmentalist states, of varying degrees of plausibility and efficacy, may have taxed agriculture to varying degrees,[50] they also often provided – albeit again with

[48] Ramifications that include, centrally, the linkages between the financial basis – and debt – of highly capitalized farming, not least 'family' farming in the North, and the volatility of land (and other asset) values which secure such levels of capitalization: thus so much of the 'farm politics' of the EU, USA and Canada around recurrent farm(er) 'crises'.

[49] Nor are these dynamics of 'globalization' limited to the flow of commodities from Southern farmers to Northern food industries and consumers (as Patnaik 1996 seems to imply); they are key to the supply of major domestic markets in the South, for example, in Latin America, Western Asia and North Africa, Southeast Asia, and increasingly India in its belated but accelerating process of liberalization since the early 1990s (Banaji 1996/7).

[50] Evidence about the extent of such taxation – the deleterious effects of which featured so strongly in the argument of neo-classical populism and the neo-liberal rationale for structural adjustment (and liberalization more generally), with their shared stance on 'urban bias' – remains highly contentious.

varying degrees of efficacy – key conditions of the commoditization of (small-scale) farming in terms of input supply, credit and marketing. The impact of the withdrawal of such state provision is significant, especially perhaps in sub-Saharan Africa (note 37 above) and in many circumstances tends to intensify existing patterns of class differentiation in the countryside.[51]

The dynamics of class differentiation intrinsic to the development of commodity relations also merit at least brief comment in relation to the concerns of this paper. The argument proposed here is that just as agribusiness capital is increasingly consolidated through 'globalization', with its forms of concentration and centralization materialized in new types and/or intensities of integration/regulation of commodity chains and markets for agricultural commodities, so is labour in the world of contemporary capitalism increasingly structurally fragmented, especially in the South. This fragmentation – manifested, *inter alia*, in the stagnant or declining opportunities of (relatively) stable wage employment, the vast extent of the urban 'informal sector', and the (re)structuring of labour markets, rural and urban – also connects with the class dynamic at work in agricultural petty commodity production.[52]

Pace the classic Leninist scenario of the decomposition of the peasantry into distinct and evident classes of agrarian capital and labour (a model that continues to have its champions and denigrators), there is another driver of class differentiation in the countryside, namely the rising 'entry' and/or reproduction costs of viable agricultural petty commodity production in the contemporary South (and North, for that matter).[53] This may result in apparently relatively stable 'middle peasantries' as the outcome of processes in which (many) 'small farmers' are effectively dispossessed (unable to reproduce themselves as capital).

Two indicators of this merit emphasis, because they are often misperceived or misunderstood. The first is that even 'middle peasant' farming in many circumstances today is dependent on hired labour (to varying degrees, and recruited and remunerated in different ways). The second offers a particular insight into the 'win-win' scenario of 'new-wave' agrarian reform. One way it emphasizes markets can be 'friendly' to the rural poor is to provide means for them to gain access to land, and to farm on their own account, through rental (including sharecropping) arrangements – that in turn can be facilitated by legal and other institutional 'reform' measures.[54] An alternative view is that access to land is hardly

Karshenas (1996/7) provides a rigorous critique – analytical, methodological and empirical – of a major World Bank study of agricultural pricing policies.

[51] Cf. Gibbon (2001) for a penetrating analysis of the mechanisms and effects of the liberalization of cotton marketing in Tanzania.

[52] This sweeping thesis – or assertion – of the fragmentation of labour as a key dimension of contemporary 'globalization' remains untheorized here, hence a major lacuna in the argument as Gavin Capps pointed out at the DESTIN seminar.

[53] An inability to replace that most elementary of tools, the hand hoe, by poor peasants in the extreme conditions of Uganda in the 1980s was observed by Mahmood Mamdani (1987).

[54] The recent embrace of the virtues of sharecropping by neo-classical economists (and 'new wave' agrarian reform) argues not only the rationality of the risk-sharing claimed for it, but also suggests the virtue that its arrangements can supply all inputs, together with land, to sharecroppers who lack any other means than their labour power.

a sufficient condition of farming (agricultural petty commodity enterprise), and that in many circumstances the rural poor are just as likely to *rent out* land that they possess as to rent *in* land to farm.[55]

These observations connect with another concerning the 'multiple livelihood strategies' of the overwhelming majority of rural people and farmers (not the same thing, of course) in the South today. This formulation, characteristic of current development discourse, contains some recognition – however myopic – of the fragmentation of labour indicated above. The rural poor, dispossessed of the means of farming as a principal or significant means of simple reproduction – even when they possess some land, the 'too poor to farm' syndrome just noted – have to struggle to reproduce themselves through labour markets both local and distant (rural as well as urban), as 'footloose labour' in complex migratory circuits, often combined with efforts to enter and establish precarious niches in (overcrowded) branches of petty commodity enterprise (Breman 1996; cf. also Harriss-White and Gooptu 2000). Patterns of diversification are similarly prevalent in the activities of middle and rich peasant households: the former typically diversify income sources to secure the means of their reproduction as capital (including labour hiring), the latter typically as part of portfolio accumulation (which may generate the 'too busy to farm' syndrome and limit the degree of concentration of agricultural means of production by rich peasants).

An analytical grasp of (variant) processes and outcomes of differentiation is key to considering the limits of 'new wave' agrarian reform, in terms of its stated goals of efficiency (productivity) and welfare (poverty reduction) gains. This requires more than a generalized critique of populism (especially when allied to a somewhat stereotypical understanding and application of Lenin's model), and needs to be able to investigate and connect:

(i) changes in the international structuring of agriculture ('globalization');
(ii) contemporary forms of the concentration and centralization of capital;
(iii) the effects of both for the conditions of existence and reproduction of agricultural petty commodity production/small-scale farming in different places and circumstances; and
(iv) what was termed above the structural fragmentation of labour in contemporary capitalism with its vast reserve army denied stable conditions of reproduction through wage employment and/or petty commodity production, hence straddling (and inventing) a range of marginalized activities.

These themes also provide a means for exploring and interpreting contemporary agrarian politics, and the issues of agency they present, in conditions of such volatile structural change. Might there be forms of class and popular struggle that resonate, or at least hint at, agrarian questions of classes of labour confronted with the conditions of existence outlined, and that bear on issues of land distribution? Latin America may offer suggestive illustrations.

[55] As noted by Lenin in late nineteenth-century Russia, in fact. And that having secured land titles through 'new wave' type reforms, poor rural people may then sell the land acquired, as in Central America (Eduardo Baumeister 2001, and personal communication).

James Petras (1997) has recently proclaimed the centrality of agrarian political movements to Latin America's 'third wave' of radical politics in the period since 1945, the most significant response so far to the onset of globalization and neo-liberalism, which emerged and has developed independently of the parliamentary and sectarian parties of the Left of earlier phases of struggle.[56] At the same time, this 'peasant resurgence', in his term, does not replicate 'peasant movements in the traditional sense, nor are the rural cultivators who comprise them divorced from urban life or activities' (Petras 1997, 21). Petras's survey of the rural 'third wave' – in Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, Paraguay, Colombia, Chile, Argentina and Mexico – indicates specificities and differences due to the agrarian histories and class structures, and the national political contexts, of these countries, but also suggests some common elements that link with the framework suggested in this paper. These include the 'crises affecting industrial and urban areas, particularly growing unemployment and poverty', and how trade liberalization and increasing debt compound the pressures on the simple reproduction of small-scale farming. The 'basic class composition of these movements' is 'rural landless workers' and 'impoverished peasants either . . . evicted from land or unable to subsist on tiny plots' (Petras 1998, 125). The kinds of 'structural' or 'objective' factors Petras notes go together with a striking 'subjective' feature of what he calls the 'new peasantry' and its politics: 'a new generation of "educated" (primary or secondary school) peasant leaders . . . with strong organizational capabilities, a sophisticated understanding of national and international politics, and a profound commitment to creating a politically educated set of cadres' (Petras 1997, 19).

Together with the Zapatistas of Chiapas, Mexico, probably the internationally best known 'new' rural social movement in Latin America is the MST in Brazil, the *Movimiento Rural Sem Terra* (Landless Workers Movement), started in the 1980s in the south and south-east of Brazil by the daughters and sons of European immigrant small farmers and spreading to most agricultural areas of Brazil.[57] The characteristic political strategy of the MST – in a country still with areas of large underutilized landed properties, with a recent history of much official rhetoric but little action on land reform, and historic memories of peasant leagues and other forms of militant association – is land invasion and settlement, preferably followed by the formation of production cooperatives. Petras (1998) enumerates and explores regional variations in the activities and effectiveness of the MST, identifying a number of factors: the social origins of its activists; local histories of previous land occupations; proximity to cities and mobilization of urban support by trade unions and municipal governments controlled by the Workers Party; the local balance of class forces as manifested in the (varying) ability of landowners to deploy state and extra-state violence and the capacity of the MST to defend itself; and the availability of land for occupation, together with concentrations of landless workers and poor peasants.

[56] This and the following two paragraphs are largely adapted from Bernstein (2000, 42–3).

[57] Including the Northeast, where it has recruited from that region's retrenched and marginally employed agricultural proletariat (Wendy Wolford, personal communication).

Petras is aware of some of the problems and limits of these movements. He observes the 'heterogeneity' of the category of 'landless workers',[58] and also its 'ambiguity' in relation to forms of production established on land seized by invasion – whether this will consolidate petty commodity production (generate or strengthen a rural petty bourgeoisie?) or be able to sustain the collectivist vision of the MST leadership (1998, 125, 132). He notes too the difficulties of moving 'from protest to politics' in some instances (e.g. Argentina), the organizational fragmentation strongly localized rural politics are prone to (e.g. Mexico by contrast with the MST in Brazil), and that 'while this third wave represents intransigent opposition to the imposition of neo-liberalism, it does not as yet offer a fully articulated plan for the seizure of power' (Petras 1997, 37, 43, 23).[59]

Such features of contemporary rural movements in Latin America resonate some familiar motifs of peasant movements in transitions to capitalism – and of 'peasant politics' more generally? (cf. Hobsbawm 1973) – but in what I have suggested are the conditions of a new phase of capitalism, another instance of the dialectic of change and (through) continuity perhaps. What is changing is crucial to present and future problems and prospects, and in ways that bear on the agendas and tensions of 'new wave' agrarian reform. For example, instances of 're-peasantization' involving struggles for land by (former) proletarians, whether farm workers, miners or industrial and other urban workers, hardly correspond to the mission of 'new wave' land reform to overcome *rural* poverty by saving/re-establishing the 'small family farm'. Nor do the strongly oppositional ideological stance and political tactics of the MST conform to the aversion to confiscation and desire for consensus of market-friendly 'new wave' reform. Indeed, the introduction of World Bank and USAID land-titling and similar 'new wave' programmes in Brazil seems to have been accelerated to counter the successes of the MST (Macha Farrant, personal communication).[60]

The possibilities of political practice to address the agrarian questions of labour, suggested by the MST and other movements in Latin America, can be contrasted briefly with India and Southern Africa. One of the striking features of the 'new farmers' movements' in India is that their programmatic demands (as distinct from the many layers of ideology that they embrace and that others attach to them, cf. Brass 1994b) centre so strongly on issues of prices and subsidies rather

[58] Something long remarked and debated in agrarian studies, but perhaps intensified in the context of the structural fragmentation of labour suggested above, and some of its key moments – like the retrenchment of large numbers of miners and industrial workers – and locales, like mining centres in the middle of agricultural zones, so typical of the South African highveld where the burgeoning shack settlements of the last ten years bring together both former miners and farmworkers.

[59] Who does?

[60] Petras (1997, 26–9) gives another, and intriguing, example of agrarian struggle in the moment of globalization (and of continuity in/through change?): in Bolivia the 're-peasantization' effect includes over 30,000 retrenched tin miners, the former vanguard of proletarian struggle, who are now coca farmers and 'the most dynamic and influential sector in direct confrontation with the regime'. In his account, the radical politics of these *cocaleros* 'involves harnessing ancestral spiritual beliefs to modern forms of class and anti-imperial struggle. Marxist analysis is linked to pre-European values (concerning coca, HB) . . . While the land issue continues to be important . . . the main struggle is for free trade against the US-directed attempt to eradicate coca production'!

than of land, giving them a suggestive affinity in this respect with farm(er) politics in the EU and North America. Some analysts interpret them as primarily movements of rich peasants – in terms of ideology, demands and leadership – in India's more dynamic zones of peasant capitalism (Banaji 1994; Brass 1994a, 1994b), although this is strongly contested in populist terms by Gail Omvedt (1994) among others.[61]

The politics of land in Southern Africa, above all in South Africa and Zimbabwe, have a distinctive relationship to the broad thesis advanced here of the location of redistributive land reform in historic transitions to capitalism (now complete in the sense that the conditions of existence of all rural classes are determined by their locations within generalized commodity production). Both countries have extremely unequal distributions of land along lines where class and race intersect so closely, and which could not be addressed in policy terms until the end of (white) minority rule, in 1979 in Zimbabwe and 1994 in South Africa. Large-scale landed property and farming in the two countries are almost entirely controlled by capital of white settler origin, with a black farm labour force, and black farming (much more extensive in Zimbabwe than South Africa) is mostly small-scale. These countries, then, seem to provide a clear case for radical land redistribution as unfinished business of their (belated) national democratic revolutions.[62]

This was much debated in South Africa during the transition from *apartheid* (1990–4), when the World Bank advocated the market-led redistribution of some 30 per cent of land held by (white) commercial farms to small (black) farmers, a target that was taken up in the ANC's manifesto for the 1994 elections (cf. Williams 1996). It is impossible to gauge how serious the intent of the World Bank was; in any case, little land redistribution took place (by any means) and even rhetorical commitment to it has faded during the second (current) ANC government (cf., amongst others, Bernstein 1996b, 1998; Cousins 2000; Lahiff and Cousins 2001).

This throws an even stronger spotlight on Zimbabwe, where a comprehensive seizure of white-owned capitalist farms commenced in early 2000 through an often chaotic and sometimes violent process supported, if not necessarily initiated, by an embattled and corrupt political regime that contributes its own measures of tragedy and farce to current events. Zimbabwe is of particular interest because of the ways in which its currently explosive politics of land seems to combine, and intermix, two distinct historical dynamics suggested here: (i) representing, as unfinished business of national democratic revolution, an historic footnote to the most recent – and final? – period of widespread redistributive land reform

[61] Otherwise, the politics of labour in the Indian countryside seems to be as – or more? – focused on the conditions of wage employment as on demands for land.

[62] In other countries in the region, historically defined as the labour reserves of mining capital, issues of agricultural production and rural poverty are similarly connected with massive job retrenchment in mining and the restructuring of labour markets and employment on a regional scale (cf. O'Laughlin 1998). Ferguson (1999) is a scintillating study of the profound recession on the Zambian Copperbelt and its ramifications, including the cultural and micro-political obstacles faced by former urban workers who try to access land to establish themselves as farmers.

(between 1910 and the 1970s), and (ii) in conditions of massive structural unemployment and poverty, compounded by recent losses of jobs in mining and manufacturing (and agriculture), manifesting elements of a new agrarian question of labour of more general contemporary significance, as sketched above.[63]

CONCLUSION

To the extent that the land question in Zimbabwe is an historic footnote to the major period of redistributive land reform, and the latter's place in the formation of capitalism's (and once state socialism's) modernities, it is a symptomatic exception. The stated rationales and underlying purposes of 'new wave', post-developmentalist, market-friendly 'agrarian reform' mark the end of an era in other ways, as do the sites (and rationales) of some of its most significant applications: Central America and Brazil to pre-empt or contain radical mobilizations on land issues; the former Soviet bloc with its imperative for neo-liberalism of de-collectivization; sub-Saharan Africa, where Northern aid donors experience repeated frustration in their attempts to engineer successful development from the intractable social realities of what is seen as the world's most blighted region; South Africa, which presented the challenge of an exemplary transition to a prosperous non-racial capitalism and stable liberal democracy.

And South Africa is as good an example as any of the pathos of 'win-win' scenarios in the world of contemporary capitalism, of consensual solutions, of the faith that markets are friendly to the poor, or can be guided to be more so – in short, the now familiar conventional wisdom of contemporary post-developmentalist discourse.[64] The reasons stem from the fundamental dynamics of capitalism/imperialism, of its social relations of property, production, power and inequality in their various manifestations (of class, gender and nationality) and current period of 'globalization'. These are the realities that confound the assumptions of good will and claims to reason to which a technicist neo-populism, and its doctrine of 'new wave' agrarian reform, cling.

I have suggested, however briefly (and speculatively), some of the key coordinates of changing global and local patterns of commoditization that shape

[63] The contributions to Worby (2001) demonstrate the inherited complexities of land questions in Zimbabwe, including the tensions and conflicts attendant on in-migration and the development of new branches of commodity production on the frontiers of peasant settlement; new forms of dispossession of 'customary' land to make way for the projects of (eco-)tourism capital; and the chauvinism and violence directed against several hundred thousand farm workers and their families, of Malawian and Mozambican origin, regarded as 'foreigners' (Rutherford 2001). Moyo (2001) is an illuminating attempt to differentiate, explain and evaluate the complex and contradictory strands of the politics of land in Zimbabwe today.

[64] This pathos is prefigured in the work on South Africa of Michael Lipton, the intellectual architect of the IFAD report of 2001. Lipton simultaneously advocated 'a consensual reduction of the world's most severe (and most racialized) inequality' and envisaged a scenario in which 'opportunities are opened for Africans to farm with a share of land, water and other resources that correspond more closely to their share in the rural population – well over 90 per cent' (Lipton et al. 1996, x, xii). To put some rough figures on this optimistic vision: in 1994 some 40,000 or so (white) landed properties fenced an area about six times that of the bantustans, home to perhaps 14 million black South Africans.

agriculture, and the prospects of different agrarian classes, in an increasingly globalizing capitalism. These coordinates are 'general themes' that require investigation of both their generality and of the 'complex variations' that the concrete circumstances and specific contradictions of different agrarian processes weave from them.[65] If this is an historical moment which presents ironies and challenges to older, 'classic' Marxist views of the agrarian question and the development of capitalist agriculture, it holds up far less flattering a mirror to varieties of agrarian populism, both nostalgic (oppositional) and technicist (accomodationist).

The corollary of what is argued here is that possible reversals – greater or lesser, sooner or later – of the current dominance of neo-liberal ideology (and of the political forces on which that dominance rests) will not bring back the material circumstances that gave historic understandings of the agrarian question their intellectual appeal and practical force. What matters now is to confront and investigate the manifold changes occurring in capitalism today and to understand better their multiple determinations, effects and implications, not least for the constitution, prospects and trajectories of new agrarian questions of labour.

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[65] Which is a safeguard against, rather than temptation to, pre-determined outcomes. For example, it may be the case that there is a trend away from bonded labour in farming in some parts of India, due to the greater availability of other rural employment, and to political dynamics favourable, directly and indirectly, to the struggles of agricultural workers (cf. Byres et al. 1999; also Banaji 1994; Corbridge and Harriss 2000).

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